

PRESBYTERIAN LINK

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE UPCSA

Newsletter

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EDITION

**LINKING ALL IN
THE UPCSA
TOGETHER**



The Presbyterian Link team wish to thank our outgoing Moderator of General Assembly The Right Rev Siphon Mtetwa for the excellent servant leadership that he provided to our Denomination in the past two years. Thank you Nyambose

Join Us



UPCSA



Mypresby



The Presbyterian Link team wishes our Moderator designate Rev Lydia Neshangwe well as she starts a new Journey

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OVERVIEW OF THE 2023 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

From the 24th to the 30th of June 2023, approximately 165 commissioners from the twenty (20) Presbyteries and two (2) Synods of the UPCSA will meet in a hybrid form to constitute the 15th General Assembly of the UPCSA. The commissioners will

join virtually from their respective locations. The leadership of the UPCSA will meet in person in Harare, within the Presbytery of Zimbabwe. They will be joined by ecumenical delegates and partners from the respective organisations that the UPCSA affiliates with and the various sister denominations. The delegates are expected from the Council for World Mission, Church Unity Commission, and Zimbabwe Council of Churches. The World Council of Churches, World Communion of Churches and All Africa Conference of Churches sent messages of good will and apologies. Over the period, the Central Committee of the WCC will be sitting, hence the apologies, as the leadership from the organisations will be engaged in that meeting. The Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Reformed Church - UK (Eastern Synod) and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa are some of the partners that will be represented, while the Church of Scotland and others will join online.

On the 24th of June 2023, the outgoing Moderator, the Rt Rev Siphon Mtetwa will constitute the Assembly and deliver his retiring address. He will outline the significant achievements and observations over the past two years under his theme, "Going back to basics". He will, further, induct the incoming Moderator, Rev Lydia Neshangwe. On the 25th of June 2023, the Rev Lydia Neshangwe will preach the sermon in which she will introduce her theme, "Stronger together", which will be used to galvanise the UPCSA over the next two years. During that service, fraternal greetings will be received and a valedictory service will be held in honour of the retiring ministers of the UPCSA. The Moderator will dispense the Holy Communion

The General Assembly is a discernment and decision /policy making space for the UPCSA. Hence, the commissioners and all in the UPCSA are invited to a period of prayer as from Friday, the 16th of June 2023. The commissioners are urged to internalise the contents of their reports and engage effectively and optimally during the Insaka discernment sessions and participate during the decision-making sessions.

The General Secretary will give an organisational report, detailing the achievements of the UPCSA and the challenges that lie ahead. This will be followed by the reports of the eighteen (18) Committees of the General Assembly over the four-day period. It is hoped that Commissioners will give time to engage on the decade programme of the UPCSA – Going for Growth: Sowing, growing, and reaping. This programme enjoins all into action for growth of the UPCSA numerically, spiritually, and missionally.

The Assembly will, among others, elect the Moderator Designate, Assembly Appeals Review Panel/Court of Assembly and the Convener thereof. It is our prayer and hope that as we come to the end of the Assembly, we will be “stronger together”. Let us work together “To be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ”.

Please continue to pray for the General Assembly until it completes its business on the 30th of June 2023.



**Greetings from the Presbyterian Link Team
Linking all Presbyterians together**

Grace and Peace of the Lord to all the Uniting Presbyterians. It is our hope as the Communications Committee and Presbyterian Link Team that this May/June Edition of our magazine finds you well. Linking all Presbyterians is our objective and will hope that you will find this edition, after some lull, informative.

With the General Assembly upon us, the team decided that this edition of our magazine should focus on this most important event in our calendar. We will for this reason, the articles will focus on the preparations of the General Assembly, how the proceedings will unfold and what we should expect out of this august gathering of the leaders of our Denomination. Our intention is to get the members of our Denomination to understand and appreciate the significance of Assembly.

After a lull spanning almost a year, the Presbyterian Link is back in circulation. It returns with renewed vigor to teach, educate

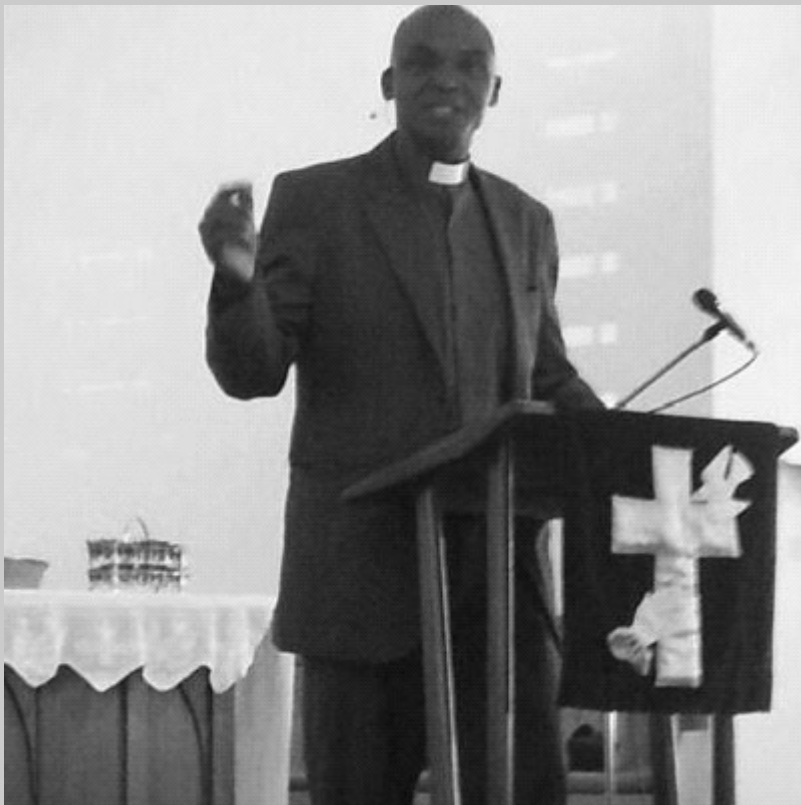
and inform. The intention going forward is to publish the magazine bi-monthly. After some research it has now been decided that rather than stay with the old way of doing things, we will only issue electronic versions. For people who require hard copies they can always print for themselves. Electronic version has proved to have a wide reach in terms of distribution, is cheaper to compile and distribute, but most importantly it appeals to the young in the church.

The Team takes the opportunity to thank the Moderator of the General Assembly, The Right Rev Siphon Mtetwa for the work he has done for our Denomination. From the Communications point of view, he has ably lifted the profile of the UPCSA, to remain on the lips of our members and non-members alike. Well done, Nyambose. May the Good Lord continue to shower you with more wisdom and long and healthy life.

Equally the Team welcomes our incoming Moderator, Rev Lydia Neshangwe, and wish her the best and most successful term. We are indeed certain that our Denomination is in good hands and will continue to serve the people of DRC, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and generally the people of God wherever they are. All the best our dear Sister and Mother.

To all Presbyterians, please enjoy this edition.

Benny Boshielo
Convener: Communications Committee



Greetings from Zimbabwe!

This concludes a period of perpetual invocations for your arrival. The Presbytery of Zimbabwe is so humbled to host you for a Historic General Assembly. The 15th General Assembly is historic in two forms, coming to Zimbabwe after 34 years and induction of a female Zimbabwe minister. We are hopeful that the Spirit is saying something to the church in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa.

As we gather, Zimbabwe is praying and preparing for her harmonized elections. As we remain here for the duration of the Assembly, please keep praying for peace and peaceful elections this year on August the 23rd. Pray for Churches in Zimbabwe to remain prophetic witness and a reconciled community as a nation going through uncertain socioeconomic and political challenges.

We also meet in the Season of Pentecost just few weeks after the commemoration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What a time for “Going Back to The Basics” and building a “Stronger church Together” as we discern the will of God for His Church.

The Presbytery continues to pray for spirit filled engagements and discussions and the rest of commissioners for fruitful resolutions for the wider church despite meeting virtually. How proud we are to be part of the church Jesus prayed for; united church, and indeed the church of our time.

Please, feel free to enjoy our humble and warm hospitality. Your concerns and cooperation will make us very proud host by the end of the General Assembly.

May the Lord be with us all! You’re welcome!

Rev Dr David Mushayavandu

Preparations for the 15th General Assembly of the UPCSA

Preparations are well underway for the General Assembly to be held in a Hybrid format (with the Moderator's team in Zimbabwe and about 160 Commissioners) joining virtually. The main venue is Harare in Zimbabwe. From the 24th to the 30th of June 2023, these men and women as appointed by their respective Presbyteries will congregate *to discern God's will with respect to the business of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa*.

The Presbytery of Zimbabwe is ready to welcome the Moderator's team as well as some fraternal delegates.

Each day will of course begin and end with devotions.

General Assembly uses the Discernment model of decision-making. The process involves three steps: **Listening**, **Discussing**, and **Deciding**. Each of these phases is done separately and the Moderator makes sure that the phases are not confused but engaged deliberately.

In the Discernment model of decision-making is the discussion that happens during what is called **INSAKA**. In this phase, the General Assembly is divided into small groups (no more than 12 members per group). Commissioners are encouraged to debate freely, dialogue, and engage on Missional Proposals in their language of choice provided an interpreter is present if necessary.

By now we have received reports from all twenty (20) Committees of the General Assembly and those have been consolidated into Assembly Papers which have in turn been circulated to all those who will be participating in the deliberations of the Assembly so that they can read these and be better prepared to engage. We have taken time to prepare Commissioners by conducting dry runs so that everyone is abreast of the technology which will be used.

Over and above the decisions that will be made based on the reports, the Assembly will also be electing the Moderator Designate to take over from the year 2025, the Court of Assembly and Assembly Administrative Review Panel. Some of the Conveners of the Assembly Committees have now completed their terms and so the Nominations Committee will be hard at work searching for and proposing new Conveners (and Committees) to General Assembly.

We have had many discussions around connectivity given the challenges of load shedding and have come to some commitments in terms of what Presbyteries need to do and provide so the Commissioners remain connected all the time and we would like to encourage every participant to commit to doing his/her best to make sure that they remain connected throughout all the deliberations.

All in all, we are looking forward to a successful General Assembly.

Humbly submitted by,

Rev Vusi Mkhungo (Clerk of Assembly)

FROM THE GENDER DESK

Christmas time and birthdays are exciting times in our year calendar. It's the time of presents and lots of food, drinks and cakes. Many times, one looks forward to the following day, as it is real time to take a good look at all the presents that one had received, which ones one likes and don't like, which ones to keep for personal use and which ones one will pass on to someone you don't really like as a present on their birthday, to avoid spending.

I normally don't look forward in warming up the leftover food. Eating left overs is not nice. It is normally nicely packed for those who are beggars from the streets. Those who bother us by knocking in our big gates in search for food. It is normally stuffed in ice cream containers with a plastic spoon, having forgotten the amount of time spent and effort put to prepare the very nice food it was the previous day, now the food not good enough for one's own consumption. Some people throw it in rubbish bins some give it their dogs. It's food with no value for many. Don't we have the same left overs in our denominations the UPCSA? Or at least, those we treat and view as left overs? Those we "don't care " any more about them, for we have used and don't care no more, and are not needed for our edification? I'm talking about the great woman and men who worked hard and tirelessly for our church.

Burning Spear (Winston Rodney) in his album Garveys Ghost, a song written by Winston Godfrey Rodney titled:

Recall Some Great Men.

'Let's recall some great men, who've been fighting for our rights ". I write this article with humility and conviction and as a minister of the UPCSA with a craveto all of us Presbyterians especially the General Assembly to recall with respect the woman and all these men not in any special order who devoted their time and energy to the work of God and His ministry.

The Clerk of the General Assembly: Mr Tom Coulter. These are the past General Secretaries of our denomination who worked very hard for the UPCSA to be where it is. Alistair Roger, Vusi Mdlalose, Vuyani Vellem, Jerry Pillay. All these men laboured,

sacrificed their God given time to spend with their families and gave service to the church as they felt called by God to serve. I take my hat off to all of them.

These are the Women and Men who were nice respected as moderators of this church: Cliff Leeuw, Diane Vorster, Max Chigwida, Graham Duncan, Mose Boshoman, Rod Botsis, George, Mukhondi Ramolondi, Chris Mkhawire, Robert Munthali, Peter Langerman, Sipho Mhetwa, Jerry Pillay, William Pool.

Well done you faithful servants, you have served the UPCSA with distinction.

Where are they? Do we know as the General Assembly how they go on with their lives? Having given all the time and service to the church, how were they integrated with their families and congregations? What happened to all that knowledge and experience they have after their term of office? Is it knowledge worth for their congregations those who were lucky and remained in the same congregations after their terms of office, or is it good enough for themselves and not for the denomination? Where did all these broken, wounded, experienced, caring and loving people go?

Barclay well said, "God does not choose a person for ease and comfort and selfish joy but for a task that will take all that head and heart and hand can bring to it. God chooses a person in order to use him."

Above are the names of women and men who God chose, as much as we believed that they were chosen by us through our canvassing, through our skimming and political influences that normally happen on the floor of the General Assembly. These were mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters whom we elected voted employed for the benefit of our motives, benefit of the church but have now been forgotten. When do God stop using His chosen people? Does God stop using His people because we have stopped seeing value in them, because they have become useless to our motives and missions?

Let us recall and remember these great women and men who God called and used them. The UPCSAs might think they are left over meals who carry a new name and belong to "doggy bag", they might be of no value in our thinking but will still be good enough to feed the dogs with good nutrition, re-energize the weak, hungry and energy less dogs. Have we forgotten that even the dogs are of importance to our wellbeing as they provide companionship, security etc.

Let us remember, love and care for these great men and woman, especially those who are still with us who are not yet called to higher service. Here is the good news to all of you who feel "they don't care about us": Psalms 62

Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. 2. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress; I will never be shaken 3 How long will you assault me? Would all of you throw me down — this leaning wall, this tottering fence? 4 Surely they intend to topple me from my lofty place; they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse. 5 Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. 6 Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress; I will not be shaken. 7. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. 8 Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. 9 Surely the lowborn are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie. If weighed on a balance, they are nothing; together they are only a breath. 10. Do not trust in extortion or put vain hope in stolen goods; though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them. 11 One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard: "Power belongs to you, God, 12 and with you, Lord, is unfailing love"; and, "You reward everyone according to what they have done."

Rev Zwai Mtyobile

PLANNING INFORMS MONITORING & EVALUATION

“HOW FAR WE HAVE COME”

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD., plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a FUTURE.” Jeremiah 29:11



The 2022-23 GENERAL ASSEMBLY has developed and began a journey back to basics of instilling the spirit and culture of planning, setting priorities and continuously checking the pulse...culture of monitoring progress towards what we set ourselves to do. In our church this work is ably led by ABC to monitor progress on the implementation of the decisions of General Assembly and Executive commission as we head to this 2023 General Assembly. Priorities and Resources has a role to add value, supporting with tools and consolidation of performance.

It is at this point that faith tells us that no matter what lies ahead, God is already there, his plans are not our plans. The book of Isaiah 55:8-9 “Indeed, my plans are not like your plans, and my deeds are not like your deeds, for just as the sky is higher than the earth, so my deeds are superior to your deeds and my plans are superior to your plans.” Reporting to GA 2023 we should still use a **Simple format for all committees**. Building on this method, we had plans submitted and reviewed in October 2022, and on our learning curve, still on our tracks back to basics, a working workshop was held at the beginning of 2023 and on progress to date was consolidated into submission to GA 2023. What we know by now is that **Failure to plan is also failure to implement and deliver**.

At the heart of the culture to plan, monitor and evaluate, is the decision of the General Assembly to extend the period of the Strategic Plan with another five years from 2021 to 2026. As we converge at the GA 2023, the question will be how far have we come, we also say Ebenezer, **stone of help. 1 Samuel 7:12**, in commemoration of our small victories in the short term 2021-23, BACK TOBASICS. We still continue the journey in pursuit to be a reconciled community. We still aspire to have financial stability by 2026. How far are we, to date, recovering from the scourge of COVID and all other challenges we face in our society including lack of jobs, economic stagnation and increasing poverty and inequality? How do we fare as the denomination in the midst of the country struggling with crime, CORRUPTION and gender based violence as we continue back to basics and to an interconnected denomination in the African countries? Indeed, thus far he hath been with us and hopefully at the end of the GA 2023, we shall have a collective answer. **How do we know if we are succeeding?...if you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it.**

2022-23 Clusters system has consolidated reports from the committees using terms of reference and goals set by the committees to achieve by end to term in 2023, reporting to GA 2023. We shall follow the reports and conclude that we are making first steps, not strides yet...we continue to be on a learning curve to deliberately monitor, based on plans and set goals and targets in the strategic planning 2021-26. We are reporting on activities and milestones as set to achieve the goals with clear time frames and responsible members of the committees. To this end, the Strategic leadership for the denomination...consolidation of the broad objectives of the denomination as means to achieve the strategic plan goals and targets of the strategic plan, simply put..the strategic plan of the UPCSAs should be a lodestar, blue print and a living document based on which all plans from congregations to Presbyteries must be developed...Is this the case? Maybe we are slowly getting there, we can improve and sustain into the future with the remaining 3 years to 2026. Critical issues we should concretise in the next plans remain goal setting on where we want to be; clear milestones on how do we get there; desired outcomes and required action on how do we know we are there and ultimately the responsibility and accountability to one another.

The cluster system has set the basis, or reports are providing a number of the answers, so we are on a critical path, but more needs to be done to build this culture of priority setting, monitoring and evaluation. When the strategic planning path is right, it will inform resourcing in our denomination. The strategic plan will inform funds and people as human capital as well as their allocation of time, skills and talent in our church. This will include knowing the God`s given talent and building more talent, encouraging the young to make our church what we aspire it to be...THE CHURCH THAT JESUS CRIST PRAYED FOR.

2023 marks midterm into the UPCSAs Strategic Plan 2021-26, therefore this is a good time to take stock and do a Strategic review. Let`s embrace our Successes, Challenges, Emerging issues and What needs to be done better in the medium term 3-5 years. Our GS and the P&R using all information from the clusters, committees and Presbyteries has led this process to date, will help to give us an overview of progress to date. We support his course and the journey of the denomination. WE MAY NEED TO REFLECT ON HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PRESBYTERIAL PERFORMANCE AS INPUTS TO THE STRATEGIC PLANNING REVIEW. GS report will give us the sense of the journey thus far and priorities for the near future and beyond 2026. "We remain confident that as we journey together, we shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Psalm 27:13...The journey continues and lessons are more and more.

Lastly, building a church and society remain long term projects in God`s hands. Countries that have deliberately pursued long term plans have seen results of growing economies and impact on people`s lives through consistency and not changing course when leaders change. **Our church has introduced the first 10 years, Long term plan: Going for growth. All the work short term (Back to basics) 2022-23 to, Medium term plans (A reconciled church):** UPCSA Strategic plan 2021-26, as well as the objectives of the 10-year plan should strengthen, contribute to, inform and complement long term (**Going for growth**), next 10 years through (M&D). Work form the **long term plan to inform short to medium term plans** to attain the **goals, objectives, activities and activities** set for the long term.....GOING FOR GROWTH (M&D) towards 2026 and beyond. This may need a lot of energy from all of us (active congregations and all members), strong leadership from our church building back better and together. “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured on the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2, together we shall win the complexity of measuring our successes and creating better plans and priorities into our future as the denomination.

WHAT WE REALLY NEED: We must ensure development of the **implementation plan** over the next years for our church should be strengthened by how the church works and organizes itself from congregation to General Assembly. The implementation plans to inform monitoring and evaluation tools: (**INDICATORS**). Such should measure how we know we have succeeded, in process, failure and challenges and recommendation to change course. I believe by now all tools and structures are in place, we are challenged to work and build together more, have the same dreams and pursue them together and succeed together...LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND. The results are in the near future, in the medium term and impact will be felt in the long term.

As we know: “THE LORD HIMSELF GOES BEFORE YOU AND WILL BE WITH YOU, HE WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR FORESAKE YOU. DO NOT BE AFRAID, DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED.” Deuteronomy 31:8.

Yours in service

Dr Kefiloe Masiteng

Convener: Priorities and Resources



Church redefined.

I was asked by the communications committee to present this article and I humbly do so not as an expert but do so to help other elders and churches to debate this to see what suits their particular situation.

The Covid-19 lockdowns changed behaviour patterns as health experts discouraged physical meetings. In Southern Africa, going to church is one of the most popular traditions for Christians.

Technology allowed online church attendance through platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp. Now, as the world reintroduced physical meetings, church administrators are decrying low numbers of worshippers.

Although connecting to your church family via online live streams may be an occasional and temporary necessity, “online church” does not meet the Biblical purposes, functions, and commands of gathering in person. But 5 Reasons the Virtual Church Service may be here to stay.

1. Virtual Church Services Can Be Archived

One of the biggest benefits of providing a congregation with virtual church services is that they can be archived on the church’s website or shared on YouTube. This is a great tool for helping people find the right church.

For example, if they're new to an area and aren't sure which church they should attend, they could go online to view previous church services. Then, they can make an informed decision on which church they should join based on the messages, personality of the pastor, outreach projects and more.

2. Virtual Church Services are Convenient

On-site church services can be difficult to attend based on personal circumstances. For example, single parents with multiple children may find it difficult to get their children ready early Sunday morning. Streaming a church service would be a much more convenient option.

Parents of young children may also find it more convenient to be able to pause an online sermon to deal with a crying or disorderly child. At an on-site church that doesn't provide daycare, their children could disrupt the entire service and force the parent to leave the sermon. (There are many views on this but sadly some folk even in our congregations find it disruptive.)

3. Not Everyone's Work Schedule Accommodates Sunday Morning Services

Modern church technology is making it easier for people from all walks of life to attend church services, regardless of their work schedule. While most jobs give people Saturday and Sunday off, not all employees get to enjoy this luxury. Virtual church services might be their only option for hearing messages from their favorite church.

4. Virtual Church Services Have a Greater Reach

Finding the right church is more difficult for some people than others. For example, some people prefer a more strict and traditional congregation while others prefer a more progressive or modern church.

As such, not everyone can find a church nearby that suits their preferences. A church that takes advantage of live streaming to publish virtual church services can expand its reach to find people even in other cities and outlying towns.

5. We Don't Know How Long the effects of the Pandemic are going to Last even though in most cases we are back to "normal".

Finally, as much as we'd love for it to be over, Covid 19 and the W.H.O fallout still has a powerful hold on the world. It might not be going anywhere for a while.

Finding a church that offers streaming services might be the safest thing for you and your family. This is especially important if you have anyone in your household who is vulnerable

to the virus and its effects. People who normally travel long distances to church or the area around their church may have declined, find it "convenient or safer" to "attend" online.

Church and faith establishments are not only a faith issue, but also an economic enterprises. The countries covered by the UPCSA have a very high unemployment rate which has led to the emergency of "faith entrepreneurs" who use religion to collect money from church attenders. Attracting a large followership means that "pastors" or evangelists of these churches can collect large sums of money from their followers.

During the Covid-19 lockdowns, church business became digitized. Faith entrepreneurs were able to open "Zoom churches". The venture was very lucrative because the church could hold multiple sessions, have attendees from all over the world and collect money (tithe, offerings) using digital payment platforms.

Congregants quitting their churches. Sessions and ministers have to be very astutely countering this and ensure that your church is biblically sound and is meeting the great command. Spirituality is the essence of our worship and we need to be on point.

As the pandemic has subsided, Southern Africa's churches are suffering from a 'great quitting', with congregants vanishing from Sunday Zoom church services and quitting their old churches as they get poached by rival congregations.

The return to normal after the pandemic has not been an easy transition for people and institutions around the world. New realities created during the pandemic have become a norm that is hard to shake off. For pastors, the return to normal has brought new challenges. While worshippers could attend multiple events online, this is not possible with physical churches. People now must choose which church to attend.

"It's a crisis for some pastors. There is less money and earnings in tithing if worshippers quit their established churches."

When churches have moved online for live streaming their services or for providing online sermons and classes, they are considered as virtual or online churches.

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) disease resulted in an epic shift from offline liturgical practice to online platforms where South African Pentecostal churches are worshiping, using online tools such as Zoom, Facebook and YouTube. This article touches briefly how offline liturgical practices, traditional power dynamics, and the performative and communication characteristics of our churches are decoded into the digital space, and the impact it has on congregants and church leadership. The prohibition of gatherings to promote social distancing culminated in the use of online platforms as an alternative to physical gatherings. Key findings in studies suggest that this historic shift created a plethora of challenges for

some churches resulting in some being unable to reopen. Moving to online platforms meant that many churches had to adapt to new modalities of practice in transmitting sacred information. By depriving churches the opportunity to perform rituals of solidarity and other offline liturgical practices, Covid -19 disrupted important social systems and its performative and communication traits. Despite the challenges and changes caused by this novel pandemic, Covid -19 provided churches an opportunity to assess the doctrines of our leaders. In other words, online worship is coupled with benefits that must not be overlooked. In my humble view, the greatest problem facing the church is lack of unity. When Jesus Christ was getting ready to leave this earth, He prayed for His disciples and asked especially that they would be united (see John 17:20-21). He said that whenever His followers acted in unity, the world would know that the Father had sent Him (see John 17:23). However, it is extremely difficult in this world to achieve the kind of unity, love, and concern for one another that Jesus Christ shared with His disciples.

Unity begins to break down when man's selfishness enters the picture. For unity we have to have mutual respect and a mutual willingness to give and to surrender, not to the other person so much, but to Jesus. We can truly have unity when we all want God's will to be done. When preparing this article I ran across this in an article published by CareyNieuwhof.com.

10 Predictions About the Future Church

So what's likely for the future church?

The potential to gain is still greater than the potential to lose

Every time there is a change in history, there's potential to gain and potential to lose.

It is believed the potential to gain is greater than the potential to lose. Why?

As despairing or as cynical as some might be (sometimes understandably) over the church's future, we have to remind ourselves that the church was Jesus' idea, not ours.

It will survive our missteps and whatever cultural trends happen around us. We certainly don't always get things right, but Christ has an incredible history of pulling together Christians in every generation to share his love for a broken world.

As a result, the reports of the church's death are greatly exaggerated.

10 Predictions About the Future Church and Shifting Attendance Patterns

Every generation experiences change.

But sometimes you sense you're in the midst of truly radical change, the kind that happens only every few centuries. Increasingly, I think we're in such a moment now.

Those of us in Western culture who are over age 30 were born into a culture that could conceivably still be called Christian. Now, as David Kinnaman at the Barna Group has shown, even in America, people who are churchless (having no church affiliation) will soon eclipse the church.

In addition, 48% of Millennials (born between 1984 -2002) can be called post-Christian in their beliefs, thinking and worldview.

I think the change we're seeing around us might one day be viewed on the same level as what happened to the church after Constantine's conversion or after the invention of the printing press. Whatever the change looks like when it's done, it will register as a seismic shift from what we've known.

So what will the future church be like? And how should you and I respond.

Predictions...Really?

Okay, before we get going, a few things.

I realize making predictions can be a dangerous thing. Maybe even a bit ridiculous. But I want to offer a few thoughts because I'm passionate about the mission of the church.

So, borne out of a love for the gathered church, I offer a few thoughts. Consider it thinking in pencil, not ink.

While no one's really sure of what's ahead, talking about it at least allows us to position our churches for impact in a changing world.

10 Predictions About the Future Church

So what's likely for the future church? Here are the 10.

1. The potential to gain is still greater than the potential to lose.

Every time there is a change in history, there's potential to gain and potential to lose.

I believe the potential to gain is greater than the potential to lose. Why?

As despairing or as cynical as some might be (sometimes understandably) over the church's future, we have to remind ourselves that the church was Jesus' idea, not ours.

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As a result, the reports of the church's death are greatly exaggerated.

2. Churches that love their model more than the mission will die.

That said, many individual congregations and some entire denominations won't make it. The difference will be between those who cling to the mission and those who cling to the model.

When the car was invented, it quickly took over from the horse and buggy. Horse and buggy manufacturers were relegated to boutique status and many went under, but human transportation actually exploded. Suddenly the average person could travel at a level they never could before.

The mission is travel. The model is a buggy, or car, or motorcycle, or jet.

Look at the changes in the publishing, music and even photography industry in the last few years.

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See a trend? The mission is reading. It's music. It's photography. The model always shifts....moving from things like 8 tracks, cassettes and CDs to MP3s and now streaming audio and video.

Companies that show innovation around the mission (Apple, Samsung) will always beat companies that remain devoted to the method (Kodak).

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In the future, churches that love their model more than their mission will die.

3. The gathered church is here to stay. Some Christians believe the best thing to do is to give up on Christian gatherings of any kind.

This is naive.

While some will leave, it does not change the fact that the church has always gathered because the church is inherently communal. Additionally, what we can do gathered together far surpasses what we can do alone. Which is why there will always be an organized church of some form.

So while our gatherings might shift and look different than they do today, Christians will always gather together to do more than we ever could on our own.

Attendance will no longer drive engagement; engagement will drive attendance.

Simplified ministries will complement people's lives, not compete with people's lives

For years, the assumption has been that the more a church grew, the more activity it would offer.

The challenge, of course, is that church can easily end up burning people out. In some cases, people end up with no life except church life. Some churches offer so many programs for families that families don't even have a chance to be families.

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The church will always gather. What Christians can do together far surpasses what we can do alone.

4. Consumer Christianity will die and a more selfless discipleship will emerge

Consumer Christianity asks What can I get from God? It asks, What's in it for me?

That leads us to evaluate our church, our faith, our experience and each other according to our preferences and whims. In many respects, even many critics of the church who have left have done so under the pull of consumer Christianity because 'nothing' meets their needs.

All of this is antithetical to the Gospel, which calls us to die to ourselves—to lose ourselves for the sake of Christ.

As the church reformats and repents, a more authentic, more selfless church will emerge. Sure, we will still have to make decisions about music, gathering times and even some

distinctions about what we believe, but the tone will be different. When you're no longer focused on yourself and your viewpoint, a new tone emerges.

As the church reformats and repents, a more authentic, more selfless church will emerge.

5. Sundays will become more about what we give than what we get.

The death of consumer Christianity will change our gatherings.

Our gatherings will become less about us and more about Jesus and the world he loves. Rather than a gathering of the already-convinced, the churches that remain will be decidedly outsider-focused. And word will be supplemented with deeds.

In the future church, being right will be less important than doing right. Sure, that involves social justice and meeting physical needs, but it also involves treating people with kindness, compassion in everyday life and attending to their spiritual wellbeing.

This is the kind of outward focus that drove the rapid expansion of the first century church.

That's why I'm very excited to be part of a group of churches that has, at its heart, the desire to create churches unchurched people love to attend. While the expression of what that looks like may change, the intent will not.

6. Attendance will no longer drive engagement; engagement will drive attendance

Currently, many churches try to get people to attend, hoping it drives engagement. In the future, that will flip. The engaged will attend, in large measure because only the engaged will remain. If you really think about this...engagement driving attendance is exactly what has fueled the church at its best moments throughout history. It's an exciting shift.

In the future church, attendance won't drive engagement; engagement will drive attendance.

7. Simplified ministries will complement people's lives, not compete with people's lives.

For years, the assumption has been that the more a church grew, the more activity it would offer.

The challenge, of course, is that church can easily end up burning people out. In some cases, people end up with no life except church life. Some churches offer so many programs for families that families don't even have a chance to be families.

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The church at its best has always equipped people to live out their faith in the world. But you have to be in the world to influence the world.

Churches that focus their energies on the few things the church can uniquely do best will emerge as the most effective churches moving forward. Simplified churches will complement people's witness, not compete with people's witness.

Simplified churches will complement people's witness, not compete with people's witness.

8. Online church will supplement the journey but not become the journey.

There's a big discussion right now around online church. I think in certain niches online church might become the church for some who simply have no other access to church.

But there is something about human relationship that requires presence. Because the church at its fullest will always gather, online church will supplement the journey. I believe that online relationships are real relationships, but they are not the greatest relationships people can have. Think of it like meeting someone online. You can have a fantastic relationship. But if you fall in love, you ultimately want to meet and spend your life together.

So it is with Jesus, people and the church.

Online church will become more of a front door than a back door.

There's no question that today online church has become a back door for Christians who are done with attending church.

While online church is an amazing supplement for people who can't get to a service, it's still an off ramp for Christian whose commitment to faith is perhaps less than it might have been at an earlier point.

Within a few years, the dust will settle and a new role for online church and online ministry will emerge. Online church has the potential to become a massive front door for the curious, the unconvinced and for those who want to know what Christianity is all about.

In the same way you purchase almost nothing without reading online reviews or rarely visit a restaurant without checking it out online first, a church's online presence will be a first home for people which for many, will lead to a personal connection with Christ and ultimately the gathered church.

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Online church has the potential to become a massive front door for the curious and the unconvinced.

10. Gatherings will be smaller and larger at the same time.

While many might think the mega-church is dead, it's not. And while others think mega-churches are awful, there's nothing inherently bad about them. Size is somewhat irrelevant to a church's effectiveness.

There are bad mega-churches and bad small churches. And there are wonderfully effective mega-churches and wonderfully effective small churches.

We will likely see large churches get larger. Multisite will continue to explode, as churches that are effective, expand their mission.

At the same time, churches will also establish smaller, more intimate gatherings as millennials and others seek tighter connections and groups. Paradoxically, future large churches will likely become large not because they necessarily gather thousands in one space, but because they gather thousands through dozens of smaller gatherings under some form of shared leadership. Some of those gatherings might be as simple as at a coffee shop or even home venues under a simple structure.

Elder Geoff Jooste



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

UPFOY/ NEWSFLASH

June 2023 -

In an effort to make awareness and to bring about the change that we want to see in our communities, eGoli Presbytery Fellowship of youth, in commemoration of the 16 June 1976 massacre held its first of its kind career expo-day at the Dr Beyers Naude Senior Secondary School in Soweto, Johannesburg.



This follows after a finding by the eGoli Presbytery Youth that more than 70% of youth in grade 12 do not secure their application to study further on time and this results from lack of knowledge and exposure to a variety of courses to choose from.

eGoli President, Thabo Gumede and his team of specialists shared the platform with over 150 learners from different high schools within Soweto and surrounding townships where information stalls ranging from the faculties of Built Engineering, Business and Commercial Management, Informatics and Design, Health and Wellness, Home Economics, Entrepreneurship were set to equip the young lions with valuable information.

Moreover, industry captains were lined up to give practical experience in a form of motivating young people to take their studies seriously. Giant funding scheme, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) graced the occasion and further provided much needed clarity on the steps of applying for funding and how to qualify.



Amathole Presbytery FOY Executive

Subsequently, fellow neighbouring Amathole Presbytery has held community building initiatives in various parts of its Eastern Cape Province. Based within the Buffalo City Metro and Chris Hani District, Amathole Presbytery has extended its hand of goodwill within the bounds of the Tiyo Soga Presbytery in Centane where a donation of a tournament kit for soccer and netball was handed over to the Kungamila Youth Development for the June 16 soccer and netball games.

Amathole President Siyabulela Mlanduli mentioned that “the donation came as a gift from us to Kungamila Youth Development as a way of motivating young people to keep focused and stay away from destructive activities such as crime and drugs”.



“We want to appraise the development centre for keeping consistency in making sure that the youth is kept occupied with activities that will stimulate their well-being and mental state. More young people are suffocated in drugs, alcohol and GBV. Our communities and leaders need to invest more time to focus on the development of a young person, be it a girl or a boy”.

Mlanduli added that “Amathole has in the beginning of the year adopted a theme, Youth in the Community to attempt working with organisations that are focused on the development of young people.

By: Mbasa Gqokoma

The Church Fellowships in the Mission of the UPCSA

The Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa has established groupings within the church called Fellowships. These Fellowships are established based on broadly recognized categories of gender and age. Members come together in pursuit of common goals. Fellowship of Youth is one category, whilst Fellowship of Men, Church Choirs and Musicians are other categories.

These Fellowships have distinguishing colours and patterns used for identification. Worship is distinctly African both in song and dance. When in attendance, one can experience the departure from the Scottish liturgies from which our Southern African Sunday worship is hewn. From the Democratic Republic of Congo to South Africa, worship is distinctly African.

Worship and programming happens in the context of a Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) vision and mission

The Mission of the UPCSA is summarized as follows:

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*
- ✠ *Visibly proclaiming the Kingdom of God through unity, justice, peace and love.*

To this end, it is the fervent hope of the Fellowships Committee and the Church at large that every member of the Fellowships will join the Fellowship with the view to enabling the UPCSA achieve her vision. Each member must be committed emotionally towards the realization of the vision. Resources collected from members and raised through donations must be channeled to the realization of the vision. In fact, the Fellowships are a church's wagon wheels to the realization of the vision.

The advantage to the UPCSA is that all Fellowships are new, and if they work towards the realization of the vision, they will be useful tools for its accomplishment. All Fellowships are committed to bear witness to the saving love of Jesus Christ, they are contributing to building vital reforming congregations. All Fellowships have demonstrated commitment to the values of the Kingdom of God. The challenge though is to convince every member that fellowships are new, they are not associations in the new name. One can easily see that in the discussions and in the creation of new symbols. Old ashes are being used in this process of starting something new.

The committee is working tirelessly to pass the message through. The good thing that has happened with the fellowships is that fellowship unlike the associations are now govern by the same fellowship constitutions. All what the individual fellowship is expected to do, is create bylaws that will assist in action the constitution. This is a great achievement because it will not for long that we see a well co ordinated work of fellowships. When that is achieved, all fellowships will be pulling to the same direction and their impact will be felt by the entire church.

It is however important that all stakeholders in the UPCSA share in this commitment, that include ministers and their spouses. These are leaders of our denomination who should rise above fellowship positions and begin to see themselves as vision bearers and spend more time not in contesting for positions but in giving guidance to fellowships at all levels. The vision must be written in bold, in tablets on the walls, glass panes, hearts and minds until every member embraces it and forges towards its realization. Clearly, if members do not know or understand the vision, chances are various levels and structures will create parallel visions and missions and the Church will be thrown into disarray.

In conclusion, the future is bright for the church through fellowships. it is just a matter of time as the fellowships are aligning themselves with the vision and mission of the church.

Rev Thabani Masikane

DEVOTIONS

Fellow Travellers in the vineyard, as we prepare ourselves for this historic hybrid General Assembly of our church; we read from Galatians 3:6-18. Paul continues on his subject of men being saved by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8). Abraham was declared righteous by faith not works. He was the father of the Jews and serves as an example for all men. Abraham's faith was credited to him as Righteousness (Romans 4:1-3).

The Jewish teachers in Galatia were teaching that to be declared righteous it was necessary for one to be circumcised and to obey the Jewish law. In order to be declared righteous in God's sight, one had to be a descendant of Abraham to the flesh. But we now know that only by faith and nothing else is what Paul taught; that one is declared right. We know that those who place their faith in Christ are Abraham's spiritual descendants.

It is by faith that we can receive spiritual blessings. One cannot inherit spiritual blessings through the flesh. Even those who were regarded as Gentiles can receive all these blessings through faith. Trust God for our own blessings. Abraham was not declared righteous by circumcision; we know that he believed before circumcision (Romans 4:9-11). The law condemns when it is not followed to the letter (James 2:10). No one can obey everything in the law continuously without slipping. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law.

All the promises that God made to Abraham are ours too as his seed. The promise of salvation does not depend on the law. If the law was necessary to obtain the inheritance, then the promise God gave Abraham would become void. I wish the UPCSA community well as we pray and exercise our faith this week. The Lord bless you and keep you. Your partner in the Gospel, Awedzani Nemauxhwe, Modimo shuwe. Mulalo †

Rev Awedzani Nemauxhwe

Translation of the BIG fact sheet

The UPCSA as part of the World Communion of Reformed Churches is involved in the GRAPE advocacy campaign. The campaign is about the introduction of universal basic income grant.

The campaign design is at an advance stage and will require to be translated into local languages. We therefore wish to request for volunteers who can assist with translations of the campaign message/material.

We also request our Presbytery Clerks to recommend names in this regard and forward to

Dr Bukelwa Hans as a matter of urgency on stukie@iafrika.com

Rev Dr Bukelwa Hans

