



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

27th November 2023

TO ALL IN THE UPCSA

Re: Celebrating the Election of the Rt Rev Lydia C Neshangwe as the first Woman President of the All Africa Conference of Churches

"Certainly, I will go with you", said Deborah. "But because of the course you are taking, the honour will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." (Judges 4:9 NIV)

The Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa welcomes and celebrates the election of the Rt Rev Lydia Neshangwe as the first woman President of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). The AACC marked its 60th anniversary at its General Assembly that was held in Abuja, Nigeria from 19 to 23 November 2023. We praise and thank God for the appointment which comes at an opportune time, a calling like that of Deborah. We commend the efforts of many who, through their discernment, elected Lydia. The leaders of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches who attend the Assembly will for ever be appreciated for their concerted effort and unwavering commitment in nominating and relentlessly supporting the candidacy of Lydia.

Lydia's rise to the offices she now occupies can be attributed to many factors. Within the UPCSA environment, we see it as a culmination of the decision that was taken more than forty years ago, as the two denominations that merged to form the UPCSA, the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa, intentionally took the decision in their respective Assemblies to ordain women as ministers. The Presbytery of Zimbabwe deliberately appointed Lydia as its Clerk. By virtue of that appointment, she served as a member of the UPCSA General Assembly's Ecumenical Relationships Committee. The UPCSA appointed her to serve as its representative to the Annual Members Meeting (AMM) of the Council for World Mission (CWM) for a period of four years, 2016 to 2020. Over that period, she was elected to serve as the Chairperson for two of the meetings. She was later elected as the CWM Moderator in 2020, a position which she will hold until June 2024. The 2021 UPCSA General Assembly elected her, unopposed, as the Moderator Designate and was inducted into the office in June 2023, which she will hold until June 2025. And now, she has become the AACC's sixtieth birthday gift. The term is five years, with a possibility of a re-election for another term, making it ten years, if re-elected.

Lydia's election in all the positions is not just a matter of affirmative action, but of competence. She is conscientious, diligent, and zealous in her work. She outdid herself in the pre-Assembly for Women in Abuja, with her sterling performance. She was appointed a preacher in one of the services on Sunday. She moderated one of the Assembly sessions. The three events sufficed to convince many who did not know her that she is a true leader to a point where she scored a landslide win, in absentia, as she had already left for family and UPCSA business by the time the elections were conducted. Her election brought together the whole continent, particularly the women.

Her election is a challenge to us in the UPCSA. We are called to stand "**stronger together**" and support her in prayer and in action. It is needless to delineate in this space the many challenges that confront Africa, some of which she will need to address in person. Let us pray without ceasing.

Yours in Christ.

Lungile Mpetsheni
GENERAL SECRETARY