

PRESBYTERIANISM AND PROMOTION OF JUSTICE AND UNITY,

in line with the UPCS mission.

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 purpose of this paper is to evaluate our performance as the UPCS during the first twenty one years of our union in terms of its heritage. In the paper, I use racial terms freely as my experience is that we shy away from this and, consequently give the impression that these, and other differences which I will discuss, are no longer relevant. I do not subscribe to this idea and a close examination of the evidence gives the lie to such views.

There are various tools we could employ to do this, but I want to focus on one of the apostle Paul's challenges to us:

Therefore, my friends, I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to him: a living sacrifice dedicated and fit for his acceptance, the worship offered by mind and heart. Conform no longer to the patterns of this present world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds. Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable and perfect (Rom 12:1-2).

Twenty-one today
twenty-one today
(s)he's got the key of the door
never been twenty-one before ..

Being gifted the key of the door suggests having reached a degree of maturity and that is the focus of this address.

I want to consider our topic by looking at it in the context of a school report card. Despite a host of stops and starts and go slows from the closing years of the nineteenth century, the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (PCSA formed in 1897) and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (RPCSA formed in 1923) eventually came into union on 26 September 1999. Yet, both of their histories extended back to the early years of the previous century. In order to understand that the future of the UPCSA can only be grounded in certain aspects of its past. We need to analyse these aspects and focus on them as challenges for the denomination and opportunities for growth and unity.

1999 – birth year – Mother and baby are doing well: the birthing UPCSA is full of potential

Up to this point, both denominations had a significant history – one in the settler/colonial tradition; the other in the tradition of the Scottish mission; the one originally mainly white with black missions; the other black. Both denominations had experience of being church, both in the same country but both in different worlds/contexts. The potential was great, expectations in an emerging democracy were high. Then, following the union celebrations in Port Elizabeth, we got down to being the church, with all of our enthusiasm, commitment, energy and our failings. Things were looking good, though to an insightful observer clouds were already in evidence in the horizon. The union negotiations had not gone smoothly. When we had the opportunity to bring the best of our traditions to a uniting church, we opted to focus on what we were not prepared to give up, oblivious to what was good in each denomination. Many policies were not in place at the time of union and resulted in unnecessary early tensions and conflicts, some of which still affect us negatively today.

The early history of the UPCSA has been full of challenges and opportunities. The late South African missiologist, David Bosch (2011:3), quoting Kosuke Koyama, described this as living in crisis. He talked of crisis in the following way:

The Japanese character for ‘crisis’ is a combination of the characters for ‘danger’ (challenge) and ‘opportunity’ (or ‘promise’); crisis is therefore not the end of opportunity but in reality its beginning, the point where danger and opportunity meet, where the future is in the balance and where events can go either way. ... to encounter crisis is to encounter the possibility of truly being the *church*.

In these terms, our experience as a young denomination might be interpreted as living through a crisis. How we react to this and how we deal with the challenges and convert them into opportunities offers great possibilities for the future of the UPCSA. What is clear is that we cannot ignore or cover up our past. In some way or another, it has to be dealt with. Otherwise we will simply repeat or perpetuate our past failures. The opportunity is to forge ahead and work towards the critical solidarity (Christian love, *agape*) which Jesus of Nazareth demonstrated so well as we journey on towards the kingdom of God.

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When all this is said and done, we now have 21 years of experience of being a uniting church and this provides us with a great deal to reflect upon.

2020 – 21st birthday – could do better

In secular terms, we might say that our union has not been a resounding success. In a spiritual sense, we can say that it has not provided substantial evidence of our faithfulness. There are many areas where we have failed to live up to our desire to be reconciled and reconciling Christians. I want to get straight to the heart of our mission which is defined in our vision statement: **To be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ.** This is highlighted in one of our mission priorities: **Engaging in reconciliation and unity.** These are appropriately linked for where there is little unity, there is certainly a lack of reconciliation. There, I think lies the problem of our union – there is little unity. It may appear to be different, but below the surface there is a disturbing lack of unity in the UPCSA.

Racism

The heart of this, I believe, is the inherent racism that infects and affects all of us. We are all racists at heart – we all fear that which is different and make an issue of difference. In addition, we all have a tendency to promote or adopt feelings of superiority or inferiority which benefits or denigrates certain communities. Immediately, it becomes clear that the first sub-problem is

denial. We just do not see our own racism. We do not submit ourselves to that great Presbyterian process of self-examination as we used to before taking communion. John Calvin (*Institutes* I.1.ii) challenges us here:

... it is evident that [hu]man[ity] never attains to a true self-knowledge until [we have] previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into [our]sel[ves]. For (such is our innate pride) we always seem to ourselves just and upright, and wise, and holy until we are convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustice, vileness, folly and, impurity ... he being the only standard by the application of which this conviction can be produced. For, since we are all naturally prone to hypocrisy

Calvin is correct : 'We refuse to be 'convinced, by clear evidence, of our injustice, vileness, folly and, impurity' even when the evidence is presented to us. We ascribe racism to other causes and effects. We refuse to talk about it and act as if it does not exist and if it does not exist then it is not an issue. Removing racist apartheid legislation was only a beginning of confronting racism. Listen to a comment our colleague Prof Tinyiko Maluleke made at a conference a few years ago:

I often think that some of the angriest people in earth, at this time in history, are to be found on the southern tip of the African continent. Do not be deceived by Johannesburg's neat highways and byways. Nor should the hospitality reserved for strangers from the North mislead you. A centimetre beneath the smiles and cordialities lies a latent anger. This anger explodes in all kinds of ways. ... In its latent stages our anger shows in the manner in which we treat women and in the manner in which we treat poor immigrants. We see the latter as cheap labour as we employ them cheaply and precariously in our building, hospitality and domestic industries. More recently our national disdain for poor immigrants has exploded into a killing spree during which more than 50 persons were hacked and burnt to death.

This 'mutual suspicion and distrust' (UK reporter, Gavin Essler) is something we need to address if we believe in reconciliation, as we claim to do, because this is the current reality of South Africa. Racism is alive and well and should disturb our consciences. Why is it that we adhere to scripture, read it and hopefully believe and understand it, if we are quite unable to enact it in this regard – 'for you are all one person in Christ' (Gal 3:28)? That is a master narrative of the New Testament. All of us are guilty of undermining ourselves and others – this means that we dehumanise ourselves. This is what happened during apartheid when both black and white were dehumanised in the process of racial segregation and produced:

... a kind of black man who is man only in form. This is the extent to which the process of dehumanisation has advanced ... the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell ...

the first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to pump life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. This is what we mean by an inward-looking process. This is the definition of 'Black consciousness (Biko 2004:30, 31).

No longer should black people 'judge themselves according to these [white] standards and not be fooled by white society who have whitewashed themselves and made white standards the yardstick by which even black people judge each other' (Biko 2004:33). Biko is referring here to the obsequious black person who is subservient to his white master, while 'deep inside his anger mounts at the accumulating insult' (Biko 2004:30). Yet, this black person lacks the moral courage to express his fury. Sadly, we still see this black person today in the church and in our ministry. But note, Biko is advocating a process of self-examination in order that black people might be released from the subservience they project as evidence of their disintegration. Yet, so many black people today continue to participate in their own oppression.

When Steve Biko spoke out about becoming more human, he was not just referring to black people. He understood how whites had also become dehumanised by apartheid. And today, many still deny their God given humanity through adopting the values of white society and continue to participate in their own oppression. This has become a matter of choice not legislation. They have sacrificed their blackness for non-whiteness as they continue to deny their value as human beings.

This is so sad in the church where we are encouraged in the apostle Paul's words to: 'Leave no room for ambition and vanity, but humbly reckon others better than yourselves. Look to each other's interests and not merely to your own' (Phil 2:3-4). And this lack of self-motivation and self-confidence is evident in the church in many ways. Here is a real challenge when we are asked why should I be a Christian? Can we respond with Hans Küng (1974:602):

By following Jesus Christ
man in the world today
can truly humanly live, act, suffer and die:
in happiness and unhappiness, life and death,
sustained by God and helpful to men?

Consider what happened in the matter of **integration** which has led to a denial of the union and reveals our disunity when congregations from the pre-union context ministering in an area continue to show our lack of unity by not engaging seriously in discussions regarding integration. The convener of the

Integration Committee of the General Assembly, Elder Mavis Dewar from eGoli, did sterling work following the union in 1999 to resolve this issue but nothing came of this. This has resulted in a gross duplication of resources and buildings and the maintenance of the former traditions which now constitute the UPCSA. This prevents us from becoming truly one denomination. And this is considered to be a black problem because it only involved black congregations and this was a sign of racism. Let me offer a controversial evaluation. This state of affairs suits certain interests in the UPCSA because it militates against the unity of the black majority membership in the church.

Then, why were white congregations never challenged to engage in the integration process and even talk to the black congregations which they had founded as missions regarding the possibility of forming united congregations? Nowadays more congregations are struggling to make ends meet so there is an opportunity here for both integration and continuing full time ministry rather than sticking with what we know and are comfortable with in a constant struggle to survive. This is not the way of the Spirit which operates dynamically in perpetual motion bringing new opportunities and new life. It acts by disturbing our old ways of thinking and by nudging us out of our comfort zones. If we remain stuck in out of date ways of thinking and acting how can we advance the mission of the church? Never before has change been so constant a factor in our lives. We claim that we want to transform yet, we refuse to change. Here, I am not talking about behaviour modification but about the authentic transformation through the Holy Spirit. Then, if we get as far as thinking about change in congregational life we look to American mid-western middle class models. Is this how we envisage church growth in Africa? Are there no African models which we can consider? But, of course, they are black models. But are there no relevant South African models? What about the long standing work of Africa Enterprise, for example? We fear moving away from our western individualistic approaches to an approach which is truly communitarian and, therefore, African.

Ultimately, we will be judged on what we are doing to challenge and minimise racism in our denomination. So far, very little has been attempted, hence the failure of integration. We actually appear to be content with things the way they are. We do not want too much contact between and among the races; otherwise we would have done something about it during the past 21 years. Felix Theonugraha (2018:420) has defined the requirement of sacrifice or service by which we can:

... lay down our lives for the sake of others. Such a posture requires a genuine love for other people that involves learning their individual

stories, understanding their group history, lamenting with them over their experiences of pain and injustice, and rejoicing with them over stories of success and victory. Such a posture also requires deep trust that when we demonstrate a willingness to identify with another person, that person will return the favour and identify with us. It requires a deeper trust in our faithful Father, who has promised to be our Avenger and our Redeemer. Reconciliation can only take place when we relinquish our own desire for self-protection out of submission to Christ and out of love for others.

That is the gift of mutuality.

All of this calls into question our definition of the church as the people of God and the church as community. It even makes a mockery of the sacraments – baptism by which we are integrated into the fellowship of the church and holy communion by which we are maintained in that fellowship.

Presbyteries have the opportunity to take responsibility for investigating and providing opportunities to resolve integration issues in all communities where there is duplication with the aim of providing more equitable ministry to our people.

This brings us to the topic of:

Faith and Order:

The Manual of Faith and Order is a resource for the theology, polity and aspects of the history of the UPCSA and its constitutive traditions (RPC/PCSA). It has not come to us in a vacuum but is the cumulative experience of our Presbyterian faith and practice going back to the Scottish Reformation (1560). It is grounded in scripture and consonant with its basic principles. It contains our *Confession of Faith* and other doctrinal standards and guidance for our common life as Presbyterians in government and external relations.

Our experience teaches us that departure from the faith and order of the UPCSA leads to serious problems. The benefit of adherence to these matters ensures that all Presbyterians are treated in the same manner, while deviation from these same standards leads to dissension, distrust and disunity. We often hear of charges of racism being levelled in Presbytery meetings. This normally happens when different people are treated differently when the *Manual* is applied. We are Presbyterians. That means that we always act in concert, we do things together, even if we disagree; then there are processes available to register our disagreement or dissent. No one person gets to decide for the rest of us.

Part of our history involves a deviation from Presbyterianism as, prior to the formation of the PCSA in 1897, many congregations operated on an independent or congregational basis as there were only scattered ('isolated') congregations, and later, presbyteries (Cuthbertson & Quinn 1979:38). This spirit of independency or congregationalism has been perpetuated in the UPCSA as can be seen from an examination of the policy of trusteeship of property which remains unresolved despite General Assembly decisions.

Prior to the formation of the PCSA in 1897, congregations secured their own property and held their own title deeds. This situation persisted after 1897 and, during the period of apartheid, many black congregations secured property held which they independently of the PCSA for legal and political reasons. The situation in the RPC was different for when the Bantu Presbyterian Church of South Africa (BPCSA) was formed in 1923, all of the properties of the Free Church of Scotland Mission were vested in the General Trustees of the BPC. At the time of union they were all vested in the trustees of the UPCSA as part of its commitment to union. Where are the outstanding properties of the PCSA and why are we not one church in this regard, even taking account of the historical reasons for this ongoing discrepancy? The major opportunity arises out of our recognition that our resources do/did not belong to denominations but to God (Ps24:1). This can help us. In our particular context, as we now have an opportunity for those congregations which still hold their own title deeds to consider vesting their title deeds in the name of the trustees of the UPCSA to demonstrate a common commitment to our future as a 'uniting' denomination, **as a sign of maturity**, and in recognition of their ownership by God.

Luther reminded us of the biblical truth of the priesthood of all believers for: 'you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, a people claimed by God for his own, to proclaim the glorious deeds of him who has called you ...' (1Peter2:9). We are all called to one form of ministry or another. This emphasises that ministry is not differentiated – we are all part of the people of God – the word we use is laity and that even includes the ordained ministry so the differentiation is actually redundant. But where is the equality and parity evident as we are divided by age, gender, sexuality, disability, theology, economics and culture. We claim to affirm our fundamental unity in Christ drawing on our diversity as a source of enrichment, but where is that evident in our corporate lives as the UPCSA? Rather the manner in which we deal with these issues shows up our disunity and the lack of justice in the UPCSA. Unity cannot be deepened by marginalising critical constituencies

either in church or in society. What is lacking is the empowerment of all groups in the church whether they are 'in' groups or not.

We talk about parity in ministry – that means that no one of us is above the others unless we give specific powers in certain cases. Those who are given authority in councils as moderators must not confuse authority with power. We should remember that when we elect moderators we actually disempower them as we deprive them of a vote except in the cases where a council divides equally. One of the reasons moderators are elected for a short period is so that they may not accumulate power as they ought to 'moderate' between differing views on the matters that come before our councils for consideration. It is also because the required gifting is not restricted to the few, but recognises that the Spirit gifts all of us. Moderators are to be respected not venerated for Jesus Christ is 'the only head of the Kirk' (*Scots Confession* 1560:XVI, in Cochrane 1966:175). As an example, our forefathers strove to get rid of authoritarian bishops. Are we to let them back in by the back door? Have we forgotten that it is the General Secretary who is the voice of the UPCSA in public matters. This was a decision we took soon after the union in the Priorities and Resources Committee which was accepted by the General Assembly. The holder of that function is the Chief Executive of the denomination.

Our system of government is representative (Gray & Tucker 1999:5). It is not democratic as some believe because not everyone can participate in decision-making; so we elect elders to presbyteries and General Assembly in a representative capacity – we call them representative elders. Again, while ordination to function is for life, it may not be arbitrarily exercised for life.

A matter for serious concern is the general ignorance of church law. It is embarrassing when ministers charge other ministers on the floor of the General Assembly when they ought to know that ministers come under the care and discipline of their presbyteries. This reflects badly on how they were prepared for ministry. The ministry of the UPCSA is still largely racially determined despite significant successes in congregations which have taken the initiative and have called ministers from different race groups. This reflects the transnational and multi-racial character of the UPCSA. The decline in the number of those answering a call to ordained ministry and the large number of ministers approaching retirement exacerbates the situation.

Here is an opportunity in the search for a minister, for us to look beyond the colour of a prospective minister's skin and consider criteria which focus on the

needs of a congregation and the type of person who would best meet these needs.

Then there is the matter of our doctrine. Again, some think that they can simply set aside our beliefs with impunity. Look at those (presbyteries and theologically trained ministers) who allow second baptism in the UPCSA with little regard for the principles of our faith and law (UPCSA 2007:2.13; 3.18) and who demonstrate no sense of discipline as discipling. This is a white issue, by and large. Yet, when there is even a suggestion of ancestor veneration, we want to apply strict control over what black people believe. You see, racism intrudes into every aspect of church life! Many years ago I said at a ministers' conference that there are two systems of law in the UPCSA. Is this still true? I was not challenged then. Can I be challenged now?

One of our ongoing issues is the problem that dares not speak its name – the issue of human sexuality. This issue demonstrates a direct challenge to the broad church character of the UPCSA as it challenges the UPCSA's view of the authority of scripture as it is based on the fundamentalistic principle of the verbal inerrancy of scripture which is permitted in the UPCSA alongside other forms of interpretation. Sadly, this has become excessively divisive although a deep investigation of scripture reveals different perspectives of human sexuality. Some think that blindly imposing biblical texts on the denomination solves the problem. Instead, it denies the opportunity to analyse these same texts to plumb the depths of their meaning in their original contexts and as how they may apply to our contemporary context. Assembly decisions in this regard are extremely fickle as they can simply be ignored. Let me draw the parallel of the Roman Catholic document *Humanae vitae* whose purpose was to end the discussion on birth control. Many faithful Catholics in conscience felt bound to ignore it. When we consider human sexuality, it is disturbing to note the lack of academic training with regard to scripture in a Reformed ministry noted for its thorough academic and spiritual prowess.

The opportunity is to accept that we are all children of God's creation for whom Jesus died and move forward with our acknowledged differences and forge an active loving approach to all who are different from us, through study, discussion, reflection and pastoral care.

Finance and Property are controversial issues that have led to a sense of superiority/inferiority within the UPCSA.

With regard to finance, tension results, in part from a belief still held by some, that the RPC came into the union in order to benefit from the relative wealth of the PCSA. This is untrue as can be seen from the substantial cash and

property injection that came from the sale and disposition of the assets of Lovedale Press and other RPC assets and funds, including Impolweni farm which has been sold recently. No account has ever been given regarding how these assets were stewarded.

In addition, serious historical issues have impacted on the matter of the support of the ministry leading to many congregations becoming unable to support themselves. This is the result of different approaches to ministry going back to the nineteenth century. I struggle to understand how many of the RPCSA congregations, all of whom were financially independent prior to union have now become dependent on stipend subsidies – and the key word is dependent, because financial dependency comes at a cost of loss of other aspects of independence.

Now we go where even angels fear to tread, the Church Associations. This is an issue that has vexed the union from day one. Many do not realise that the associations have been the main arm of mission and evangelism in the black community. They are not and never have been a ‘church within a church’. Would that description ever have been used of the Women’s Association of the PCSA? The issue goes far beyond the uniform and opens up basic questions about power and control in the UPCSAs. Evidence of the background to the dispute is difficult to secure but it is clear that the problem is still with us because some benefit from it. The continuing existence of mutual animosity militates against the unity of the black majority membership in the church and, as I have already suggested is where the power, and the threat, of the black membership lies in the unity of the associations. With the lack of clear evidence, I ask the question ‘Who benefits from this ongoing problem?’

We rejoice in the strenuous efforts that have been made to resolve the issue and, at last, appear to be bearing fruit with the union of the associations. Now the opportunity is to consolidate advances made and get the mission and vision of the UPCSAs back on track.

Last, but certainly not least is the transnational nature of the UPCSAs

We give thanks to God for the vision of our forebears in advancing the Presbyterian cause north of the Limpopo River into what is now Zambia and Zimbabwe through extension and missionary work. However, during the twentieth century great changes took place in these nations as they developed from British colonies to independent nations. The church was slow to recognise the impact of these changes and to respond appropriately. From this time tensions developed regarding the relationship with first, the PCSA and from 1999, the UPCSAs. Our presbyteries in these countries have rightly

challenged the attitudes of paternalism and trusteeship which are long out of date. There have been threats of secession and the formation of new alignments, eg in Zambia with the United Church of Zambia, as well as a call for greater autonomy and responsibility, even for a separate *Manual of Faith and Order*.

There has been an unwillingness to take account of why these presbyteries actually exist. At the time of independence when the United Church of Zambia was formed, it was due to white opposition that our current presbyteries did not enter that union. The context has changed radically and requires new approaches. While changes have been made in the way that Zambia and Zimbabwe relate to the broad UPCS, such as having access to General Assembly committees, greater attention needs to be given to our relationships north of the Limpopo. Perhaps this could be achieved through a special commission appointed specifically to engage with outstanding issues that continue to give cause for tension. It was such a commission that prepared the way for the Special Commission that brought the UPCS into being, and from which Zambia and Zimbabwe were excluded. Perhaps we need to work towards a new way of relating to our Presbyterian members north of the Limpopo. Perhaps we need to take our brothers and sisters more seriously when they talk of leaving the UPCS and forging new links within their own countries.

Reconciliation

Much has been said and is constantly being said about reconciliation, and much of this has been rather facile. Are we actually prepared for reconciliation with all of the effort, pain and time this will involve? Many look on reconciliation as a 'cheap' way out of difficulties. But reconciliation is an all or nothing matter and that is extremely problematic for us who seem to thrive on holding grudges. People tell you to forgive on the surface. Yet, it may look quite different as we strive and forget after betrayal and heartbreak. People may tell you it's good for your soul. They tell you it's the only way to achieve happiness. But do we tell the rape victim or the abused wife or child to forgive and forget? That means that we haven't taken their traumatic experience seriously. It is telling them to go on as if nothing has happened to them while they suffer for the rest of their lives scarred by their horrendous experiences. Reconciliation is a site of struggle. It is where alienation can be overcome and integration can take place. It is the place where isolation can be transformed into a new sense of community. It is the place where the weary and careworn can find life in all its fullness. But it has to be authentic and grounded in our personal integrity. So for many it is: 'I Don't Forgive & Forget — I Remember &

Do Better'. If we struggle with all of this, all we can do is to look to our faith and the example of God in Jesus Christ. This is our choice for when we participate in reconciliation, like God, we have to make a sacrifice. We cannot remain in our places of comfort, even if we feel we are right. The main sacrifice we have to make is our pride and our self-righteousness. We either have to reach out to our enemies or we have to respond to their reaching out.

2020+ - must try harder -> the sky is the limit

Through the cross, Christ creates 'a single new humanity in himself, thereby making peace' by breaking down walls of hostility that separate different ethnic, gender, social and cultural groups. His work of reconciliation on the cross becomes the powerful basis of their unity and belonging. In this new humanity of inclusion in Christ, there are to be no 'aliens' and no 'strangers', only members of the same 'household', simply because we have the same Father (Eph 2:15-19). Because all God's redeemed people share the identity of being beloved children of the same Father, no matter what socio-cultural locations they come from, they share equal dignity as image bearers of their Father (Gal3:28) (Cha 2018 510-11).

Unity cannot be deepened by marginalising critical constituencies in church and society – cultures, women youth, disabled, lay and gay. This can only be achieved by empowerment. Otherwise, we remain with what we now have – a hollow union.

The stated marker in the subtitle of this webinar is '**Visibly proclaiming the Kingdom of God through unity, justice, peace and love**'. I want to suggest that these values can all be subsumed under the value of 'peace' – the deep peace which in Hebrew is *shalom*. *Shalom* is a comprehensive term which embraces unity, justice and love as it strives to achieve harmony in church and society. We often refer to 'keeping the peace' in a situation where there is tension, but *shalom* goes far beyond that by making peace as opposed to keeping it:

by forging a system where all agree that the outcome is fair
where solidarity binds us together in love and
where we recognise and repent of the truth that our 'own divisions deeply undermine the credibility of [the Church's] witness' and that 'unity and diversity are both God's gift to the Church' (UPCSA 2007:22.11).

'When I was a child I spoke like a child, thought like a child, reasoned like a child; but when I grew up I finished with childish things' (1Cor 13:11). Our problem is that we are still immersed in childish things. By this I mean matters that should have been resolved a long time ago in order that we can proceed

with God's mission of bringing the kingdom of God to reality. We accept that we have come from different Presbyterian traditions with differences and we are challenged to exercise tolerance as our church strives to become one. To return to David Bosch's reference to crisis, it comes to mind that perhaps, despite all the negative trauma we have experienced during the past few months of crisis, we are now offered a wonderful opportunity to evaluate our common life and 'make all things new'. This provides us with the opportunity to demonstrate that Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17 can become a living reality. Surely, this is not too much to hope for after twenty one years. We would then be, in those terms, seen to be a grown up denomination.

A final word:

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43: 18-19). These words express the grace and forgiveness of God towards the people of Israel who constantly forsook and displeased God with their disobedience and reluctance to follow His will. God, in these verses, calls them to not fixate on the past but to embrace a new prosperous and blessed future. (GENERAL ASSEMBLY WORKING GROUP ON ASSOCIATIONS, Report to Executive Commission 2019:32).

Amen. *Soli Deo gloriae!*

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Tasks:

Instil a sense of unity in your local area among Presbyterians of our own and other Presbyterian denominations.

Discuss how to bring congregations in Presbyteries together to discuss the issue of property.

Raise issues of integration as a symbol of the reality of the union that brought the UPCSA into being.

Investigate opportunities for ongoing discussions within the associations with a view to discerning ways of finding common goals and objectives to enhance the mission of the UPCSA.

Investigate the issue of human sexuality from all perspectives in a spirit of love and tolerance recognising our mutual integrity and to be open to personal and communal transformation.

Consider appropriate criteria to be considered in the call and appointment of ministers to congregations.

Discuss how the Presbyteries in Zambia and Zimbabwe bring added value to the life and work of the UPCSA

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