



THE UNITING  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
IN SOUTHERN  
AFRICA

3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020

**MESSAGE TO ALL ON: "I CAN'T BREATHE"**

The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground..."  
(Genesis 4: 10 NIV)

**THE DECLARATION OF FAITH FOR THE CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA** which was approved for use in 1973 and, subsequently, adopted as an amended version as a subordinate standard in 1986 (and amended again in 1993 and 1994), as contained in Chapter 2 of the Manual of Faith and Order of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, reads as follows:

We believe in the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe in the Father, who created and rules all the world, who will unite all things in Christ and who wants all his people to live together as brothers and sisters in one family.

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son, who became human and lived and died and rose in triumph to reconcile both the individual and the world to God, to break down every separating barrier of race, culture or class, and to unite all God's people into one body.

He is exalted as Lord overall, the only Lord over every area of life.

He summons both the individual and society, both the Church and the State, to seek justice and freedom for all and reconciliation and unity between all.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the foretaste of God's coming reign, who gives the Church power to proclaim the good news to all the world, to love and serve all people, to strive for justice and peace, to warn the individual and the nation of God's judgement and to summon them both to repent and trust and obey Jesus Christ as the King who will come in glory.

This is a life affirming Declaration. It catapults the UPCSA to a prophetic ministry of responding to and acting against life threatening situations that occur in many places, daily, so that all may be able to BREATHE and have life abundantly. The cries of Collins Khoza and George Floyd, who both died in the hands of the security forces are heard in the streets of our societies every day. Similar voices are heard in our homes, our workplaces and in our churches. This message is a call to hearken to the cry: "Black lives matter!" Black people are crying out: "I can't breathe". The Declaration speaks of God the father who "wants all people to live together as brothers and sisters in one family". It also speaks of God the Son – Jesus Christ who came "to break down every separating barrier of race, culture or class, and to unite all God's people into one body."

Hear the cry over the death of George Floyd:

He called out to his Mom .... who died 2 years ago on this same day 🥹🥹🥹🥹🥹 RIP

Handcuffed.

Face Down.

Knee on his neck.

They did nothing.

He called the officer "Sir."

They did nothing.

He begged for his life.  
He begged for water.  
He begged for mercy.  
They did nothing.

His nose bled.  
His body trembled.  
He lost control of his bladder.  
They did nothing.

He cried out, "I can't breathe."  
They did nothing.

Twelve more times.

"I can't breathe."  
"I can't breathe."  
"I can't breathe."  
"I can't breathe."  
"I can't breathe."  
"I can't breathe."  
"I can't breathe."  
"I can't breathe."  
"I can't breathe."  
"I can't breathe."  
"I can't breathe."

They did nothing.

One last time, he gasped, "I can't breathe."  
They did nothing.

He lost consciousness.  
They did nothing.

A firefighter demanded they check his pulse.  
They did nothing.

Off duty medical personnel begged them to stop.  
They did nothing.

Deprived of oxygen.  
His organs screaming.  
His brain frantic.  
They did nothing.

They watched George Floyd die.  
His life fading.  
A slow death.  
They did nothing.

A lynching on the ground.  
They did nothing.

For eight agonizing minutes.  
Four officers watched.

He cried out for his Mom...  
A grown man...  
Crying out for the woman who gave him life....  
As he feared joining her in death.  
And still they did nothing.

A black man.  
A gentle giant.  
Murdered because he was black.  
And still, they've done nothing.

The officers should be arrested.  
And still they've done nothing.

George Floyd cried just for BREATH. He wanted to BREATHE but was deprived of the right to breathe. May the cries of the “non-persons”, the marginalised, the impoverished, those on the “underside of modernity”<sup>1</sup>, keep on haunting us, until we realise and live up to the dictates of our DECLARATION. May their blood continue to cry out to the Lord, so that we become restless.

We, therefore, condemn systemic and structural injustices and inequalities (racial, economic and gender injustices and inequalities) that keep on sacrificing lives of helpless people to feed the ego of the empire. In so doing, we invoke the efficacies of the Belhar Confession and Accra Confession<sup>2</sup>. Let us recommit to value, affirm and save life in every way possible. Let everyone enjoy the right to BREATHE.

Yours in Christ.



Lungile Mpetsheni  
**GENERAL SECRETARY**

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<sup>1</sup> This is the title of a book by Enrique Dussel. Dussel, E. (1996). *The Underside of Modernity. Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor and the Philosophy of Liberation*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

<sup>2</sup> The UPCSA adopted the two Confessions. Belhar Confession speaks against racial discrimination and inequalities, while Accra Confession addresses issues of gender, economic and ecological justice and equality. Please read the two Confessions.