

UPCSA TURNS 21

Rev Jane Nyirongo responding to the two presentations at the webinar to mark UPCSA 21 from the Context of Zambia (Personal Observations - Not speaking on behalf of the Synod of Zambia)

Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa celebrate.

The Zambian Perspective

As we celebrate 21yrs of UPCSA we need to reflect on the following:

Has Presbyterianism contributed to the disunity and injustices in our context?

Has it pleaded guilty of such contributions?

Do women find themselves in Presbyterianism?

How does the Presbyterian polity enable the accomplishment of this mission?

Does Presbyterianism have the powers to emancipate the colonised and the oppressed?

What can be done to change the narrative and the picture?

What are the essential traits of Presbyterianism that should be carried to the next generation?

In any birthday celebration, it is important to have time to reflect on the past- where you are coming from, the present -where you are, and the future - where you are going or you want to go. Let me first give a disclaimer on what I am about to say. The views being shared here are my personal views and not the views of the Synod of Zambia. I am giving these reflections as one of the senior ministers who have served the church in Zambia in various leadership positions for 31years. I am the immediate past moderator of the synod of Zambia.

I have seen the growth of the church in Zambia from only 3 congregations in the early 1960s to over 25 congregations and so many outstations. Previously the Presbyterian Church was only along the line of rail but now we have the church as far as Chama in the Mchinga Province and Solwezi in North Western Province. From zero Zambian minister to more than 20 indigenous ministers. We thank God for this growth. We feel the commission in Matthew 28:19 is being fulfilled.

However, there is still a lot to be done by the church in Zambia to fulfil its Mission as UPCSA. At 21 years, a person would be deemed mature enough to handle life situations. For the church in Zambia, I feel that we are still colonised in the way we handle issues. There is no real sense of ownership and responsibility. We still behave like the church belongs to someone somewhere and it is those people who have to do things for us all the time. We have been too comfortable to be on the receiving end. A typical example is in the translation of the manual and other training materials from English to the local Zambian languages. For 21 years the contents of the manual have been in the hands of a few people who understand the English language. We all know that knowledge in the hands of a few people can be manipulative.

The Zambian Church seem to be reluctant in coming up with a system that can help do mission work effectively in the Zambian context. There is this joke that we have this golden bowl and we go begging

with this bowl. The rich resources we have is copied by others in Zambia and they are doing very well in almost all areas while we keep on lamenting that we do not have enough resources. The transnational nature of the church has helped so much but there is a lot that need to be done. There are things in the manual that cannot bring progress to the church in Zambia and the denomination needs to hear from the Zambians and allow them to do things differently. The issue of ministers being called and others appointed need to be reviewed so that no minister is seen to own the congregation saying that he/ she has been called to that congregation and no one can move them. This has brought disunity in that the congregations which are financially sound are not able to help those which are struggling in a brotherly way and so the master-servant syndrome is perpetuated.

The Presbyterian Church believes in the Priesthood of all believers, but in practice some believers are seen to be more equal than others. The women are not appreciated and fully encouraged to bring out their God given gifts in the Church. There is just tolerance not acceptance. (Because the General Assembly said we should include women in leadership so let us see whom we can include) Women are always reminded of their gender and that they should not forget that they are in the midst of (madodana) men and the men are doing them a favour. Sentiments like, how can a married woman do this, or that is why she is not married because of this.....! Women have not found themselves in the Church in Zambia.

The trait we can carry to the next generation is that despite all our shortcomings as a church, the Bush is Burning but not CONSUMED! This is the Church that Jesus died for and his Spirit is moving to take the Church where He wants it to be, so that it becomes a beacon of hope to the hopeless.

Thank you so much for inviting me to take part in this celebration.

May God continue blessing us all.

Shalom!