



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

6th January 2020

Let's Journey Together (LJT) (1/2020)

TO ALL IN THE UPCSA

Dear Fellow Presbyterians,

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go". ... Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom (reign) of God." (NIV Luke 9:57-62)

Compliments of the New Year.

As we end the Festive Season and start business for 2020, we would like to give thanks to God for the good time that families had. We pray for peace, love, joy and happiness for families that had struggles with relationships. We convey our commiserations to those who lost their loved ones. We congratulate those who made significant achievements at the end of the year, especially those who made it in their studies.

We continue to journey together "to be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ". That pursuit demands us to make or renew our commitment to follow Jesus, as the disciples of Jesus would do, from time to time. Luke 9: 57-62, in the NIV and some of the translations, is given the title: "The Cost of Following Jesus". It is not our intention to delve into different approaches to Christology and to even give an exposition to this text, especially the title, in this correspondence. I may just note that central to the ministry of Jesus was/is the reign of God and the calling of men and women to work together for the reign of God. The UPCSA adopted the following as its mission, as we serve in the reign of God:

We will proclaim our Triune God in Southern Africa through

- *Bearing witness to the saving love of Jesus Christ;*
- *Building vital, reforming congregations for worship, ministry and discipleship; and*
- *Visibly proclaiming the Kingdom of God through unity, justice, peace and love.*

The Christians in the UPCSA are called upon to internalise this mission and to have proper plans to put this in practice as a guide to our work. This will be followed up below.

2019 OVERVIEW

The year 2019 has been very eventful. We are grateful to God for the achievements and experiences. We have learned so much about the UPCSA as a dynamic organisation and about ourselves as valuable members of the UPCSA. The highlight of the year was the UPCSA week: 22 to 29 September 2019, when Presbyterians gathered in Port Elizabeth to hold the Executive Commission, launch the new Fellowships and celebrate the 20th anniversary of the UPCSA. All the three events left so much to be done in pursuit of transformation and continuous improvement. At the Executive Commission, we were able to deal with issues and we are confident that the UPCSA came out of that process better than before.

We have also lost colleagues in the ministry and some of the colleagues lost their loved ones through death. We continue to pray for peace and comfort for all the bereaved families. The tributes of the deceased colleagues are in the 2019 Executive Commission papers. We closed the year on a sombre note, as we still mourn the departure of the Rev Prof Dr Vuyani Shadrack Vellem, former General Secretary of the UPCSA and an advocate of justice and transformation. Prof Vellem was a devout minister of the UPCSA, a churchman indeed. At the time of his departure, he was a minister of Diepkloof Congregation and an interim Moderator of BE Ngubane, within the Presbytery of eGoli. He was the Convener of the Doctrine Committee, a member of the Ministry Committee and a member of the Assembly Appeals Review Panel and Court of Assembly. He was also active in the ecumenical bodies, including the South African Council of Churches, All Africa Conference of Churches, Council for World Mission, World Communion of Reformed Churches, and World Council of Churches.

Prof Vellem was a prolific academic, an unapologetic exponent and doyen of Black Theology of Liberation. His interlocutors were those who suffer the injustices of the empire and his fight was against all forms of injustice, not against blood and flesh. Hence, he founded a movement called VukaniBantuTsohangBatho, as an awakening to the people. He contributed immensely in the formation and development of the UPCSA ministers, with the Rev Dr Fundiswa Kobo, a woman minister, being the first UPCSA minister to complete PhD under his supervision. He bequeathed to us wealth of knowledge and wisdom, and an arduous task to strive for justice and to unshackle the church from “the colonial legacy and its pervasive trauma that remains a ferocious residue in South Africa post-1994” and “from being an instrument of cultural domination by those who perpetuate the hegemony of ecclesiological insights and theologies that present their culture as normative in the interpretation of the gospel of Jesus including those who grudgingly accept that the heartland of Christianity is now in Africa” (Vellem 2015: 5). May his soul rest in peace.

FOCUS FOR 2020: BUILDING A COMMUNITY

The environment in which we serve as a denomination is ever changing. We need to sharpen analytical skills, so that we can conduct effective environmental scan, and be able to contribute meaningfully and respond promptly. The responses are needed direly both in and out of the UPCSA. We, therefore, need to build ourselves into a formidable community, a reconciled community that will be able to address the issues of concerns, thus boosting the profile of the UPCSA. As part of building a community, we encourage all to focus on the following areas:

Four Cardinal Points

In 2019, we were focussing on following four cardinal points:

- Building the relationships.
- Healing of memories.
- Building a missional church.
- Leadership capacity development.

From the Ministers’ Retreat that was held at eMseni Christian Centre in February 2019, it was learned that there is a great need to pursue these points for the good of the UPCSA. From general evaluation towards the end of 2019, it was observed that the Presbyteries did not do follow up, as it was agreed at the retreat. None of the four may be over- or under-emphasised. However, it is encouraged that the building of the relationships and the healing of memories need to be attended to with urgency. We need a healthy community for effective mission, ministry and witness. The Presbyteries, congregations and Fellowships are adjured to work on these aspects, thus contributing towards building a reconciled community of Christians.

Planning, Implementation, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

It has been pointed out, repeatedly, that the UPCSA, at large, is found wanting in the areas of planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Where these happen, they are not documented to be understood by all. We will be corresponding with the Presbyteries and Fellowships to attend to our weaknesses and emerge strong. It is recommended that all planning should be based on the vision, mission and the strategic plan of the UPCSA. All the structures of the UPCSA should be synchronised to speak in unison, while not neglecting to address specific issues at local levels.

Gender Desk and Youth Desk

The need for the establishment of Gender Desks and Youth Desks has been articulated enough. We were encouraged by some of the Presbyteries that have made significant inroads in establishing the desks. The demand for the desks grows day by day. We appeal to all the structures of the UPCSA to attend to this area of importance.

Spirituality in the Community

It has come out, several times, that some of the challenges in the denomination are issues of spirituality. It is not easy to give content to this concept in this piece of work, as spirituality is a broad and dynamic concept. However, the UPCSA has developed and adopted some mechanisms that, if adhered to properly, can contribute to the betterment of the spirituality in the denomination and serve as guides to our members' spiritual nourishment and growth. In addition to Scripture, such instruments include the following:

- The Manual of Faith and Order.
- The Confession of Faith, as contained in Chapter two of the Manual of Faith and Order.
- The Belhar Confession.
- The Accra Confession.
- The six values of the UPCSA

We shall be busy with all of this in 2020. Let us make it our 2020 resolution to build a better UPCSA for God's sake, for the sake of the peoples that we are sent to and for our sake. Please continue to pray for the process of expanding the UPCSA to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Our brothers and sisters in the DRC have already changed their name and registered themselves with the DRC authorities as the Uniting Presbyterian Church. The Synod of Zambia, as requested and tasked, is journeying with the church in the DRC. We work with the Synod in this endeavour.

Let's Journey Together **"To be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ"**. We are building a community and we are A People's Church. We will follow Jesus wherever he goes, and we shall be found "fit for service in the kingdom (reign) of God." (NIV Luke 9: 62)

Yours in Christ.



Lungile Mpetsheni
GENERAL SECRETARY