



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

Friday, June 11, 2021

Dear Friends

This is my last letter to you as Moderator of the General Assembly after three years and, as I mentioned last month, I am using the opportunity to share with you some thoughts I have around the challenges facing the UPCSAs as we move into the future. Although these reflections are included in my report to General Assembly, I thought I would share some of those thoughts in my final two letters to you all.

Congregations

The COVID-19 crisis has caused all of us to have to adapt to ministry in new ways, but it has also had a devastating effect on congregations, particularly in Zimbabwe and South Africa. One of the issues was how to conduct worship and celebrate the sacraments when we were not permitted to meet together. It was amazing to see how ministers, elders and members in congregations rose to the challenge of worshipping remotely, found ways in which to share the sacrament and, probably most important of all, continued the work of feeding the hungry and taking care of the poor. Whether suburban, inner city, or rural, congregations continued to express their life together and meet the needs of their communities when, often, our governments were unable to do so or were simply overwhelmed. I want to commend ministers, elders, and members of UPCSAs congregations who have continued to function, sometimes under the most restrictive and difficult circumstances imaginable. In rural, township and suburban congregations in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, the UPCSAs faithful have managed to adapt to this new reality. From online services on Facebook, WhatsApp, or YouTube; to feeding schemes looking after the hungry and desperate people in our communities; to those who are working in the front lines; to those who do various acts of kindness, it is touching to see the efforts of so many of our people to help others. We don't know how long before we will be able to have normal services again or when we will be able to travel freely, but in these days, I want to encourage you to continue in your love, care, and compassion for others. Dwindling congregational incomes, creeping despair and health challenges make it extremely difficult for us to keep our heads above water. Remember that, when it feels as if we are drowning in the needs of the people around us and we have so little to offer, Jesus reminds us that even a cup of water given to a thirsty person counts in the economy of the kingdom.

Day of Prayer and Fasting

In the midst of the second wave of the COVID-19 crisis, we saw this disease take a terrible toll on our ministers and members. A number of our ministers succumbed to this disease and many families have been touched by the tentacles of this global pandemic. The Rev Melanie Cook suggested that I call the UPCSAs to a Day of Prayer and Fasting and I thought a spectacularly good idea. Accordingly, I called the denomination to prayer and fast on Monday 11th January for an end to the Corona virus pandemic, particularly in the countries in which the UPCSAs has a presence: Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. It was interesting to note that the rate of infections, hospitalizations and deaths reduced dramatically towards the end of January 2021, and I am convinced that our commitment to pray and fast had a role in turning the tide of the second wave of this disease.

Vaccines

During 2021 various vaccines began to be rolled out. Ministers and elders have a crucial role to play in advocating for the vaccine and in getting people to agree to receive the vaccine. We need to be saying, publicly and prominently that we support the vaccine and when our people see us leading the way, they