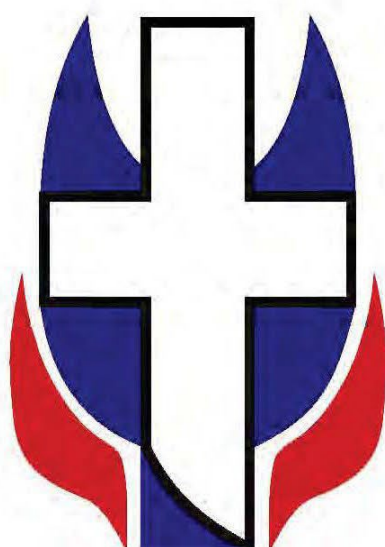


THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA



NEC TAMEN CONSUMEBATUR

**SUPPLEMENTARY PAPERS FOR THE
16th GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2025
MTHATHA, SOUTH AFRICA, AND
HYBRID VIRTUALLY ON ZOOM
28 June-3 July 2025
THEME: "PARTNERS IN MISSION"**

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THE UNITING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SATURDAY 28 JUNE TO THURSDAY 3 JULY 2025

Final Draft Agenda

SESSION TIME	EVENT	ESTIMATED DURATION
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Saturday 28 June 2025

09h00 – 13h00	Registration for all Commissioners and Delegates <i>(Refreshments served throughout the morning)</i>	
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FIRST	14h00	CONSTITUTING SERVICE Welcome Public Worship Roll of Commissioners Retiring Moderator's Address Induction of new Moderator Introduction of the Chaplains Vote of Thanks to the Retiring Moderator	120
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	16h00	BREAK	
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SECOND	16h30	EXECUTIVE SESSION Welcome and local arrangements Notices of Motion & Allocation Assembly Business Committee Nominations (Preliminary Report) Clerk of Assembly Overtures & Petitions Retiring Moderator's Report	60
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THIRD	17h30	LISTENING SESSION 1 General Secretary <u>General Assembly Cluster</u> Church Office & Human Resources Court of Assembly/AARP Communications	60
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Closing Prayers

	18h30	SUPPER	
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	19h30	INSAKA SESSION 1	90
		General Secretary Church Office & Human Resources Court of Assembly/AARP Communications	
<u>Sunday 29th June 2025</u>			
FOURTH	09h00	GENERAL ASSEMBLY SERVICE	120
		Public Worship In Memoriam Minutes Moderator's Address Holy Communion	
	11h00	LUNCH	
		<i>The Assembly Plenary venue is changed to table gathering format.</i>	
FIFTH	12h30	DECISION SESSION 1	90
		General Secretary Church Office & Human Resources Court of Assembly/AARP Communications	
SIXTH	14h00	LISTENING SESSION 2	90
		Explanation of the voting process for the election of the Moderator Designate and the Court of Assembly. Election of Moderator Designate (first ballot)	
		<u>Governance and Administration Cluster</u> Finance Audit Pensions (UPCSAPF and PEPF) Manual Assembly Standing Commission	
		Closing Prayers	
	15h30	BREAK	
	16h00	INSAKA SESSION 2	90
		Finance Audit Pensions (UPCSAPF and PEPF) Manual Assembly Standing Commission	

18h00 **BUFFET SUPPER & GOING FOR GROWTH EXHIBIT**

Monday 30 June 2025

SEVENTH	08h30	Opening devotions	60
	09h30	DECISION SESSION 2	90
		Finance	
		Audit	
		Pensions (UPCSAPF and PEPF)	
		Manual	
		Assembly Standing Commission	
	11h00	BREAK	30
EIGHTH	11h30	LISTENING SESSION 3	90
		Election of Moderator Designate (Second ballot)	
		Election of the Court of Assembly/AARP (First ballot)	
		<u>Worship and Pastoral Care Cluster</u>	
		Worship	
		Health and Wellness	
		Stewardship	
		Priorities and Resources	
		Nominations Committee (First Draft)	
	13h00	LUNCH	60
NINTH	14h00	SPECIAL SESSION (Going for Growth)	120
		Closing Prayers	
	16h00	BREAK	
	16h30	INSAKA SESSION 3	90
		Worship	
		Health and Wellness	
		Stewardship	
		Priorities and Resources	

18h00 **SUPPER**

Tuesday 1 July 2025

TENTH	08h30	Opening devotions	60
	09h30	DECISION SESSION 3	90
		Worship	
		Health and Wellness	
		Stewardship	
		Priorities and Resources	
	11h00	BREAK	30
ELEVENTH	11h30	LISTENING SESSION 4	90

		Election of the Moderator Designate (3rd ballot)	
		Election of the Court of Assembly/AARP (Phase 2)	
		<u>Service and Witness Cluster</u>	
		Ecumenical Relationships	
		Ethics and Discipline	
		Church in Society	
		Church Fellowships	
		People with Disability	
	13h00	LUNCH	
	14h00	INSAKA SESSION 4	90
		Ecumenical Relationships	
		Ethics and Discipline	
		Church in Society	
		Church Fellowships	
		People with Disability	
TWELVETH	16h00	SPECIAL SESSION (Going for Growth)	120
		Closing Prayers	
	18h00	SUPPER	

Wednesday 2 July 2025

THIRTEENTH	08h30	Opening devotions	60
	09h30	DECISION SESSION 4	90
		Ecumenical Relationships	
		Ethics and Discipline	
		Church in Society	
		Church Fellowships	
		People with Disability	
	11h00	BREAK	30
FOURTEENTH	11h30	Fraternal Greetings	90
		Valedictory Service for Retiring Ministers	
	13h00	SPECIAL RECEPTION arranged by Hosting Synod	
FIFTEENTH	14h30	LISTENING SESSION 5	120
		<u>Preaching and Teaching Cluster</u>	
		Mission and Discipleship	
		Ministry	
		Education and Training	
		Doctrine	
		Nominations (first draft)	

	16h30	INSAKA SESSION 5 Mission and Discipleship Ministry Education and Training Doctrine	90
	18h00	SUPPER	
SIXTEENTH	19h00	Unfinished Business (if needed)	
<u>Thursday 3 July 2024</u>			
SEVENTEENTH	08h30	Opening Devotions	30
	09h00	DECISION SESSION 5 Mission and Discipleship Ministry Education and Training Doctrine Nominations Committee (Final Report)	90
	10h30	BREAK	30
EIGHTEENTH	11h00	CLOSING SERVICE Recognition of Moderator Designate Moderator's Closing Address Vote of thanks to Hosting Presbytery Adjournment	90

ROLL OF COMMISSIONERS

Supplementary Report to General Assembly 2025

Surname/First Name	M/F
Ex Officio	
The Rt Rev Lydia C Neshangwe	F
The Rev Dr Amon Kasambala	M
The Rev Dr George Marchinkowski	M
The Rev WV Mkhungo	M
The Rev Melanie I Cook	F
Mr Ryan Johnson	M
Amathole Ministers	
Dick Lulama	M
Mbele Celani	M
Mkentane Zolile	M
Nyoni Allan	M
Elders	
Mqamelo Nyameka	F
Khenke Thembela	F
Pona Nobuntu	F
Mqalo Siyanda	M
Central Cape Ministers	
Sotashe Zukisani	M
Mandiyase Mbulelo	M
Njengane Cecil	M
Yoyo Simphiwe	M
Mahleza Yibanathi	M
Hans Bukelwa	F
Goba Mziwonke	M
Elders	
Mtshake Nqabisa	F
Spence Brenda	F
Lolonga Nanziwe	F
Vaaltein Elliot	M
Maqungo Siyabulela	M
Danster Thandiwe	F
Tshotwana Xolile	M
Copperbelt Ministers	
Chirwa Lazarous	M
Msiska Godfrey	M
Elders	
Ndhlovu Jeremiah	M
Kumwenda Sheila	F
Democratic Republic of Congo Ministers	
Zibondo Alain Ilunga	M
Elders	
Kasongo Kitobo Omer	M
Drakensberg Ministers	
Mbanjwa Philani	M
Madlala Nozinhle	F

Mabaso Innocent	M
Elders	
Zondi Thobelani	M
Phungula Nomusa	F
Magoso Mzwandile	M
East Griqualand Ministers	
Ruka Luyanda	M
Van der Lingen Shona	F
Elders	
Nonkonyana Order	F
Xhelithole Ntombi	F
Eastern Zambia	
Banda Sonye	M
Elders	
Chirwa Dickson	M
eGoli Ministers	
Judelsohn Christopher	M
Kemp Iain	M
Jobela Fezeka	F
Mokeng Lesego	M
Craig Michael	M
Xhinti Sandisele	M
Elders	
Masekela Sarah	F
Rachapo Pauline	F
Banda Enith	F
Steynberg Vernon	M
Ndlovu Nkosinathi	M
Sijadu Nwabisa	F
Highveld Ministers	
Njeza Malinge	M
Mocke Janco	M
Van Heerden Wayne	M
Molokoane Lebogang	M
Elders	
Mokgohloa Mokela	M
Mabizela Buli	F
Nkosi Dorah	F
Ntantala Camagwini	F
Lekoa Ministers	
Thema Robert	M
Nyama-Ratsoma Mafasa	M
Sello Tsholofelo	F
Elders	
Setenane Alice	F
Tshabalala Moferefere	M
Nare Teboho Sam	M
Limpopo Ministers	
Nemaikhwe Awedzani	M

Molife Mary Ann	F
Pandelani Isaau	M
Elders	
Mukwevho Mphiriseni Irene	F
Raasetje Cybel Mphahlele	F
Modiba Lettie	F
M'chinga Ministers	
Chirwa Edward	M
Nyirongo Moyo Jennie	F
Elders	
Hildah Tembo Hildah	F
Sakala Enala	F
Mthatha Ministers	
Qupuna Ndimpiwe	M
Jita Mthobi	M
Letuka Victor	M
Nojoko Nkululeko	M
Elders	
Halam Lulama	M
Matiwane Nontle	F
Maqekeni Joseph	M
Mdoda Nomfundiso	F
Munali Ministers	
Phiri Patricia	F
Mkandawire Judith	F
Nkosi Panji	M
Elders	
Chulu Anna	F
Mkandawire Mathew	M
Nyirongo Lazarus	M
Thekwini Ministers	
Dlamini, Sandile	M
Zungu, Sibusiso	M
Nkayi, Mabandla	M
Gwala, Sibusiso	M
Subroyan, Cecil	M
Elders	
Duma, Yena	M
Khuzwayo, Zonke	F
Bengane, Menge	F
Nhlabathi, Aaron	M
Mabaso, Sizakhele	F
Thukela Ministers	
Masikane Thabane	M
Mhlanga Willingmore	M
Nyawo Andile	M
Elders	
Mbhense Mathandi	F
Khubheka Vusi	M

Mthembu Vanessa	F
Tiyo Soga Memorial Ministers	
Njeza Sandiso	M
Xalisa Qaqamba	F
Mshumpela Bongani	M
Luthuli Nkosikhona	M
Elders	
Matiwane Babalwa	F
Dlova Nomatamsanga	F
Xongwana Siviwe	M
Mapasa Simanye	F
Trans Xhariep Ministers	
Letseleha Mashiane	M
Galela-Thema Thembisa	F
Ngebulana Bongiwe	F
Elders	
Ramokopu Lewatle	M
Mosime Keitumetse	F
Mtshali MJ	M
Tshwane Ministers	
Mashoko Lentikile	M
Piroe Matshediso	F
Nyawuza Patrick	M
Simelane Sharon	F
Fryer Graham	M
Elders	
Masete Thabo	M
Ross Urshula	F
Baloyi Violet	F
Maja Norma	F
Groeneveld Brenda	F
Western Cape Ministers	
Mfene Madoda	M
Campbell Colin	M
Ntseke Unathi,	F
Mlalandle Yolisa	F
Lawrence Christopher	M
Bower Douglas	M
Sokoyi Bukhosi	M
Gordon Natalie	F
Ngalwana, Thembazana	F
ELDERS	
Campbell Helen	F
Gwele Malibongwe	M
Makwabe Noluthando	F
Maqubela Buyiswa	F
Langa Zamuxolo	M
Mgquba Bonginkosi	M
Jezile Zamikaya	M

Tyobile Beauty	F
Panyaza Chris	M
Zimbabwe Ministers	
Simango Elias	M
Benzon Fiona Margaret	F
Sakala Farisi	F
Murove Dephine	F
Magovere Gleness	F
Gwangwava Garikai	M
Elders	
Siwela Samkeliso	F
Paulo Donald	M
Chirara Joseph	M
Mususa Onifaro	M
Gomo Marita	F
Yesaya Sheilah	F
SYNOD OF ZAMBIA (Observers)	
Minister	
Phaika Sauros	M
Elder	
Makani Lawrence	M

INSAKA GROUPS FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2025

Report to the General Assembly 2025

Group One

Thema, Robert Facilitator	M
Gwele, Malibongwe Scribe	M
Khuzwayo, Zonke	F
Lolonga, Nanziwe	F
Mocke, Janco	M
Tshabalala, Moferefere	M
Ngebulana, Bongiwe	F
Nkosi, Panji	M
Sijadu, Nwabisa	F
Simango, Elias	M
Dick, Lulama	M

Group Two

Molifi Mary Ann Facilitator	F
Nyawo, Andile Scribe	M
Chirwa, Dickson	M
Fryer, Graham	M
Langa, Zamuxolo	M
Maqubela, Buyiswa	F
Mbense, Mathandi	F
Mbele, Celani	M
Mukwevho, Mphiriseni Irene	F
Murove, Dephine	F
Njeza, Malinge	M

Group Three

Phaika, Sauros Facilitator	M
Van Heerden, Wayne Scribe	M
Lawrence, Christopher	M
Mabaso, Sizakele	F
Magoso, Mzwandile	M
Makwabe, Noluthando	F
Mkentane, Zolile	M
Mphahlele, Raesetje Cybel	F
Vaaltein, Elliott	M
Xalisa, Qaqamba	F
Xhinti, Sandisele	M

Group Four

Nemaukhwe, Awedzani Facilitator	M
Siwela, Samkeliso Scribe	F
Craig, Michael	F
Galela-Thema, Thembisa	F
Maqungo, Siyabulela	M
Masekela, Sarah	F
Nyoni, Allan	M
Mshumpela, Bongani	M
Sotashe, Zukisani	M
Ntantala, Camagwini	F

Group Five

Piroe, Matshidiso Facilitator	F
Benzon, Fiona Scribe	F
Mosime Keitumetse	F
Danster, Thandiwe	F
Pandelani Isaau	M
Halam, Lulama	M
Makani, Lawrence	M
Masikane, Thabane	M
Matiwane, Babalwa	F
Mokeng, Lesego	M

Group Six

Campbell, Helen Facilitator	F
Mhlanga, Willingmore Scribe	M
Gomo, Marita	F
Jobela, Fezeka	F
Khubeka, Vusi	M
Kumwenda, Sheila	M
Mandiyase, Mbulelo	M
Maqekeni, Joseph	M
Mashiane, Letsheleha	M
Rachapo, Pauline	F

Group Seven

Kemp, Iain Facilitator	M
Mtshake, Nqabisa Scribe	F
Banda, Enith	F
Chulu, Anna	F
Luthuli, Nkosikhona	M
Mkandawire, Matthew	M
Mokgohloa, Mokela	M
Njengane, Cecil	M
Paulo, Donald	M
Sello, Tsholofelo	F
Subroyan, Cecil	M

Group Eight

Judelsohn, Christopher Facilitator	M
Simelane, Nomasonto Scribe	F
Chirara, Chirara	M
Mapasa, Simanye	F
Tshotwana, Xolile	M
Modiba, Lettie	F
Nyama-Ratsoma, Misheck	M
Yeshaya, Sheila	F
Yoyo, Simphiwe	M
Zungu, Sibusiso	M

Group Nine

Gwala, Sibusiso Facilitator	M
Van Den Lingen, Shona Scribe	F
Dlova, Nomatamsanqa	F
Mahleza, Yibanathi	M
Kasongo, Kitobo Omer	M
Mabizela, Buli	F
Maja, Norma	F
Mashoko, Lentikile	M
Nyirongo Moyo, Jennie	F
Xongwana, Siviwe	M

Group Ten

Qupuna, Ndimpiwe Facilitator	M
Hans, Bukelwa Scribe	F
Banda, Sonye	M
Duma, Yena	M
Groeneveld, Brenda	F
Matiwane, Nontle	F
Mqalo, Siyanda	M
Nkayi, Mabandla	M
Sakala, Farisi	F
Tembo, Hildah	F
Zondi, Thobelani	M

Group Eleven

Mkandawire, Judith Facilitator	F
Ntseke, Unathi Scribe	F
Bengane, Menge	F
Goba, Mziwonke	M
Khuzwayo, Zonke	F
Masete, Thabo	M
Mtshali, Malefetsane	F
Ndhlovu, Jeremiah	M
Njeza, Sandiso	M
Nonkonyana, Order	F
Ruka, Luyanda	M

Group Twelve

Chirwa, Lazarus Facilitator	M
Pona, Nobuntu Scribe	F
Dlamini, Sandile	M
Letuka, Victor	M
Mabaso, Innocent	M
Mlalandle, Yolisa	F
Mususa, Onifaro	M
Nare, Sam	M
Pungula, Nomusa	F
Ross, Urshula	F
Xhelithole, Ntombi	F

Group Thirteen

Baloyi, Violet Facilitator	F
Msiska, Godfrey Scribe	M
Madlala, Nozinhle	F
Mfene, Madoda	M
Molokoane, Lebohang	M
Nhlabathi, Aaron	M
Nojoko, Nkululeko	M
Setenane, Alice	F
Spence, Brenda	F
Steynberg, Vernon	M

Group Fourteen

Mbanjwa, Philani Facilitator	M
Ramokopu, Lewatle Scribe	M
Campbell, Colin	M
Mdoda, Nomfundiso	F
Mqamelo, Nyameka	F
Mthembu, Vanessa	F
Ndlovu, Nkosinathi	M
Nkosi, Dorah	F
Nyawuza, Patrick	M
Phiri, Patricia	F
Zibondo, Alain	M

Group Fifteen (Online)

Gwangwava, Garikai Facilitator	M
Bower, Douglas Scribe	M
Sokoyi, Bukhosi	M
Mgquba, Bonginkosi	M
Jezile, Zamikaya	M
Magovere, Gleness	F
Gordon, Natalie	F
Panyaza Chris	M
Tyobile Beauty	F
Ngalwana, Thembazana	F
Sakala Enala	F
Nyirongo, Lazarous	M
Phiri, Patricia	F
Chirwa, Edward	M

ASSEMBLY BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Report to the General Assembly 2025

MEMBERSHIP:

The following are the members of the Assembly Business Committee (ABC):

Revs, MI Cook (Convener), L Neshangwe (Moderator), Dr. A Kasambala (Moderator Designate) Dr. George Marchinkowski (General Secretary), Vusi Mkhungo (Clerk of Assembly), M Gwele, B Gaborone, V Mabo and A Banda.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The following are the terms of reference for the ABC:

- a) To organise meetings of the General Assembly and Executive Commission.
- b) To draw the agenda for the General Assembly and the Executive Commission.
- c) Formulate the Standing Orders of the General Assembly and the Executive Commission.
- d) Taking responsibility for conducting the business of the General Assembly and Executive Commission.
- e) Ensure communication and implementation of decisions of General Assembly and Executive Commission.
- f) Attend to matters that may arise between the sitting of General Assembly and Executive Commission.
- g) Ensure the preservation of the UPCSAs organizational memory (Repository) as drawn from the decisions of the General Assembly and Executive Commission.

The following goals were set at the beginning of the term which began in July 2023 and will conclude in July 2025.

- To make a success of the Executive Commission 2024 which is being hosted by Central Office and the Presbytery of Tshwane.
- To support and monitor the preparations for the General Assembly 2025 in the Synod of JH Soga Memorial.
- To explore the possibility of the General Assembly 2025 being an in-person meeting, including the Committee Conveners and Commissioners.
- To distribute the papers of General Assembly 2023 and the Executive Commission 2024 timeously, and ensure implementation of its decisions, through Committees of GA, Presbyteries and congregations.
- To ensure that there was support offered to the Moderator and her team during the periods between sittings of General Assembly and Executive Commission.
- To assist Cluster Coordinators with their role and work in the denomination, offering resources and support.
- To continue to add to the virtual repository of all the decisions taken by the General Assembly and Executive Commissions.

As this timeframe concludes with the sitting of General Assembly 2025, I am proud to report, as Convener, that each of the stated goals has been successfully achieved.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP

The current structure involving Cluster Coordinators has now been in place for four years. At the 2023 sitting of the General Assembly, the membership of this committee was revised to reflect and support this model. Cluster Coordinators were formally appointed as members of the Assembly Business Committee (ABC) to strengthen communication and collaboration between the ABC and the various General Assembly committees.

Since then, the ABC has worked closely with the Cluster Coordinators, providing guidance and support in their roles, which are integral to the life and work of the Assembly. Our meetings have offered a platform to monitor the progress of different committees, address challenges as they arise, and ensure alignment with the wider mission of the UPCSAs.

This model has already proven beneficial, and we are committed to further developing and refining this structure to realise its full potential in the years ahead.

STANDING ORDERS

The current Standing Orders, originally reviewed for the 2021 General Assembly and the 2022 Executive Commission to accommodate a virtual meeting format, have once again been revised to reflect the hybrid nature of the 2025 Assembly. The Assembly Business Committee (ABC) continues to fine-tune these provisions as we gain further insight and experience in managing the business of the church within hybrid and evolving formats.

The ABC views the Standing Orders as a living document—one that must be continually adapted to suit the context and needs of the Assembly and the broader decision-making structures of the UPCSA.

We would like to highlight the following key updates, which we believe significantly impact the life and work of the General Assembly:

- **4.3 Records Committee:** In light of the widespread move to digital record-keeping and the impracticality of transporting physical minute books, the ABC proposes that all committee minutes be submitted electronically to the Clerk. These will be reviewed and confirmed electronically, streamlining the process and embracing more sustainable practices.
- **5.2 Seating of the General Secretary:** The requirement that “The General Secretary shall also be seated at the front table” has been reconsidered. The committee believes the General Secretary better serves the Assembly by having the flexibility to move and offer support as needed, rather than being confined to the front table. This change facilitates greater efficiency in assisting the Moderator, ABC Convener, and the Clerk.
- **9.5 Election Programme:** The previous version of the Standing Orders included a detailed Election Programme designed for paper-ballot voting. With the successful transition to an electronic voting system, the programme is no longer relevant and has been removed. Voting will now take place in a single streamlined session.

These amendments reflect our ongoing efforts to ensure that our procedures remain practical, relevant, and aligned with the changing needs of the church and its assemblies.

ORIENTATION (DRY RUNS & PROCEDURES)

In preparation for the 2025 General Assembly, the Assembly Business Committee (ABC) facilitated a series of three online orientation sessions, referred to as “Dry Runs,” to equip commissioners with the necessary tools and information for meaningful participation.

- The **first Dry Run** was specifically designed for commissioners who would be joining the Assembly remotely. This session focused on virtual meeting etiquette and provided guidance on how to register and log in to the platform effectively.
- The **second Dry Run** was a general orientation intended for all commissioners. It provided an overview of the Assembly process, including where to access the official Assembly papers and when supplementary materials would become available. The General Secretary also produced a comprehensive and insightful orientation video that explained the Assembly's decision-making process, enhancing understanding and preparedness.
- The **third and final Dry Run** served as a practical session to introduce and test the developed decision-making Widget. This tool enables commissioners to express their views using colour-coded cards (orange or blue) during consensus-building exercises. The session also provided instructions on how commissioners could use the Widget to indicate a desire to speak during deliberations.

As part of the consensus model, **15 Insaka groups** (1 to meet virtually) have been formed, each comprising approximately 10-12 participants selected at random. Every

group has an appointed facilitator and scribe. These groups serve as the foundation for deeper listening and shared discernment throughout the decision-making process.

This General Assembly will begin under the **Westminster Model** for initial business and then transition to the **Consensus Decision-Making Model**. We urge all commissioners to actively engage in every phase of the consensus model, namely the Listening Session, the Insaka Session, and the Decision Session. Full participation ensures that the discernment process reflects the collective voice and spiritual integrity of the church.

In accordance with the decision of the 2018 General Assembly, all proceedings of this General Assembly will be recorded and securely stored in the UPCSAs cloud-based repository, preserving the integrity and transparency of our shared work.

ADOPTION OF THE PROPOSED AGENDA

The preliminary draft agenda was distributed to all commissioners along with the General Assembly papers. For those who may not have attended a General Assembly or Executive Commission meeting recently, it is important to note that the structure of the agenda has undergone some significant changes.

The agenda reflects the implementation of the **cluster model**, aligning committee reports according to their respective clusters. The intention behind this format is to improve coherence and efficiency by grouping together committees that perform related or overlapping work. We hope that this approach will assist commissioners and delegates in engaging more meaningfully with the business of the Assembly.

Each day will begin and end with **devotions**. The Moderator-Designate has requested that the morning devotions include extended time for **Bible study within the Insaka groups**, offering both spiritual grounding and theological reflection as we commence our daily work. Evening devotions will be brief, offering space for quiet reflection and prayer. These devotional times are vital as we centre ourselves in God's presence and seek the Spirit's guidance in making wise and faithful decisions for the future of our denomination and its witness in the world.

Additionally, this year's General Assembly is aligned with the **"Going for Growth"** campaign. The Mission and Discipleship Committee has been invited to contribute to the agenda by providing opportunities to inspire, resource, and equip commissioners for growth in mission and ministry. The agenda includes a few dedicated slots—some interactive, others reflective—to highlight and promote this important initiative.

DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMISSION 2024

The decisions of the Executive Commission 2024 were circulated to all General Assembly committees, presbyteries, and congregations. In addition to this, meetings were held with the Cluster Coordinators and conveners of GA committees to highlight these decisions and to request that attention be given to matters relevant to their areas of responsibility. This engagement remains an ongoing process as we seek to ensure faithful implementation and alignment with the direction of the wider church.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2025

Some time ago, the Synod of J.H. Soga extended an invitation to host the General Assembly within its bounds. This invitation was graciously accepted at the 2023 sitting of the General Assembly. The Local Organising Committee (LOC) and supporting teams have worked diligently and with great care to prepare for this gathering—the first fully in-person Assembly since the COVID-19 pandemic. The Assembly Business Committee (ABC) is deeply grateful for the hard work and dedication that has gone into ensuring a well-organised and welcoming Assembly.

EXECUTIVE COMMISSION 2026

Following two successful Executive Commission meetings in 2022 and 2024, the Central Office team has again been tasked with planning and coordinating the next Executive Commission. The ABC, through the GS, approached the Presbytery of Highveld with a request to host the 2026 meeting, specifically identifying Gateway Congregation as the proposed venue.

The **proposed dates** for the Executive Commission are:

Sunday, 20 June – Wednesday, 24 June 2026

FACILITATING TEAMS

We wish to present the following as members of the facilitating teams:

1. Drafting team:
 - Mamolotje Magagane (Convener)
 - George Marchinkowski (GS)
 - Vusi Mkhungo (Clerk)
 - Vusi Mabo
 - Lita Madaka
 - Luzuko Qina
 - Olwethu Phinzi
2. Minute Clerks: Rev. Zwai Mtyhobile and Thozama Mpetha
3. Minute Scrutineers: Rev. Thembinkosi Nopapaza, Michelle Black and Thomson Mkandawire
4. IT Team: Melanie Cook, Christine Kasambara, Ryan Johnson, and Theo Groeneveld.

PROPOSALS

1. The General Assembly receives the report.
2. The General Assembly adopts the Standing Orders contained in the Papers circulated to the Assembly.
3. The General Assembly adopts the Final Draft Agenda for the 2025 General Assembly.
4. The General Assembly notes that the decisions of the Executive Commission 2024 were sent to all the relevant stakeholders for attention and action.
5. The General Assembly thanks the Synod of JH Soga, the LOC and supporting teams for all their hard work and preparation in making this Assembly a success.
6. The General Assembly resolves that the Executive Commission 2026 will take place in Highveld Presbytery, at Gateway Presbyterian Church, Kempton Park from Saturday 20th to Wednesday 24th of June 2026.
7. The General Assembly appoints the following as facilitating team:
 1. Drafting team:
 - Mamolotje Magagane (Convener)
 - George Marchinkowski (GS)
 - Vusi Mkhungo (Clerk)
 - Vusi Mabo
 - Lita Madaka
 - Luzuko Qina
 - Olwethu Phinzi
 2. Minute Clerks: Rev. Zwai Mtyhobile and Thozama Mpetha
 3. Minute Scrutineers: Rev. Thembinkosi Nopapaza, Michelle Black and Thomson Mkandawire
 4. IT Team: Melanie Cook, Christine Kasambara, Ryan Johnson, Theo Groeneveld

CLERK OF ASSEMBLY

Report to the General Assembly 2025

Introduction

It gives me a great honour to present this report. Much of the work that the Clerk of Assembly does is covered in the reports of the Committees he is involved in. This report covers:

- Committee Reports
- Meeting with Presbytery Officials
- Remits
- Assembly/Executive Commission Papers.

Committee Reports

Over several years many comments has been made about GA Committee Convener's lack of diligence in submitting their committee reports within the time frames stipulated in the Standing Orders. This often resulted in original reports being submitted as Supplementaries which meant that some reports were only seen for the first time when Commissioners arrived at Assembly.

I am happy to report that all reports to be heard at this Assembly, other than the genuine Supplementary reports, are contained in the Papers. Let me take this opportunity to thank conveners for their much-appreciated timeous responses.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the information needed for certain Presbyteries. That can be seen from the input received from those Presbyteries.

Meetings with Presbytery Officials

As indicated in the past, ever since we started having these meetings, there has generally been good cooperation between Presbyteries and the Central Office. Also, good practices have been learned between Presbyteries. Unfortunately, there those Presbyteries that have not taken these meeting seriously in that they have not participated in the information sharing sessions. Much as these are not necessarily decision-making meetings, it is important that we all move in the same direction. We encourage all Presbytery officials to join others.

Remits

The 2024 Executive Commission resolved to send back to Presbyteries an overture on the transnationality of the UPCSA and to report back to the Clerk of Assembly by the 30th of November 2024. Only eGoli and Tshwane Presbyteries submitted their submitted their responses and the rest of the Presbyteries said nothing. A full report on this matter is covered on the report of the Priorities and Resources Committee report.

Papers of General Assembly/Executive Commission

It has been reported in the past that due to financial constraints UPCSA finds herself in, it is no longer possible to print the papers of General Assembly and Executive Commission. We now send these electronically directly to Commissioners and Presbytery Clerks. We ask Presbyteries to help print for those of their commissioners who are not able to read from their laptops etc. It is unfortunate that we still get a lot of requests from individuals asking for these.

Proposal:

1. The General Assembly receives the report.

MODERATOR DESIGNATE NOMINATIONS

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2025

PRESBYTERY	NOMINATION	ACCEPT NOMINATION	CURRICULUM VITAE
Central Cape	Rev Melanie Cook	Yes	Received

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2025

PRESBYTERY	FULL NAME	
Amathole	Rev Zolile Mkentane	M
Central Cape	Rev Zukisani Sotashe	M
Drakensberg	Rev Philani Mbanjwa	M
DR Congo	Rev Dr. Ilunga Zibondo Alain	M
East Griqualand	Rev Luyanda J Ruka	M
Eastern Zambia	Rev Sonye Banda	M
eGoli	Ms Sarah Masekela	F
Highveld	Rev Dr Malinge Njeza	M
Lekoa	Rev Mafasa Misheck Nyama-Ratsoma	M
Limpopo	Rev Awedzani Nemaikhwe	M
M'chinga	Rev Jane Nyirongo	F
Mthatha	Rev Ndimpiwe Qupuna	M
Munali	Rev Panji Nkosi	M
Thekwini	Rev Sibusiso Zungu	M
Thukela	Rev Andile Nyawo	M
Tiyo Soga Memorial	Rev Luthuli Nkosikhona	M
Trans Xhariep	Rev Bongiwe Ngebulana	F
Tshwane	Mr Thabo Masete	M
Western cape	Rev Christopher Lawrence	M
Zimbabwe	Rev Elias Simango	M

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Supplementary Report for to the General Assembly 2025

Following from the Nominations Committee report in the 2025 General Assembly Papers, this Supplementary report is about the Policy on the Nomination and Appointment of Committees and Commissions of General Assembly, to propose a new way in which conveners and members of committees are appointed. The Nominations Policy is outlined in Annexure 1, below. Changes to the General Assembly Standing Orders and the Manual of Faith and Order will follow consequently if the Nominations Policy is agreed to.

Geographical Location

The Manual of Faith and Order instructs the Nominations committee first to appoint the committee convener and second to appoint the committee members from the same geographical region as convener. This was about reducing travel expenses of the committee members when attending in person committee meetings.

Technology is now available for virtual committee meetings, so conveners and committee members no longer need to be in the same geographical region. Most General Assembly committees now meet virtually. The proposal is that geographical region where it relates to limiting travel expense of committee members is removed from the Policy, the Standing Orders and at a later stage from the Manual of Faith and Order.

Nominations Policy Changes

The Nominations Policy agreed to at the 2019 Executive Commission set up the "Standing" Nominations Committee that met during the year and the "Ad-hoc" Nominations Committee that met during General Assembly. This complicated the Nomination process at virtual General Assemblies because when the Standing committee Draft Nominations report was proposed, radical changes in committee conveners and members were made to the Draft Nominations report by the Ad-hoc committee. This proved to be counterproductive as it resulted in long meetings, after the hours of normal General Assembly business, and many changes were made to the Draft report, undoing the work done by the Standing Committee.

Note that the Standing Orders of Assembly and the Manual of Faith and Order call the Nominations committee the 'Core Group'. This 'Core Group' is to be supplemented during a General Assembly by commissioners from Presbyteries not represented on the 'Core Group'.

The proposal is for one Nominations committee, made up of one representative from each of the Presbyteries within the denomination that meets virtually throughout the year and presents a Draft Nominations committee report to the General Assembly and if needed meets virtually after business hours during the General Assembly or at an Executive Commission, and does the work required of them.

The Nominations committee will have a representative from each Presbytery within the denomination which means it will be a large General Assembly committee meeting virtually during the year and also meeting virtually during a General Assembly and Executive Commission.

This Nominations committee will be an inclusive committee. Each Presbytery representative will be able to propose conveners and members who have the necessary skills and time to serve on the committees of General Assembly from within their Presbytery. Each Presbytery will nominate a commissioner to serve as their representative on the Nominations committee.

REV CL CAMPBELL - CONVENER

REVISED PROPOSALS:

1. The General Assembly receives the report. (T)
2. The General Assembly adopts the Policy on the Nomination and Appointment of Committees and Commissions of Assembly as outlined in Annexure 1 below. (M)
3. The General Assembly instructs the Assembly Business Committee to amend the Standing Orders and the Manual Committee to amend the relevant Manual paragraphs accordingly. (M)

**2025 Nominations Committee Report for Supplementary Papers
Annexure 1****Policy for the Nomination and Appointment of Committees and Commissions of General Assembly****Introduction**

The General Assembly delegates its business to Committees and Commissions while the Assembly is not in session. Committees of the Assembly are important in the functioning of the denomination and population of the committees must be done in a way that ensures the denomination is provided with a combination of skills and experience with the required visionary insight to lead the denomination forward. Establishment of Committees of Assembly must be undergirded by the principles of Transparency, Participation, Consultation, Respect and Care.

Nominations Committee Structural Changes

The Nominations committee is made up of one representative from each of the Presbyteries within the denomination plus a Convener appointed by the General Assembly. It meets virtually throughout the year and presents a Draft Nominations committee report to the General Assembly and if needed meets virtually after business hours during the General Assembly or at an Executive Commission, and does the work required of it by the Assembly.

Each Presbytery representative will propose conveners and members who have the necessary skills and time to serve on the committees of General Assembly from within their Presbytery.

Each Presbytery is to nominate a commissioner to serve as their representative on the Nominations committee.

Policy Guidelines

The Nominations Committee, in nominating General Assembly Cluster Conveners, Committee Conveners and Members of Committees, are to adhere to the following policy guidelines:

- (a) Only a person in full standing as an enrolled member of this Church, or of a United Congregation in which this Church is a constituent participant, may be appointed as a member on a Committee of General Assembly.
- (b) Cluster Conveners are appointed to ensure that the General Assembly Committees within their Clusters are meeting regularly and doing the required work. (They are to report regularly to the Clerk of Assembly and to the Convener of the Assembly Business Committee of which they are members.)
- (c) The normal period of tenure of an Assembly Committee and that of its Convener shall be four years, with the possibility of this tenure being extended for a further four years. Should the Committee desire to extend its life beyond the first four years, it should motivate this to the Convener of the Nominations Committee, who

presents the motivation to the General Assembly. If a committee can show that it has specific tasks which will be completed through the extension of its appointment for a further period, it should bring this specifically to the attention of the General Assembly in its written Report.

- (d) Committee Convener nominations need to be spread as widely as possible throughout the different Presbyteries and Countries of the UPCSA.
- (e) Committee member nominations need to be spread as widely as possible throughout the different Presbyteries and Countries of the UPCSA.
- (f) In the nominating of Conveners and Committee members, care should be taken that no person is nominated to serve on more than two Committees at a time. Nomination onto more than two Committees shall be made only where specific knowledge and expertise is required.
- (g) In nominating people to serve as Conveners or Committee members, propose the most suitable persons in the UPCSA for the positions irrespective of race, gender, status (Minister / Elder / Congregational Member) or age, always considering the need for women and young people to be included in the Committee structures of the Church.
- (h) Consult Presbyteries and Congregations about whether they have suitably gifted and informed persons to nominate to specific Committees.
- (i) Committees should normally have no more than 10 to 12 members.
- (j) Where the General Assembly has determined the criteria for the appointment of persons to serve on specific Committees, and / or to be selected for specific expertise, the Nominations Committee implements the Assembly decision in recommending names to the Assembly.

MINISTRY

Supplementary Report to the General Assembly 2025

The General Assembly Ministry Committee's Secretary held two consultations with the ministers regarding Ministers' stipends. The first consultation was better attended than the second one. There is a feeling amongst Ministers that thorough research on this matter should be conducted. It was further advised that the stipend speaks directly to the welfare of Ministers and therefore needs not be taken lightly. These consultations assisted the Ministry Committee in addressing the overture that was referred to the Ministry Committee regarding the matter of Ministry stipends and transport allowances to the Ministers ministering in rural areas.

Below are the figures to assist Presbyteries and Congregations when dealing with the Stipends of their Ministers.

Minimum Stipends

Zambia

	2023	2024	2025
0 – 5 years	ZK4580	ZK 5,038	ZK 5542
6 – 15 years	ZK5000	ZK 5,500	ZK 6050
16 – 25 years	ZK5341	ZK 5,785	ZK 6364
26 – 35 years	ZK5770	ZK 6,347	ZK 6982
35 years +	ZK6230	ZK 6,853	ZK 7538
Travel	ZK 420	ZK 500	ZK 550
Pulpit Fee	ZK 350	ZK 653.23	ZK 718.55

Zimbabwe

	2024	2025
0 – 5 years	US\$ 300	US\$ 450
6 – 15 years	US\$ 312	US\$ 462
16 – 25 years	US\$ 325	US\$ 475
26 years and above	US\$ 339	US\$ 489
Travel	US\$ 110	US\$150
Pulpit Fee	US\$ 70	US\$ 70

South Africa

	2023	2024	2025
0 – 5 years	R 9 700	R10 370	R10 837
6 – 15 years	R10 480	R11 203	R11 707
16 – 25 years	R11 300	R12 080	R12 624
26 – 35 years	R12 200	R13 042	R13 629
35 years +	R13 200	R14 111	R14 746
Travel	R7 665	R8 194	Presbyteries to set
their own			
Pulpit Fee	R500	R700	R731.50

DISCERNMENT CONFERENCE

The Call Discernment Conference took place from the 4th – 07th June 2025 at Vista ORT, Kempton Park. Twenty shortlisted candidates attended the conference.

SURNAME	NAME	STATUS
Ross	Urshula	Called - probation
Masanjala	Simellad	Called - student
Serfontein	Ne-Ray	Called - student
Leburu	Seboya	Called - student
Ntoni	Vuyolwethu	Called - student
Mwanza	Chisilo	Called - student
Maguga	Siphokazi	Called - student
Marawu	Brandina	Called - student

PROPOSALS

1. The General Assembly receives the supplementary report. (T)
2. The General Assembly increases the minimum Stipend for ministers in South Africa by 4,5% per year for the next two years and notes that this proposal was prepared in consultation with the Ministers. (M)
3. The General Assembly increases the minimum stipend for ministers in Zambia by 10% per year for the next two years and notes that this proposal was prepared in consultation with the Ministers. (M)
4. The General Assembly notes that the proposed minimum increases across the board for the Presbytery of Zimbabwe were done in consultation with the Ministers within the Presbytery of Zimbabwe. (T)
5. The General Assembly resolves that Presbyteries should determine travel allowances based on their contexts. (M)
6. The General Assembly commends the Ministry Committee for arranging the Ministers' consultation on stipends and encourages Ministers to participate in future consultations. (T)
7. The General Assembly notes that the Ministry Committee discerned a call on eight candidates. (T)

FINANCE

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2025

4. PROPERTIES AND TITLE DEEDS (*amended – highlighted below*)

We remain satisfied with a previous ruling in that the Central Office of the General Assembly receive CERTIFIED COPIES of the original title deeds, together with a letter from the Minister and Session Clerk stating that they will not sell their property unless permission is sought and granted by both the Presbytery and General Assembly Finance Committees.

Congregations who have not submitted copies of their title deeds to the Central Office should please do so as soon as possible, as this will affect your ability to obtain any form of relief from Ministry Contributions. Refer clause 7.2 of the Manual of Faith and Order states: **"All applications for Ministry Contribution relief must be accompanied by: c) Copies of deeds of UPCSA owned land and buildings or proof from the institution which holds the deed where relevant."**

Currently, where a congregation is dissolved and its property is sold, the money is often ring-fenced by the Presbytery, although most properties in fact, belong to the General Assembly. Whilst we understand that the congregation has maintained the properties over the many years, the properties do in fact belong to the denomination. We therefore propose that where a property is sold in South Africa, the Presbytery engage the Finance committee of the General Assembly, and that an agreement is reached so that at least 50% of the proceeds belong and are transferred to the General Assembly. This is more of an amicable solution where both parties benefit.

We are also aware that some congregations do not own their buildings and have the right to use the buildings in which they worship. In such cases, a PTO (Permission to Occupy) should be in place, and a copy of this too, should be submitted to the Central Office. Failure to have such certificate in place, is a risk to the congregation as their right to use the premises could be terminated at any stage.

Proposal 6: *The General Assembly again reminds all Presbyteries to assist congregations in transferring the property and obtaining title deeds from their local municipal offices for properties still in the local municipality's name, into the General Assembly or congregation's name. (M)*

Proposal 7: *The General Assembly again instructs all Presbyteries and congregations who have not submitted certified copies of their title deeds to the Central Office yet, to do so by latest 30th September 2025, together with a letter stating they will not sell their property without the consent of both the Presbytery and General Assembly Finance Committee. (M)*

Proposal 8: *The General Assembly again reminds all Presbyteries to assist congregations who have Permission to Occupy certificates in place to submit these to the Central Office, and where a certificate is not in place, to assist their congregations in obtaining one, and then to submit it to the Central Office. (M)*

Proposal 25 (Additional): *The General Assembly instructs the Manual committee to amend the Manual to include a paragraph that deals with the sale of properties in South Africa, so that at least 50% of the proceeds of a sale (where a congregation has been dissolved) go to the General Assembly. (M)*

PROPOSALS (additional)

25. The General Assembly instructs the Manual committee to amend the Manual to include a paragraph that deals with the sale of properties in South Africa, so that at least 50% of the proceeds of a sale (where a congregation has been dissolved) go to the General Assembly. (M)

MANUAL

This Supplementary report expresses the Manual committee's response to two new items of Assembly business: the Overture from the Presbytery of eThekweni about the election of the Moderator of General Assembly, and the proposal from the General Assembly Nominations committee to change its composition and working process. The committee met on Wednesday 4 June 2025 to consider these two matters.

1. Overture from the Presbytery of eThekweni

The Presbytery of eThekweni resolved to overture the General Assembly at its meeting on 11 February 2025. The Overture concerns a proposed change to the "system of nominating and deciding on the election of the Moderator Designate."

What the Presbytery craves is that the Moderator of General Assembly be considered elected by a simple counting of the nominations from Presbyteries. This would, in effect, transfer the discernment about who should preside at the Assembly from the General Assembly itself to the Presbyteries.

As a concession, the Presbytery offers a "processing function" to the Executive Commission of Assembly, only to direct the list of processed candidates back to Presbyteries for "final discernment" at their February meetings. The General Assembly will then be constrained to "make a determination on the preferred candidate based on the number of Presbyteries that elected him/her."

The Committee is opposed to the Overture on the following grounds:

- (a) **The Overture lacks a clear, definite, proposal.** It talks about a process that "should" be followed but doesn't say which paragraphs of the Manual have to be changed and doesn't put forward new wording for them. The Overture envisages that in the first round "ideally" the Presbyteries should submit their nominations to the Executive Commission that will "process the candidates and send the list to the Presbyteries for final discernment." What does this mean? Do they have to submit their nominations to the Executive Commission, or not? Another question is what happens if someone exercises his/her right to nominate a candidate from the floor. There is no mention of this possibility in the Overture or motivation, but it flows from the fact that the General Assembly is the supreme Council.
- (b) **The Overture transfers the prerogative for electing the Moderator of General Assembly from the General Assembly itself to the Presbyteries.** In our polity, a Council elects its own Office Bearers (Consider the Presbyteries and the Synods which elect their own office bearers). The General Assembly will in the process be disempowered of its right to elect its own Moderator. The "supreme Council of the Church" will not have the power to elect its Moderator!

Lastly, the Overture makes a fundamental error in regard to Presbyterian polity when it states: "The Moderator of the General Assembly is the Moderator of the whole denomination." While this may seem a reasonable assumption, it is untrue. The Moderator is specifically defined as the "Moderator of General Assembly," not of the Church as a whole. This title reflects the fact that the Moderator has no executive

authority nor powers at any level in the UPCSA but has a very important role in the Assembly, as well as limited pastoral roles and an ecumenical and public relations functions. The overture would thus cause a fundamental shift in our polity and should therefore be dismissed.

If the Overture does carry, it would be required to be sent down to Presbyteries using the Barrier procedure.

Commissioners should familiarise themselves with the following paragraphs before voting on this overture: Overtures (14.18-14.26), Nomination and election of Moderator of G.A. (10.27, 12.8-12.15), Authority and functions of Moderator (12.16-12.32), in GA debates (12.32) and the status of Moderator, indicated by full title (12.15).

2. Nominations Committee Supplementary Report

The Nominations committee has produced an excellent Supplementary report, seeking to bring the Standing Orders and relevant Manual provisions up to date with their current operating procedures, especially with regard to virtual/online meetings. The Manual Committee has studied the supplementary report and wishes to support the proposals. The committee makes the following input to activate the Nominations committee proposals.

Proposals 2 and 3 below should be considered ONLY IF THE ASSEMBLY AGREES to the Nominations committee Supplementary proposals:

(a) Standing Orders

The committee proposes the following changes to the Standing Orders:

"4.2.1. The Nomination Committee Process shall be as follows:

- (a) The Convener of the Nominations Committee corresponds by e-mail or otherwise with the members appointed to it by the General Assembly (who with him/her constitute 'the core group') which consists of one member per Presbytery. The committee meets using a virtual meeting platform. Together they decide before the end of May which Conveners of Assembly committees should continue in office, bearing in mind Assembly's decision about length of tenure. The Convener ascertains from current Conveners who are otherwise due to retire in terms of that decision, whether there are good reasons for them to continue in office.
- (b) The Convener writes to contacts all Conveners, whom the core group committee thinks should continue in office by **15th April**, requesting them to let him/her have, by **15th May**, the names of those they wish to be members of their committees.
- (c) The core group committee compiles a preliminary report. The Convener sends this to all Presbytery appointed members of the Committee by **31st May**.
- (d) All members of the Committee comment to the Convener on the report by **15th June**.
- (e) The Convener compiles a first draft report for the Assembly and submits that for printing in the Supplementary Papers. He/she tables this without discussion on the Sunday of the Assembly and requests commissioners to communicate comments on it to him/her.
- (f) The full Nominations Committee meets virtually at during Assembly to consider the first draft and amends it in light of information and comments from Assembly commissioners made directly to the Convener. The Convener then presents the second draft on the Tuesday of the Assembly and the final report on the Thursday.

(a) **Manual**

The committee proposes the following changes to the Manual of Faith and Order:

MEMBERSHIP OF A COMMITTEE OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- 13.59 The General Assembly's Nominations Committee proposes, and the Assembly or its Executive Commission approves, those nominated to serve as the Conveners and members of Assembly Committees (including the Nominations Committee itself). Every ordinary meeting of the General Assembly adds to the Nominations Committee one Commissioner from every Presbytery ~~that is not already represented on it~~. The Nominations Committee may meet ~~virtually at during the Assembly venue before the Assembly, and during breaks in the Assembly's business~~ and, with the Assembly's approval, at other times.
- 13.63 In nominating persons as Conveners, the Nominations Committee seeks to propose the most suitable person in the UPCS for the position irrespective of race, gender, status (Minister, Elder, etc), age or geographical location. It seeks also, in the case of Committees other than those which conduct their business by ~~correspondence~~ **virtual meeting platform**, to take account of the availability of support persons within reasonable distance of the place of residence of the Convenor who may be able to serve on the Committee. The Nominations Committee also seeks to spread the convenerships as widely through the Church as possible.
- 13.64 In nominating persons as members of Committees that ~~do not~~ conduct their business ~~by correspondence on virtual platforms~~, the Nominations Committee: ~~(a) attempts to find enough persons within a reasonably small geographic area to keep the costs of travel as low as possible. It should nominate persons who will need to travel long distances only if they have special expertise that makes their contribution to the Committee's work essential or at least highly desirable. Otherwise persons with special skills residing a long way away from where the Committee will meet members", who do not attend but contribute to the work of the Committee by e-mail or correspondence;~~
- (b) as far as possible includes persons of different races, ages and genders, taking into account at all times the need for women and young people to be included in the Committee structures of the Church;
 - (c) may consult Presbyteries and Congregations about whether they have suitably gifted and informed persons to nominate to specific Committees.

The Manual committee respectfully submits this report as its opinion on these two matters which are before the General Assembly for discernment.

GW Marchinkowski

CONVENER

PROPOSALS:

1. The General Assembly receives the supplementary report. (T)
2. The General Assembly amends the Standing Orders paragraph 4.2.1. as indicated in the body of the report. (M)
3. The General Assembly amends paragraphs 13.59, 13.63, and 13.64. as indicated in the body of the report above. (M)

JOINT COMMISSION ON UNION

Supplementary Report to the General Assembly 2025

This Supplementary Report is presented to inform the Assembly of two developments subsequent to the finalisation of the Commission's report published in the Assembly Papers in April 2025.

1. Attempt at convening a meeting with the UCCSA

On 8 April 2025, the General Secretary made an attempt to organise a meeting with a delegation from the UCCSA to discuss a way forward on Union negotiations. The Rev Kudzani Ndebele responded positively, offering to come across to the UPCS Central Office in Kempton Park. It was agreed that the meeting take place on Monday 5 May 2025. Arrangements were made, including the purchase of an air ticket for the Convener, the Rev. Natalie Gordon, from Cape Town.

On the day before the meeting (on Sunday 4 May), the General Secretary sent a WhatsApp message to the UCCSA General Secretary about how the next day's meeting was much anticipated, and all arrangements were in order. The Rev Ndebele responded that he was "in Bulawayo conducting a mass ordination for 4 ministers, would be driving to Johannesburg the next day, and that he would like to suggest that the meeting be moved to Wednesday."

It was not possible to move the meeting, and the cost of the air ticket was lost. The General Secretary expressed his surprise and disappointment to the UCCSA General Secretary at the lack of notice.

A meeting of the UPCS's half of the JCU was called for 6 May 2025 and it was agreed that we pause our activity as regards the UCCSA General Assembly.

2. Meeting with the South African Synod

On Tuesday 4 June 2025, an informal meeting was held with the Office Bearers of the South African Synod of the UCCSA. The idea was mooted at a CUC meeting in which the General Secretary of the UPCS and the SA Synod Secretary of the UCCSA were present. The meeting took place at the UPCS Central Office.

At the meeting, attended by the Ministry Secretary, the Chief Financial Officer, the Revs Theo Groeneveld (Mission & Discipleship), Melanie Cook (Gender Desk) and the General Secretary, it was decided to pursue a process of exploring areas of common interest. The UCCSA delegation, consisting of the Rev Aubrey Nsthekang (Synod Chair), Bertram Swartz (Synod Secretary) and Heidi Petersen (Synod Chair elect) agreed to put the proposal to their Synod in July and we agreed to put the proposal to our General Assembly.

The purpose of exploring working together would be to create efficiencies and to strengthen our joint ecumenical voice. It was suggested that the Presbytery of Zimbabwe also be encouraged to do a similar exploration with the UCCSA's Synod of Zimbabwe. South Africa and Zimbabwe are the only two countries where both the UCCSA and the UPCS have congregations.

Natalie Gordon
CONVENER

Proposals

1. The General Assembly receives the report. (T)
2. The General Assembly authorises the Joint Commission/Committee to continue the exploration of how the UPCS may work together with the UCCSA in future. (M)

CHURCH FELLOWSHIPS

Supplementary Report to the General Assembly 2025

Progress Report of the CFC Uniform Task Team on the Uniform Development of Church Fellowships

1. Introduction

This supplementary report seeks to report 3 new matters that are not in the original report.

2. TASK TEAM ON FELLOWSHIPS UNIFORM

The Church Fellowships Committee (CFC), following the decision by the 2023 General Assembly and recognizing the shared aspirations of fellowships regarding the development of uniforms, initiated a unifying process by allowing CFC to establish a Uniform Task Team.

The need for a coordinated and spiritually guided process became evident as Fellowships began exploring uniform concepts in isolation, sometimes leading to confusion, duplicated efforts, or in certain instances unintended tensions. The process of developing Fellowship Uniform should foster a sense of unity and ensure that all voices are heard in shaping a shared identity.

This report outlines the Task Team's initial deliberations and proposed way forward, which prioritises collaboration, consultation, and denominational coherence.

2.1. Composition and Representation

The General Assembly declared that no individual fellowship may independently initiate or finalise uniform decisions outside of the umbrella of the CFC Committee. More than anything, this was done to ensure that Fellowships follow a unified approach that is inclusive to all within the Denomination.

The CFC Committee mandated all Fellowships to provide two members who will form part of the Uniform Task Team. The inaugural meeting of the Uniform Task Team convened by the CFC Convener, Rev T Masikane, was held at the Central Office of the General Assembly on the 31 May 2025.

The Task Team comprises appointed representatives from the following fellowships:

Fellowship of Men (FOM)

- Rev Celani Mbhele
- Mr Bongile Bokwana

Fellowship of Women (FOW)

- Ms Nonzame Bosiki
- Ms Bomela

Fellowship of Young Women (FOYW)

- Ms Rebone Mamabolo
- Ms Zimi Nomzaza

Fellowship of Youth (FOY)

- Mr Sakhele July
- Ms Iviwe Marwanqa

Fellowship of Church Choirs and Musicians (FCCM)

- Ms Nosipho Mdedetyana
- Ms Nomazizi Dwadwa

These members understand that while serving within this Task Team their role is not tied to their current positions as office-bearers in their respective Fellowships, however, they serve as appointed contributors to a broader denominational effort.

While each member brings valuable insights from their Fellowships, their responsibility is to act in the interest of all fellowships and the UPCSA as a whole.

Given the nature and continuity required by the uniform development process, it is strongly encouraged that appointed members remain part of the Task Team for the full duration of the project. This continuity is essential to ensure clarity, minimize disruptions, and enable the successful and effective completion of the Task Team's mandate.

2.2. General Assembly decision and narrative

The 2023 General Assembly took note of concerns around the manner in which uniforms are being handled by Fellowships. It is understood that Fellowships were permitted by the Constitution of Church Fellowships to (Clause 6.3.2) to work on their uniform. The CFC Committee in its report to the General Assembly argued that discussions on Uniforms is still a sensitive issue that should be handled with care.

Some Fellowships were able to find ways to have inclusive conversations around uniform, however, in one instance a Council meeting could not be concluded due to tensions that arose as they were discussing one item on the uniform.

To foster a sense of unity and ensure that all voices are heard in shaping a shared identity, the General Assembly took the following decisions:

- a. The General Assembly mandates the Church Fellowships Committee to attend to the matter of Fellowships uniforms.
- b. The General Assembly discourages the fellowships from engagement in discussions about uniforms without the facilitation by the CFC.

Given the rich history of the UPCS and its former associations, it is imperative that this process be approached with care, sensitivity, and spiritual discernment. New and pivotal approaches must be undertaken to find ways to unify Fellowships and represent the diverse experiences within the denomination.

2.3. Terms of reference

The Task Team has set the following terms to guide the purpose of the committee:

The Task Team shall facilitate the crafting of symbols and uniforms that express the identity of Fellowships as part of the UPCS.

The Task Team shall develop a policy on the use of symbols and uniform of Fellowships that promotes unity, equality and dignity.

3. Consultation and way forward

The Task Team, having held its first meeting considered its mandate from the General Assembly. This undertaking should foster cohesion among fellowships and ensure that the development of Fellowship uniform is inclusive, prayerfully discerned, and forward-looking.





The Task Team noted there was strong consensus on the need for meaningful consultation with Fellowships. Fellowships will be given an opportunity to provide inputs and their views to the Task Team for consideration. Final designs on Uniform will be provided to the General Assembly for consideration.


The issue the Task Team wishes to address in the current year, would be the narrative around the decisions on the development of Fellowship uniform. In order to ensure all Fellowships have a common understanding this report will be issued to each Fellowship Denominational Conference within the current year.

This will be the first approach to on consultation with Fellowships and gather inputs on way forward. In order to initiate conversations and provoke new ways of thinking, the committee will also share proposed logo designs to allow Fellowship to provide feedback and inputs.

4. Proposed Logos

- 4.1. The Task Team acknowledged the need for distinct emblems or badges to clearly identify UPCSAs Fellowships and to differentiate UPCSAs members from similar ecumenical organisations.
- 4.2. The Task Team appreciates that some Fellowships have already designed logos to represent them. What can be noted, is that some Fellowships have held on to symbols informed by their former associations.
- 4.3. The design of the Fellowship of Youth on the other hand has designed something new and completely different. Their design challenges existing views of holding on to past symbols.
- 4.4. To initiate the process on designing Uniform the Task Team adopted the design concept, and has considered the use of this concept to represent all Fellowships logo designs. The key idea here is to allow Fellowship to have a common look where they can be identified as UPCSAs Fellowships, but be distinct among themselves.
- 4.5. The Task Team wishes to submit these preliminary designs for consideration by all participants. Fellowships are encouraged to consider these designs and provide inputs to the Task Team. The inputs may consider distinctive ways to identify Fellowships.
- 4.6. The proposed designs are as follows:

Fellowship Of Young Women	Fellowship of Women
	
Fellowship of Men	Fellowship of Youth
	

Fellowship of Church Choirs and Musicians	
	

This process marks a historic opportunity to shape a unified identity for UPCSA fellowships through inclusive, consultative design of uniforms. The task team is committed to transparency, fairness, and spiritual integrity in this journey.

We respectfully submit this report for consideration, endorsement, and communication across the denomination.

5. THE FELLOWSHIP OF WOMEN CONCERNS

The committee received a letter of concerns from the Fellowship of Women Denominational Executive committee. The letter is raising concerns about what they call interference by some members and leaders in the work the fellowship. Also it raises concerns about unjust criticism that happens on social media. Unfortunately these issues were generalised in the letter. The letter came towards the closing date for submission of the supplementary papers which made it impossible for the committee to deal with the matter. This matter is going to be attended by the committee once all facts are presented however the committee brings the matter to the General Assembly to request the Assembly to discourage any member of the church to take issues of the Fellowships to the social media and further encourages that proper structures be used to raise any concern on the work of fellowships within the church. We want to believe that every Presbytery and every Session with Fellowships does have a Convenor of the Church Fellowships Committee who can be used in channelling any concerns regarding the work of fellowships.

Having said the above, the committee wish to acknowledge the fact that some of the criticism comes from concerns members of the UPCSA although sometimes wrong platform are used to voice them. All fellowships were given same objectives by the church through the Fellowships constitution that was adopted in 2019. The committee struggles to align the work of the fellowships to their objectives. Almost all fellowships are stuck to what they are used to.

It is based on that view that we believe that there is an urgent need for the General Assembly to offer guidance to Fellowships in order to help them fulfill the purpose for which they are established. Without this essential guidance, Fellowships will continue to exist as appendages that perform their own activities unrelated to the vision and mission of the Church.

To this end, Fellowships could be guided to support the vision of the Church by focusing on four main areas, namely, Evangelism, Church in Society, spiritual growth and Discipleship.

The Assembly can then in partnership with the Fellowships develop performance areas and performance indicators.

It is hoped that this will reduce the current criticism and possible conflict in the Fellowships and outside.

6. FELLOWSHIP OF YOUTH

The fellowship of Youth missed the original closing date for the submission of the bylaws. The committee urges the General Assembly to receive the attached document of the FOY bylaws.

THE UNITING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

FELLOWSHIP OF THE YOUTH

Advance the Kingdom of God in a manner befitting the Church and consistent with God's word.

NOTES

This pages only highlights important notes for the attention of members making use of this document.

1. These bylaws were created inline with the Constitution on Fellowships as adopted by the UPCSA GA of 2019 and must therefore be read as such
2. All references to the Constitution on Fellowships are marked in bold e.g. **[ref 3]**
3. This document has been provisionally adopted by the 2nd FOY Conference (02 July 2022), and is to be presented at the 2023 General Assembly Conference for ratification.

Important items to note:

1. Items in **RED** are still outstanding
2. Membership age (7.1.3) provisionally adopted, while office bearer age (11.3) to be adopted as is.
3. Uniform is still an outstanding matter deferred to a date to be issued by the GAWGA
4. Robing (7.4)
5. Senate,
Definition: an assembly or council usually possessing high deliberative and legislative functions
6. Convocation,
Definition: An assembly of representatives, to consult on academical or ecclesiastical affairs.
7. Presbytery and Convocation Executives (10.3.2, 10.4.2)
8. **Each page is designed to fit A5 print, in order to allow printing as a booklet**

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THE UNITING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA FELLOWSHIP OF YOUTH BYLAWS

1 PREAMBLE

The Church has been called into being by the will of God, who gathers all people into fellowship in Christ, which is created and sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church is one, because it worships only one God, serves one Lord and is united by one Spirit in one faith, one hope and one baptism, to be one People, one Family, one Body, one Temple (Eph. 4:1-6). Therefore, the Lord of the Church calls it to manifest its unity, not just spiritually, but visibly before the world. Recognizing the varied needs and spiritual gifts within the body (1Cor. 12), the Church allows for certain groups to exist with the purpose and function to bear witness to the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to all who do not yet believe in him, to build up in faith, hope and love those who already believe, and to proclaim his sovereignty over the world.

The Church Fellowships, within the UPCS, aim to fulfil this purpose as they cater for the needs of and ministry to [the] youth. They do so, bearing in mind the oneness and unity of the body of Christ.

This document has been developed in accordance with Chapter Constitution of Fellowships as contained in the Manual of Faith and Order of the UPCS. They aim is to combine the Constitution and the Bylaws into one comprehensive document in order to avoid contradictions and omissions for the Youth Members.

2 NAME

The name of the fellowship shall be the **'Uniting Presbyterian Fellowship of Youth' (UPFOY)** here after referred to as the **'Fellowship of Youth' (FOY)**. *[ref 2.4]*

3 VISION

Advance the Kingdom of God in a manner befitting the Church and consistent with God's word.

4 MISSION

To present Christ in a manner whereby we reflect and promote spiritual growth and unity amongst youth members.

5 AIMS

The aims of the FOY shall be to:

[ref 3]

- 5.1 To promote the vision, mission, and unity of UPCSА.
- 5.2 Empower and encourage the youth to be witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Word and in deed, and promote Christian values in their lives.
- 5.3 Strive for unity within the body of Christ, inter alia, so that resources can be optimised for building the church and missionary outreach.
- 5.4 Encourage the Youth to discover their talents and spiritual gifts, and to pledge these and their resources to building the kingdom of God and uplifting the community through projects related to issues such as Health issues, justice, social equality, poverty alleviation, etc.
- 5.5 Establish structures to ensure effective communication and evaluation.
- 5.6 Engage the Youth at all levels within the UPCSА (congregational, presbyterial and denominational) in planning and executing youth related programmes and activities.

6 LEGAL CONSTITUTION

[ref 4]

- 6.1 The Fellowship is constituted as a voluntary association¹ having perpetual succession apart from its members with full capacity in law to acquire, hold, deal with, hypothecate or dispose of property, movable, immovable and incorporeal, to open and operate accounts with any bank or financial institution and to sue and be sued in its own name.
- 6.2 The principal object of each Fellowship in the context of its temporal affairs is to carry on the public benefit activity of the promotion and practice of the Christian faith which encompasses acts of worship, witness, teaching and community service founded on the Fellowship's belief in the one, triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to that end the provisions of Annexure A of Chapter Constitution of Fellowships, as contained in the Manual of Faith and Order of the UPCSА hereto, with such amendments as may hereafter be approved by the UPCSА General Assembly from time to time, are incorporated into and form an integral component of the Bylaws.

7 MEMBERSHIP

7.1 Membership shall be open to:

7.1.1 All confirmed members of the UPCSА who subscribe to the aims set forth in the Bylaws.

7.1.2 Full Members of the UPCSА and in good standing. **[ref 5]** 7.1.3 **Members up to the age of 40. [provisional]**

7.1.4 Member affiliation.

7.2 A Member who belongs to a congregation that does not have a structure of the FOY may apply to be associated with another congregation's FOY within the same presbytery through the session for a year. The arrangement must be reviewed on a halfyearly basis.

7.3 Adherents:

7.3.1 An Adherent is a person who has publicly expressed the interest to join the FOY, attends meetings and demonstrates their commitment to the FOY.

7.3.2 In order to be admitted as a Full Member of the FOY, an Adherents shall meet the requirements set by the FOY from time to time, which may include, but not limited to:

- (i) Three (3) month probation before robing as a Full Member.

¹ The word 'association' is used as a descriptive word to delineate a Fellowship within this clause and ultimately within the bylaws.

- (ii) Rights and responsibilities listed under clause 7.5
- 7.3.3 Membership shall be processed through the congregational structure. After the probation period has passed, the Adherents name shall be submitted by the congregational Chairperson concerned to the Session with a recommendation about the Adherents readiness for full membership.
- 7.4 Robing
 - 7.4.1 A robed Member, is a Full Member of the FOY.
 - 7.4.2 Members shall be robed in a public service conducted by the Minister in the Congregation.
 - 7.4.3 At the time of robing, Members must be in good standing as Adherents
 - 7.4.4 The congregational structure shall ensure that all requirements are met prior to presenting the name of the Adherent for full membership.
 - 7.4.5 At the robing service, the new Member shall take a pledge which includes commitment to the aims and objectives of the FOY.
 - 7.4.6 At the service, the Member may be robed in the uniform as approved by the FOY from time to time and receive a copy of the Bylaws.
- 7.5 Rights and Responsibilities of Full Members, notwithstanding Adherents, shall be to:
 - 7.5.1 Always strive to manifest a Christ-like way of life in Word and deed;
 - 7.5.2 Be faithful in the reading of the Bible and in prayer;
 - 7.5.3 Recognise and accept the authority of Church courts and Fellowship structures;
 - 7.5.4 Attend all meetings of the FOY as arranged and organised by the relevant structures;
 - 7.5.5 Participate actively and passionately to all Youth activities for the welfare of the FOY, the Church and community at large;
 - 7.5.6 Pledge generously their gifts for the furtherance of the work of the Kingdom of God and the FOY;
 - 7.5.7 Pay membership fee and relevant dues as determined by relevant structures.
 - 7.5.8 Take part in the discussion and formulation of FOY policies and resolutions
 - 7.5.9 Be elected to any committee, commission or delegation of the FOY
 - 7.5.10 Actively participate in the designated activities of the FOY.
 - 7.5.11 Carry out resolutions, duties and directives

8 AFFILIATION

- 8.1 Every congregation should register to the Presbytery and the Presbytery should register to the Assembly.
- 8.2 Each structure of the FOY shall set an affiliation fee for its members. **[ref 7.1]**
- 8.3 Every Member is to pay an affiliation fee determined by the congregation, in turn the congregation pays the affiliation determined by the Presbytery and the Presbytery shall pay the affiliation determined by the Convocation.
- 8.4 Affiliation fees shall reach the higher structure by the date determined by the relevant structure.

9 UNIFORM

The Uniform of the FOY is intended to promote humility, simplicity, equality and uniformity among its members. For this reason, the material used shall be as plain as possible. Members are encouraged not to use bold patterns and shiny material.

The FOY shall be a uniformed structure:

- 9.1 Female Full Members
- 9.2 Male Full Members
- 9.3 Female Adherents
- 9.4 Male Adherents

10 YOUTH STRUCTURES

The following are the levels of the FOY structures in order: Branch (*where applicable*), **Congregation, Presbytery**, Synods (*where applicable*) and **the Convocation (Denominational)**. **[ref 6.1]**

10.1 The Branch

10.1.1 The Branch is a group of members belonging to an Outstation, Preaching Place, Nuclear Congregation under Presbytery or Session. **[ref 6.2]**

10.1.2 Each branch shall elect its office bearers in the following manner: an elder-in-charge of the Outstation, Preaching place, Nuclear Congregation under Presbytery or Session is an Ex-Officio member.

- (i) Chairperson
- (ii) Secretary
- (iii) Treasurer

10.2 The Congregation

10.2.1 The Congregation consists of all Youth members including those branches associated with the congregation and is accountable to the Session. **[ref 6.2]**

10.2.2 Each congregation shall elect its office bearers; the Moderator of the congregation shall conduct the elections in the following manner.

- (i) Chairperson
- (ii) Vice-Chairperson
- (iii) Secretary
- (iv) Recording Secretary
- (v) Treasurer
- (vi) Church Fellowships Convener (ex-officio member)

10.2.3 Each Congregation shall convene its own Annual General Meeting (AGM) comprising of the Office Bearers and entire Youth Membership of the congregation.

10.3 The Presbytery Conference

10.3.1 The Presbytery consists of all Congregations within the bounds of the Presbytery and is accountable to the UPCS A Presbytery Senate. **[ref 6.2]**

10.3.2 Each Presbytery shall elect its office bearers; the Moderator of the Presbytery shall conduct the elections in the following manner:

- (i) President
- (ii) Vice-President
- (iii) Secretary
- (iv) Recording Secretary
- (v) Treasurer

10.3.3 Each Presbytery shall convene a Senate and shall comprise of Presbytery Office bearers and three Delegates from each congregation.

10.3.4 Each Presbytery shall convene a Conference comprising of Presbyterial Office Bearers and the entire Youth membership of the Presbytery.

10.3.5 There shall be three Delegates to the Presbytery, namely the Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. Their alternates may be appointed by the Executive Committee.

10.4 The Uniting Presbyterian Fellowship of Youth Convocation

10.4.1 The FOY Convocation consists of all Congregations within the denomination and is accountable to the UPCS A General Assembly. **[ref 6.2]**

10.4.2 The FOY Convocation shall elect its office bearers; the Moderator of the General Assembly shall conduct the elections in the following manner:

- (i) President
- (ii) Vice-President
- (iii) Secretary
- (iv) Recording Secretary
- (v) Treasurer

- 10.4.3 The FOY Convocation shall convene a Senate and shall comprise of all office bearers of the FOY Convocation and Presbytery Delegates i.e., President, Secretary and Treasurer or their alternates.
- 10.4.4 There shall be an annual Uniting Presbyterian Fellowship of Youth Convocation and shall comprise of all office bearers of the FOY Convocation and congregational Delegates.

11 ELECTIONS OF OFFICE BEARERS AND DELEGATES

- 11.1 All office bearers and Delegates shall be elected at AGM, Conference or Convocation.
- 11.2 Nomination forms from branches/congregations/presbyteries are submitted by Delegates at the Senate respectively.
- 11.3 Office bearers must not be above thirty-five (35) years of age.
- 11.4 Election shall be by private ballot or show of hands.
- 11.5 The nomination process and election process shall be defined by the respective structures.

12 TERM OF OFFICE

- 12.1 The term of office shall be two (2) years to all Youth structures.
- 12.2 No Member may hold office for more than two (2) terms in succession.
- 12.3 Any Member who has served two (2) successive terms in office may be re-elected into office only after a terms' break (2 years).

13 MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

- 13.1 Rules of procedure in all structures
- 13.1.1 Every meeting shall be opened with prayer. It is closed in the same way and with the pronouncement of the benediction. The minutes must record that this has been done.
- 13.1.2 Failure to comply with provisions of rules for the keeping of minutes does not invalidate the meeting or the decisions taken at the meeting, if any. However, all structures are to make every endeavour to keep proper minutes and are responsible to higher structures for doing so.
- 13.1.3 Each structure within the FOY may define rules of procedure and debate. Should there be lack of clarity in any procedural matter, the relevant structure shall refer to Chapter 14 as contained in the Manual of Faith and Order of the UPSCA.
- 13.2 Executive Committee Meeting
- 13.2.1 Executive Committee meetings of a branch shall be held bimonthly, if such a structure exists.
- 13.2.2 Executive Committee meetings of a congregation shall be held at least quarterly.
- 13.2.3 Executive Committee meetings of the Presbytery Conference shall be held at least quarterly.
- 13.2.4 Executive Committee meetings of the FOY Convocation shall be held at least three times a year.
- 13.3 Senate Meetings
- 13.3.1 The FOY Convocation and each Presbytery shall hold at least two Senate Meetings annually to deliberate on Youth matters.
- 13.3.2 The Presbytery Senate shall comprise of the Presbytery Office bearers and three Delegates from each congregation.
- 13.3.3 The Senate shall perform the following duties:
- Deal with matters referred to it by the FOY Convocation and makes decisions on all matters deemed urgent by the Senate
 - Prepare for the oncoming FOY Convocation
 - Receive standing committee reports and scrutinize them to ensure compliance
 - Receive Presbyterian reports and consolidate them into the secretariat report
 - Build capacity on Members of the Senate and Presbytery leadership
 - Ensure the implementation of the decisions of the FOY Convocation
- 13.4 Conferences or Convocation

- 13.4.1 FOY Convocation is the highest decision-making body followed by the Presbyterian Conference.
- 13.4.2 Conferences/Convocation shall be held for the purpose of an Annual General Meeting, training and equipping of Youth
- 13.4.3 The FOY Convocation, each Presbytery and Congregation shall hold at least one conference annually to deliberate on Youth Matters.
- 13.4.4 Presbytery Conferences shall be held during the second semester of the year before the elective FOY Convocation and the congregational and branch meetings shall be held in the first semester.
- 13.4.5 Annual Convocation Senate shall be held for the purpose of General Meeting.
- 13.4.6 FOY Convocation receives reports on activities, finance and welfare on Youth in the Presbyteries.

13.5 Special Meetings

- 13.5.1 These are meetings that fall outside scheduled meetings.
- 13.5.2 All levels of the FOY may convene such meetings.
- 13.5.3 Special Meetings may be convened either to conclude an agenda of the previous meeting or may be convened in order to attend a new and urgent business that cannot wait for the next scheduled meeting.
- 13.5.4 Special Meetings only deal with specific issue(s) for which they are convened.
- 13.5.5 Minutes of a Special Meeting are read and confirmed in the next scheduled meeting.
- 13.5.6 Adequate notice must be given before sitting, taking into account the urgency of the situation.
- 13.5.7 The Moderator, President or the Chairperson may convene a Special meeting.
- 13.5.8 The Moderator, President or the Chairperson may decline such a request but shall submit reasons to the next scheduled sitting.
- 13.5.9 A special meeting may be convened by the direction of the higher structure.

14 COMMITTEES

- 14.1 The FOY constitutes committees of two kinds:
 - 14.1.1 Standing Committees, which are permanent and continuing; and
 - 14.1.2 Ad Hoc Committees, which are temporary and constituted for special purposes.
- 14.2 The following Standing Committees and their Conveners shall be appointed within the FOY in all structures:
 - 14.2.1 Worship Committee
 - 14.2.2 Organising Committee
 - 14.2.3 Finance Committee
 - 14.2.4 Marketing Committee
 - 14.2.5 Health and Wellness Committee

15 QUORUM

A quorum to all meetings (e.g. Executive, Conference, Special Meetings, etc) is one-third or three members, whichever the greater.

16 DISCIPLINE

- 16.1 In the event where discipline has to be exercised, provisions of Chapter 18 as contained in the Manual of Faith and Order of the UPCSA shall apply. **[ref 8]**
- 16.2 Discipline in the FOY shall be exercised when a Member, congregational or Presbyterian structure of the Fellowship is charged on the following matters:
 - (i) The behaviour contradicts the aims set forth in the FOY Bylaws.
 - (ii) Failure to attend 4 meetings is succession without proper apology.
 - (iii) Failure to contribute stipulated funds for period of year.
 - (iv) Failure to renew membership.
 - (v) Failure to recognise and accept the authority of Church Courts, Councils and/or Youth Structures.

16.3 The procedure to be followed for a Member or a body shall include: (i) A notice to attend the hearing.

(ii) A charge sheet communicated clearly.

(iii) An opportunity to be heard.

(iv) A right to bring witnesses wherever necessary shall be allowed, prior notice being by parties.

(v) Failure to respond or to attend, second chance be given, if he/they fail to appear or respond the hearing shall continue and take decision. The party concern shall be written and informed of the outcomes of the hearing, which shall be valid. (vi) The right to appeal to the relevant structure shall be given within 14 days.

16.4 All FOY structures to forward to the relevant body the name(s) of the member(s) found guilty with reasons and recommendations to:

(i) Rebuke

(ii) Suspend up to the maximum of six months

(iii) Struck off the roll in the Fellowship (this belongs in the domain of the Church –remember it is the highest form of discipline)

The body that exercised the discipline needs to report to the relevant structure of the decision with reasons.

17 AMENDMENT(S) TO THE BYLAWS

17.1 Amendment(s) to the bylaws can only be effected by the FOY Convocation, subject to the approval of the UPCS General Assembly through the Church Fellowships Committee.

17.2 The FOY, by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting in a FOY Convocation, shall make and may amend Bylaws to regulate the life and work of the FOY at all the levels in the following respects: **[ref 6.3]**

17.2.1 Admission to membership.

17.2.2 A uniform that may be worn by its members.

17.2.3 At each level, the composition of leadership structures, the designated office bearers, responsibilities and duties of office bearers, and the appointment of Delegates to the meetings of the higher structures.

17.2.4 The holding of general meetings at each level.

17.2.5 Financial management according to generally accepted accounting principles and audit of annual financial statements.

17.2.6 Reporting to the corresponding Councils of the UPCS.

17.3 The Fellowships, by simple majority, may similarly make and amend Bylaws in regard to other matters. **[ref 6.4]**

17.4 The notice convening a general meeting at which it is proposed to make or amend Bylaws under clause 17.2 or 17.3 shall expressly set out the proposed Bylaws or amendments. **[ref 6.5]** 17.5 Amendments to the bylaws can be done in every four years

17.6 Bylaws or amendments shall not take effect unless and until they are ratified by the UPCS General Assembly.

18 DISSOLUTION

18.1 The FOY can be dissolved by a majority vote at a FOY Convocation and subject to the ratification by General Assembly.

18.2 The notice convening the FOY Convocation must expressly set out that a motion for dissolution is to be proposed and that representatives of the UPCS General Assembly are entitled to attend and speak, but not vote, at such general meeting.

18.3 The FOY can be dissolved by a decision of the General Assembly, subject to the provisions of clause 17 which shall apply with the necessary changes.

18.4 Upon dissolution or amalgamation all assets belonging to the FOY shall be handed over to the UPCS General Assembly.

18.5 Dissolution of FOY structures at Presbytery level and or congregational level:

18.6 The remaining assets of the Fellowship, after the discharge of all its liabilities and obligations shall be dealt with in terms Annexure A of Chapter Constitution of Fellowships, as contained in the Manual of Faith and Order of the UPCSA

19 INDEMNITY

- 19.1 Subject to the provisions of any relevant statute, members of the FOY and other office-bearers shall be indemnified by the relevant FOY for all acts done by them in good faith on its behalf.
- 19.2 It shall be the duty of the FOY to pay all costs and expenses which any such person incurs or becomes liable for because of any contract entered, or act done by him or her, in his or her said capacity, in the discharge, in good faith, of his or her duties on behalf of the FOY.
- 19.3 Subject to the provisions of any relevant statute, no member of the FOY and or other office bearer of the FOY shall be liable for the acts, receipts, neglects or defaults of any other member or office bearer, or for any loss, damage or expense suffered by the FOY, which occurs in the execution of the duties of his or her office, unless it arises as a result of his or her dishonesty, or failure to exercise the degree of care, diligence and skill required by law.

STANDING DOCUMENT (SD1) RESPONSIBILITIES OF OFFICE BEARERS AND COMMITTEES

All office bearers regardless of their role, shall know their FOY constitution thoroughly, execute their roles with confidence not arrogance and be conscientious about the work

1 ROLE AND DUTIES OF THE CHAIRPERSON/PRESIDENT:

The President is the Custodian of the Vision and Mission of the FOY.

- 1.1 Be the chief executive officer who can represent and speak on behalf of the FOY.
- 1.2 Chair all FOY meetings.
- 1.3 Observe rules of debate and apply them evenly.
- 1.4 Together with the Committee, co-ordinate inter-presbytery and inter-denominational ecumenical events.
- 1.5 Oversee the work of the Presbytery/Convocation youth committee.
- 1.6 Prepare agenda with the secretary, and ensure it is available to all executive members in good time before the next meeting.
- 1.7 Be punctual in your attendance and keeping of appointments.
- 1.8 Be an Ex-officio member of directly preceding FOY structures

2 ROLE AND DUTIES OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

- 2.1 Be responsible for the legal and constitutional affairs of the FOY.
- 2.2 Deals with the external affairs of the FOY.
- 2.3 Assume responsibility of the President when the President is unavailable or unable to perform their duties.

3 ROLE AND DUTIES OF THE SECRETARY:

The secretary is the cornerstone for success of the meeting and the FOY as a whole.

- 3.1 Be the Administrative officer of the FOY.
- 3.2 Establish good relationship with President/Chairperson and the rest of the FOY.
- 3.3 Be the primary custodian of all the documents and assets of the FOY.
- 3.4 Receive and forward all correspondence accordingly within and outside of the FOY.
- 3.5 Working in conjunction of the Recording Secretary ensure true and correct record of all proceedings.
- 3.6 Send out notices of meeting and distribute minutes timely.
- 3.7 Prepare agenda in consultation with the President/Chairperson.
- 3.8 Be an Ex-officio member of directly preceding FOY structures

4 ROLE AND DUTIES OF THE RECORDING SECRETARY:

- 4.1 Be the Chief custodian of all the documents and assets of the FOY.
- 4.2 Working in conjunction of the Secretary ensure true and correct record of all proceedings.
- 4.3 Make accurate record of decisions and do not manipulate decisions arrived at by the meeting.
- 4.4 Distribute minutes timely, send out notices of meeting.
- 4.5 Be conscientious about the work.
- 4.6 Record minutes according to accepted format, taking into account the Narrative, Resolutive and Action minutes.

5 ROLE AND DUTIES OF THE TREASURER:

- 5.1 It is the duty of the treasure to oversee the financial transactions, records and accounts for all moneys under the care of the FOY.
- 5.2 To handle all funds of the FOY.
- 5.3 To deposit money received in the bank immediately.
- 5.4 To reconcile the books whenever there is a transaction.
- 5.5 To collect assessment fees as stipulated by the FOY.
- 5.6 To report on income and expenditure of the FOY in writing (Audited financial statements and balance sheets).
- 5.7 To report on outstanding dues of Congregations/Presbyteries.
- 5.8 Draw up the budget.
- 5.9 Keep all document, receipts, vouchers and other financial documents and submit the accounts for audit.

6 LIAISON OFFICER:

- 6.1 A Liaison Officer is a person elected to liaise between either the FOY structures and the church councils.
- 6.2 A Liaison Officer may be either a minister, elder or layperson and shall serve in the same term of office as the executive committee.
- 6.3 Nomination of Liaison Officer's in the case of a Congregation is done by the Youth themselves at the relevant structures, but the appointment is by the Session to Congregation.
- 6.4 If the church council objects to the nomination made by the Youth, it shall give reasons to the relevant Youth structure and refers the matter back to the Youth for consideration.
- 6.5 A Liaison Officer at branch level reports to the congregation Youth structure, at congregation s/he reports to the Session quarterly.

7 DELEGATES:

- 7.1 Be accountable and responsible.
- 7.2 Make your contributions and inputs in and during meetings.
- 7.3 Compile a good report of conference/meeting.
- 7.4 Record decisions of conference/meeting.
- 7.5 Transmit decisions accurately and clearly.
- 7.6 Conduct oneself as good ambassador.
- 7.7 Prepare and circulate report, at least, to Executive members of the appropriate structure being represented.

8 EX-OFFICIO'S

An ex officio, meaning "from the office", is a Member who is part of council by virtue of holding another office.

- 8.1 An Ex-Officio is a supervisor and overseer.
- 8.2 By virtue of their position, an Ex-Officio inherits the role of the Delegates, is influential and can therefore influence the course of events and developments whichever way if Members of the FOY are ignorant of their responsibilities.

8.3 An Ex-Officio inherits responsibilities just as that of Delegates

9 ROLES OF COMMITTEES

9.1 Worship

9.1.1 To draw time table for worship services of different kinds

9.1.2 To organise Bible studies and quiz

9.1.3 To arrange prayer meetings

9.1.4 To arrange and prepare visits on sick and bereaved

9.1.5 To plan and prepare Youth services as they happen

9.1.6 To assist in arranging activities for Children Ministry

9.1.7 To arrange Memorial Service for a Robed Member

9.2 Organising and Entertainment

9.2.1 Anything that needs to be organised, be it from the Executive or other committees

9.2.2 Organise any sitting of Congregation/ Presbytery or Convocation with the instructions of the Executive

9.2.3 To see to it that all local arrangements are in place at the times of sittings

9.2.4 Arrange community outreach programmes

9.2.5 Organise educational activities within the FOY

9.2.6 Plan and organise entertainment activities

9.2.7 To aim at using all forms of activities that have potential of attract Youth in the Church

9.2.8 Ensure that meals are available whenever necessary during activities entertainment committees

9.3 Finance Committee

9.3.1 To come up with ideas of fund raising and ensure that fundraising activities do take place

9.3.2 To plan a programme of fundraising for the FOY, in order to meet all financial obligations

9.3.3 To submit the proposed plan for approval and implementation

9.3.4 To organise funds for the FOY and monitoring of proposed projects if any.

9.4 Marketing Committee

9.4.1 Propose marketing activities that positively promote the FOY and its members

9.4.2 Provide input on the development of new promotional material, and assist with initial development of marketing materials as requested.

9.4.3 Assist with maintaining the Calendar of Events

9.4.4 Manage the Production of all FOY publications, notices and other forms of communication.

9.4.5 To input on website development and enhancements of the Youth or a link to the church website

9.4.6 Make recommendations, and assist with marketing and member service activities

9.4.7 Initiate controls on all Youth assets like (youth badge)

9.4.8 Gathering information on leads to assist the Executive in growing the Fellowship.

9.5 Health and Wellness Committee

9.5.1 To equip the Youth with skills

9.5.2 To promote open debate on issues considered controversial

9.5.3 To conduct life skills development and promotion of behaviour change

9.5.4 To foster Christian and acceptable values

9.5.5 To encourage positive peer pressure

9.5.6 To conduct educational seminars around health issues

9.5.7 Fundraising and community outreach programs in Conjunction with worship, finance and organizing and

Proposals

1. That the General Assembly receives the report. (T)
2. The General Assembly (M)
 - A. notes the work on developing Fellowships Uniform is underway.
 - B. Endorse the presented artwork for the logos of all Fellowships.
3. The General Assembly endorses the submitted terms of references for the uniform Task team. (M)
4. The General assembly agrees that the appointment of members of the Task Team be effective until the task is done irrespective whether the member is still serving in the fellowship executive committee or not. (M)
5. The General Assembly discourages members of the church in using social media as a platform to critique fellowships. (M)
6. The General Assembly adopts four key areas namely, Evangelism, church in society, spiritual growth and discipleship to be the areas that the fellowships need to focus on and together with the CFC develop strategies that will enable local churches to actively participate. (M)

DOCTRINE

Supplementary Report to the General Assembly 2025

The Ad hoc Task Team on Confessions

This Task Team consults by email and at present consists of the following:

Members: Douglas Bax (convener), Heinrich Asch, Douglas Bower, Eleanor Gaunt, Glynis Goyns and Bonisile Mdyesha.

The Task Team has lost several members during the past two years, as a result of departure overseas, retirement and aging. It needs new members to be appointed to it to replace them and to restore its racial balance.

Introduction to the Report

Two parts of the Confession of Faith have recently come into discussion within *the Doctrine Committee* and are dealt with in the Report of that Committee to Assembly this year. The two parts are:

A. *the Confession's acceptance of three different views of Scripture in footnote 2 attached to Art. 6.4.*

The Doctrine Committee in its report this year declares that the three views are incompatible with one another, so that the acceptance of all three in effect divides the UPCSA into three denominations. It argues, therefore, that only one view should be accepted and proposes that this be that Scripture is the verbally infallible (i.e. inerrant) Word of God, in order to reflect "the orthodoxy of our Reformed heritage and our doctrinal sources in the Westminster Confession"; and

B. *the Confession's statement in Art. 20 that because God created all human beings in God's image, "everyone has a God-given dignity and a right to be treated with respect and protected from violence and abuse no matter [inter alia] their.....sexual orientation..."*.

The Doctrine Committee Report proposes the deletion of the last two words.

The Task Team has therefore seen it as necessary to put its other work on hold and focus on these two critical issues in its own report. It regrets that as a result its report has to be in the Supplementary Reports, because its final draft could not be composed before the Doctrine Committee's Report was finalized and made available, which was immediately before the main deadline for reports.

Section A below, under the heading "Different Views of Scripture", sets out and explains the three views of Scripture that the Confession allows, the necessity for this and the critical condition attached to these views, and then briefly identifies three other views that are unacceptable. The Task Team urges the Assembly

- (a) *not* to amend footnote 2 to Art 6.4 as the Doctrine Committee proposes but instead to amend only the last sentence in the footnote, order to clarify it (see the Proposals below); and
- (b) to place Section A of the report on the UPCSA website, in order to clarify this part of the Confession and serve as an aid in teaching it.

Section B then follows, under the second main heading, with a defence of the inclusion of the words "sexual orientation" in Art. 20.3.

Section A. Different Views of Scripture

The UPCSA Confession of Faith, Art. 6.4, footnote 2, declares that:

In adopting the Confession, the UPCSA recognizes that its members have different (for some, overlapping) views on the relation between the Word of God and Scripture:

- some fully equate Scripture and the Word of God, regarding it as verbally inspired and infallible;
- some distinguish between the Word of God and Scripture as its inspired and normative but fallible human record and witness;

- some emphasize that the Word of God is strictly Jesus Christ, the living Word, and see Scripture as the normative and authoritative witness to Christ that by the power of the Spirit becomes and is the Word of God in bearing such witness ([Jn. 1:1-18,]² Jn.5:39f., II Cor.3:14-4:6, [Rev. 19:13]).

All, however, confess that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, and that the Scriptures are inspired by God and have unique authority.

"The Essential Points of Doctrine" likewise summarises what the Confession has to say about Scripture and the Word of God by stating:

Jesus Christ as he is attested to us in the Scriptures ... is the one Word of God whom we have to hear, trust and obey, in life and in death. ... This Word, as revealed and defined by Scripture, which is the sufficient and uniquely authoritative witness to Jesus Christ, is the final rule of faith and life.

The following exposition sets out the background to Article 6 in the Confession and explains footnote 2 more fully.

1. Background: The Reformers

In 1517 Pope Leo X needed more money for the rebuilding of the great basilica, or cathedral, of St Peter in Rome. He therefore promulgated a new indulgence. Indulgences promised release from a period of temporal punishment for sins in Purgatory to all believers who purchased the certificates for them. Papal agents then set out to peddle the certificates. The aggressive peddling by Johann Tetzel near Wittenberg provoked a late medieval monk named Martin Luther to attack the practice of indulgences. Luther had been deeply affected by the Renaissance with its slogan *ad fontes* ("back to the sources") and had become professor of biblical theology at the University of Wittenberg. He formulated 95 Theses against indulgences (and the whole principle of selling forgiveness for money) for public debate and, according to tradition, nailed them to the door of the Wittenberg cathedral in October 1517. This marked the start of the Reformation. Pope Leo formally condemned Luther's views in 1520 and excommunicated him in 1521.

From indulgences the dispute moved to the core issue of how a person is reconciled with God, that is, whether one attains a state of righteousness in God's sight by the grace and mercy of God *and* one's own merits or by God's grace and mercy *alone*, received through faith alone, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*.

These fundamental 'material' issues involved the equally fundamental 'formal' question: what then is the final authority for the doctrine and teaching of the Church? Is it the Bible *and* Church tradition (when necessary, defined by the Pope's pronouncements *ex cathedra*) or is it the Bible alone? Catholics needed Church tradition and papal authority to be ultimate as well as the Bible because ever since Origen the Church had taught that Scripture had two (later three) hidden meanings besides its plain and literal meaning. Only the skilful use of allegory and typology could discern these deeper hidden meanings, but they were taken to be often more important than the literal meaning. This made the Bible a dangerous book for people to read without a thorough training in theology, so that whereas the early Church had encourage lay people to read it, the medieval Church did not. The Reformers on the other hand accepted only the plain and obvious meaning of Scripture and maintained that for any intelligent believer Scripture thus had *perspicuitas*, or lucid intelligibility.

Luther himself strongly upheld the authority of Scripture against tradition and the Pope's decrees, and held that all Church doctrine is to be decided by Scripture alone, *sola Scriptura*. He has therefore sometimes been assumed to have held an infallibilist view of Scripture, but in fact did not. On the contrary, he wished that Esther had never been written (it did not mention God once, and its ethic was a violent one). In the prefaces he

² This is a key text in this regard that has somehow inadvertently fallen out of the version of the UPCS Confession printed in the *Manual of Faith and Order* and should be restored. Rev. 19:13 should also be added in the parenthesis.

wrote for his translation of the New Testament (first published in 1522) and also specifically for Js. he attributed greater value to some books (namely Jn., Paul's Epistles, especially Rom. Gal. and Eph., I Pet. and I Jn.) than to others: "these," he wrote, "are the books that show Christ to thee and teach everything that is necessary and blessed for thee to know." He questioned the authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews (because in 6:4-8 it denies that those who fall away from the faith can repent and be saved), the Epistle of James (because it does not mention "the Passion, the Resurrection or the Spirit of Christ" and in 2:14-26 fails to set forth clearly that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone), the Epistle of Jude and the Book of Revelation. He even called Js. "a right strawy epistle" whose author must have been a Jew who had heard the gospel bell only from far away. He therefore designated these four books as "disputed" and placed them at the end of the New Testament (where they still stand in modern revisions of Luther's Bible). What for Luther was the ultimate authority was the gospel to which Scripture witnessed and by which Scripture itself was to be judged: namely, that we are put right with God *solo Christo, sola gratia, sola fide*—as Paul's Letter to the Romans sets forth especially clearly—although Luther agreed that genuine saving faith always issues in good works.

On the Reformed side *Huldrych Zwingli* took the inspiration of Scripture for granted in the sense that God, or the Holy Spirit, was its author. But his view of inspiration was not mechanical, and his commentaries recognized the human aspect by noting the differences between the Gospels. *John Calvin* described the prophets and the writers of the New Testament as "speaking by God's impulse" and writing according to "dictation by the Holy Spirit". But he also took the historical contexts of the books of the Bible very seriously and recognized that there were minor discrepancies in the Bible—which he thought did not matter. (See his *Harmony of the Gospels*.) Moreover, it seems that Calvin was careful not to speak of the text of Scripture as infallible and to speak only of "the infallible *teaching*" of Scripture. According to James McEwen *John Knox* was concerned to assert the inspiration, authority and *perspicuitas* of Scripture, but not its infallibility.³ The Scots Confession (1560), whose main author was Knox, likewise asserted the divine authority of Scripture but not its inerrancy⁴. *Heinrich Bullinger* in the Second Helvetic Confession (1562) declared "the canonical Scriptures...of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures". But he made no claim that the text of Scripture was inerrant.

2. Infallibilism

In time, as the dispute between Catholics and Protestants continued through the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly in response to the Catholic claim that the Pope's declarations *ex cathedra* were infallible, Calvin's language that the Holy Spirit dictated the words of Scripture was taken more and more literally, and many Protestants attributed infallibility to the text of Scripture. Hence the view of "Protestant orthodoxy", after the initial Reformation, hardened into the "fundamentalist" or infallibilist view that *the Bible is a record of what God directly dictated to its writers, so that it is "infallible", or inerrant in every detail*.

The classic statement of English-speaking "orthodox" Calvinism is the Westminster Confession of Faith (drawn up by an assembly of Presbyterian and Puritan divines at Westminster in England in 1643-1646 and adopted by the Church of Scotland as its confession in 1647). Ch. I.iv of this declares:

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.... [O]ur full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine

³ J.S. McEwen: *The Faith of John Knox* (London: Lutterworth), p.34-39.

⁴ See especially Art. 19 of the Confession.

authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

A classic modern statement is *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, which more than 200 “evangelical”⁵ leaders at a conference of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy in Chicago formally approved in October 1978. Its signatories included such well-known names as James Montgomery Boice, John F. MacArthur, J. I. Packer, Francis Schaeffer and R. C. Sproul. (Subsequent conferences in 1982 and 1986 added *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics* and *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Application*.)

The 1978 statement claims inerrancy only for the *original manuscripts* in their original languages, which no longer exist, but whose text “can be ascertained from available manuscripts with great accuracy” (Art. 10). It further claims infallibility and inerrancy not merely for spiritual, religious, or redemptive assertions in the Bible but also for all those in the fields of history and science, including those regarding creation and the Flood. Hence

- Art. 19 declares: “WE DENY that Scripture should be required to fit alien preunderstandings, inconsistent with itself, such as naturalism, evolutionism, scientism, secular humanism, and relativism” and
- Art. 22 declares: “WE DENY that the teachings of Genesis 1-11 are mythical and that scientific hypotheses about earth’s history or the origin of humanity may be invoked to overthrow what Scripture teaches about creation.”⁶

The official commentary then goes on to insist on “the factual nature of the account of the creation of the universe, all living things, the special creation of man, the Fall, and the Flood. These accounts are all factual, that is, they are about space-time events which actually happened as reported in the book of Genesis.”⁷

Wikipedia reports, however, that even from within “evangelicalism”, the Old Testament theologian Peter Enns at the time questioned whether the Statement adequately reflected “the nature of inspiration” and “how the Bible actually behaves”.⁸

The UPCSA Confession in its footnote to Art. 6.4 recognizes this view of Scripture as one that some in its ministry and its membership adhere to and that the Church finds acceptable.

3. ‘The Critical Historical Approach’

A quite different view of Scripture regards Scripture as inspired by God and thus having genuine divine authority but also as having been written by imperfect, indeed sinful, human beings who did not always “hear”, or understand, and record that Word perfectly,

⁵ *Evangelisch* was first used in Germany as an adjective meaning Lutheran and then, more broadly, Protestant. In the USA and some other English-speaking countries conservative Protestants have claimed the term “evangelicals” to designate themselves.

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/chicago_statement_on_biblical_inerrancy#cite_note.8

Ctrl+Click to follow the link.

⁷ See the full text online in Wikipedia.

⁸ **Note on II Tim. 3:16:** Those who maintain the inerrancy of Scripture sometimes appeal to the claims of the prophets in the Old Testament to be speaking God’s own words, e.g. Am. 1:1ff., Jer. 1:9ff. and Ezk. 2:7ff. See, e.g., J.A Motyer: *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downer’s Grove, Ill., 1993), p.30-33, esp. p.31, n.1. But most often today appeal is made to II Tim. 3:16. Luther’s translation of the Bible, at least in its present revised version, renders this text as *alle Schrift, vom Gott eingegeben, ist nütze zur Lehre* (“all Scripture, inspired by God, is useful for teaching/doctrine”), and the KJV likewise renders it as “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”. But some modern infallibilists insist that strictly the Greek word θεόπνευστος in the text means “God-breathed” (NIV) or “breathed out by God” (ESV) because the etymological roots of the Greek word (θεός + πνευστος) mean that. On that basis they argue that in II Tim. 3:16 Scripture itself claims that it is verbally dictated, and so infallible.

The argument is problematic, however. The meaning of a word is often defined most precisely not by the original meaning(s) of the etymological root(s), or parts, out of which it was constructed so much as by the common meaning which it is *constructed to mean* and so has come actually to have in common speech. To take a simple example: the word “philosophy” was constructed out of the two Greek words φιλία + σοφία, meaning “love” + “of wisdom”; but to pedantically substitute the meaning “love of wisdom” for “philosophy” whenever it occurs in literature would merely confuse and mislead. Likewise the Greek word θεόπνευστος should not be pedantically rendered as the NIV or ESV translate it but instead by *its common meaning*, which was simply “God-inspired” or “inspired by God” (its translation, e.g., in the RSV and NRSV). Indeed, even if we stick more literally to its root meaning, that is more exactly “breathed into by God”, which exactly parallels the Latin root *inspirare* = “to breathe into”, from which the English “inspired by God” is derived. See J.N.D. Kelly: *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: Adam & Charles Black,), *ad loc.*, and cf. II Pet. 1:21.

or infallibly, and in any case wrote what they did within a context influenced to some extent by social and cultural presuppositions—so that it also has a human aspect and some human errors in it.

With the advance of the Renaissance and then in tandem with the increasing trust in human reason as a tool of investigation that developed with the advance of science in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries scholars began to see the Bible as a historical book that, in order to be better understood, needed to be investigated by the study of its original languages, the history of its text, its nature as literature and the history of its interpretation. From this there developed the “critical historical” approach to Scripture. This approach was so named because it involved “lower/textual criticism”, i.e. the study of *the history of the text* as such to establish the authentic text, and “higher/literary criticism”, i.e. the study of *its literary sources, composition, date and authorship*—called “higher” because it builds on the text that “lower criticism” first establishes. This “critical approach” (perhaps more acceptably called in German the *wissenschaftliche*, or “scientific”, method) does not set out to find mistakes in the Bible, but in seeking to study the Bible objectively, as a collection of human documents, it takes the human aspect of Scripture seriously and is thus inevitably open to recognizing errors in it. Those who hold this view therefore feel bound to recognize such errors for the sake of the truth.⁹

Errors, or problematic aspects of Scripture, so recognized include scientific errors owing to the primitive cosmology of the biblical writers, historical errors, errors of fact, literary slips and even serious moral errors resulting from the acceptance of social and cultural views of the time as the will of God. Examples are the following:

- *Cosmology.* The geocentric biblical cosmology which finds expression in Gen. 1, Josh., the Pss., Prov., some of the prophets and Job. In this cosmology creation took the form of a massive “firmament” or dome-shaped canopy, or cupola, being “stretched” out (Ps. 104:2, Isa. 42:5, 44:24, 45:12, 51:13, Jer. 10:12, 51:15) to separate the primeval waters above it from those below it, so that the earth could be created in the space between them (Gen. 1:1f., 6f., 20, Job 22:14, 26:10, 38:8-11, Ps. 104:5-9, Prov. 8:27). The earth is thus a flat surface “founded upon the seas”, i.e. the primeval waters (Ps. 104:5), on pillars driven deep down into the watery abyss (Ps. 104:3, Job 38:6). Galileo Galilei famously began to question this cosmology on the basis of his scientific observations that the earth revolved around the sun, but in 1633 the Inquisition forced him to repudiate these observations. The writer of Gen. 1 also thought of the universe as created in six days, each with an evening and a morning, whereas we now know that the universe came into being over many billions of years. This view in Genesis is not just “poetry”; it is a primitive view of the universe natural to pre-scientific human beings and common in the Middle East at the time, but now, of course, scientifically obsolete. (The Bible’s obsolete cosmology does not necessarily mean, however, that the Word of God does not address us in and through Gen. 1ff. See, for instance: Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *Creation and Fall. A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, also online, and K. Barth: *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III/1 and 2.)

On the basis of the geocentric view Josh. 10:12-15 recounts an event that is cosmologically impossible. Even if we substitute a modern cosmology for the one in the text, for the earth’s rotation to have stopped would have caused a cosmic wind that swept both the Amorites and the Israelites, as well as everything else, off the battleground. But, in any case, we need to ask: would God really cause such a cosmic event for the sole purpose of letting Joshua slaughter more of his enemies?

- *A Killer God?* Is the idea of a God who moves across the land of Egypt killing the firstborn male in every Egyptian household, in order to facilitate the release of his chosen people (Ex. 12:29f.), really compatible with the New Testament portrait of God as a God of

⁹ See the essay by Gerhard Ebeling on “The Significance of the Critical Historical Method for Church and Theology in Protestantism” in his book: *Word and Faith* (London: SCM, 1984), p.17-61.

love—especially when God, who first hardened Pharaoh’s heart against releasing the Israelites, has the power to change Pharaoh’s heart anyway (Ex. 11:4-10, 12:29f.)?

- *The Death Penalty.* The Old Testament has a spray of commandments demanding the death penalty for a wide range of offences. They include a child’s hitting or cursing his parent (Ex. 21:15,17, Lev. 20:9 cf. Mk. 7:10), the practice of sorcery or spiritism (Ex. 22:18, Lev. 20:27), sacrificing to any other god than Yahweh (Ex. 22:20, Num. 25:1-5, Deut. 13:12ff., II Chr. 15:12f.), violating the Sabbath (Exod. 31:14, 35:2), adultery or incest (Lev. 20:10-14, Deut. 22:22), premarital sex while still living at home (Dt. 22:13-21), homosexual sex (Lev. 20:13), bestiality (Ex. 22:19, Lev. 20:15f.), cursing or blaspheming God (Lev. 24:10-16), coming near to the tabernacle as a non-Levite (Num. 1:51), and cohabiting with a non-Israelite (Num. 25:6ff., but cf. Ru.). One may argue that it was difficult to order a society that had no prisons, but there were other methods of punishment and at least in some of these cases the death penalty seems far too drastic. For instance, a rebellious son is to be stoned to death at the city gates (Deut. 21:18-21). In any case several modern nations have come to view the death penalty as barbaric and abolished it for all but the most serious crimes or even for all crimes. Indeed, one may argue that it is Christianity itself that has moved, or helped to move, people to this more “humane” attitude. Was/Is this penalty in all these cases then really without qualification *God’s* will? Jesus himself showed a quite different attitude from that of the scribes and the Pharisees to the law demanding the death penalty in the story of the woman caught in adultery (Jn. 7:53-8:11¹⁰).
- *War.* Places in the Old Testament like Num. 31 and Deut. 20:10ff. lay down the rules of war that Israel is to follow against other nations. It was to offer any nation that it attacked terms of peace that included subjecting all the men to forced hard labour, i.e. slavery. If the nation rejected the terms, however, and Israel was victorious, then it was to put all the men to death and enjoy all their women, children, cattle and possessions as booty. But if the nation occupied land nearby, then the Israelites were “to leave alive nothing that breathes” and devote everyone and everything to complete destruction as an offering to the LORD. No wonder that such a bitter, murderous attitude against a nation’s enemies could lead to the vengeful vindictiveness of the Psalmist who wrote against the Babylonians who had conquered Judah: “Happy shall he be who requites you with what you have done to us! Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rocks” (Ps. 137:8-9)! But was all this really what “the LORD your God commanded”?

Likewise can the prophet Samuel’s instruction to King Saul, “Go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass” (1 Sam. 15:3) truly have been God’s command, as Samuel declared? Was such genocide justified by the Amalekites’ simple refusal a long time before this to allow the Israelite rabble emerging from the desert to invade their land, as Samuel assumes?

Christopher Columbus took Deut. 20:10-13 as laying down what the Lord did command. Appallingly, therefore, when he landed in the Americas, he commanded his men to act towards the native population in the way this text prescribed. Likewise, the Spanish and their conquistadores used Deut. 20 to justify their ruthless conquest of the new world and enslavement of its peoples.¹¹

All this ignored the fact that that Jesus himself directly judged and contradicted the whole tenor of all such passages with his radical call to love our enemies and to pray for those who hate us and do good to them (Matt. 5:38-48, Lk. 6:27f.). And today we

¹⁰ This pericope is lacking in the oldest and best MSS of Jn. and must have been inserted into the Gospel after it was written. But scholars accept it as a piece of genuine tradition because it so closely accords with the character and method of Jesus. See the commentaries.

¹¹ B. Gordon: *The Bible. A Global History* (London: Basic Books, 2024), p.139-141.

would uphold the right to self-defence of any people like the Amalekites facing the threat of invasion and condemn any genocide as a moral atrocity.

- *Slavery* is a widespread practice taken for granted in the Bible. The only limitation that it places on the purchase of slaves for permanent slavery is that they must come from outside Israel rather than Israel itself (Lev. 25:39-46)! For centuries Scripture provided slavers and slave owners with plenty of material to justify the practice of slavery.

To take an outstanding example, even the great Christian preacher and revivalist George Whitfield owned slaves and declared: "As for the lawfulness of keeping slaves, I have no doubt, since...some...were bought with Abraham's money, and some...were born in his house." After the American state of Georgia abolished slavery in 1751, Whitfield even campaigned for it to be reinstated!

It can be argued that Jesus' attitude of love towards all people, Paul's principle that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28 cf. Col. 3:11) and Paul's desire in Phm. for Onesimus to be set free ultimately point in the direction of the emancipation of slaves. But Paul himself draws no further conclusion from Gal. 3:28 than that all who belong to Christ are offspring of Abraham and heirs of the promise of salvation (v.29), and his wish for Onesimus's emancipation was confined to one individual. Paul—and even Jesus—never directly condemned the institution or practice in general or sought the freedom of other slaves. Of course, it would have been dangerous to campaign publicly for the release of slaves, but so far from calling for any other slaves to be freed, Paul, or the author of Ephesians, admonishes slaves to obey their masters "with fear and trembling, with singleness of heart" and indeed in the same unqualified way as they would obey Christ (Eph. 6:5-8; cf. also Col. 3:22-24)!

The fact remains, then, that the witness of the Bible as a whole in this area is problematic. One of the most problematic examples of this is Ex. 21:7ff., which regards it as acceptable to God for one even to sell one's own daughter into slavery (no sons are mentioned in this regard!). So far from condemning this practice, the text lays down what rules the father is to follow in making the sale!

- *Farming and Food.* The rules forbidding various foods in the Old Testament and the rationales for this appear so frivolous to us today that we can hardly identify them as seriously expressing the will of God, even under the old covenant. Lev. 11:7f., for instance, forbids the eating of pork because pigs are cloven-hoofed. Lev. 11:10-12 likewise forbids the eating of lobster and shrimp. Lev. 19:19 prohibits the interbreeding of cattle, the planting of two kinds of seed together and the wearing of two kinds of cloth at the same time. Lev. 19:26-28 prohibits the eating of meat with any blood in it, the trimming of one's hair or one's beard, and any tattooing. None of these laws even make sense to us as *God's* laws today.
- *Fable?* How are we to think of Balaam's talking donkey that could also see angels (Num. 22)? As something that must be historically true because it is in the Bible or as a bit of fable that snuck into the story?
- *Contradictions.* The Bible also contradicts itself with regard to who slew Goliath: David or Elhanan (cf. I Sam. 17:1-54 with II Sam. 21:18-22 and I Chron. 20: 4-8). Did Elhanan actually do the deed, and did the story then migrate to the more famously heroic figure of David, as some scholars suspect?
- The four Gospels also exhibit contradictions. Whereas II Ki. 18:18 says that the father of Eliakim was Hilkiyah, Matt. 1:13 identifies Abiud as the father of Eliakim and Eliakim as the father of Azor, and Lk. 3:30 says that Eliakim's son was Jonam. Likewise Matt. 1:16 identifies the father of Joseph as Jacob the son of Matthan, whereas Lk. 3:23f. identifies him as Heli the son of Matthat. Mk. 1:14-18 states that John the Baptizer was imprisoned before Jesus began his ministry by calling Peter and Andrew at the lakeside to follow him, whereas according to Jn. 1:35ff. John told Andrew, his disciple, who Jesus was, so that Andrew left him and followed Jesus and then fetched Simon

Peter to join him. Jn. 3:24 also says that John was still at liberty and baptizing people after Jesus had begun his mission and travelled to Judea with his disciples. Matt. 8:5ff. reports that the Roman centurion himself came to see Jesus, whereas Lk. 7:2ff. states instead that he sent Jewish elders to meet with Jesus on his behalf. Mk. 1:17-19, Matt. 21:12f., and Lk. 19:45-47 all agree in placing the cleansing of the Temple at the end of Jesus' ministry, leading on to his arrest, whereas Jn. 2:13-22 places it at the beginning of his ministry. Mk. 14:12, Matt. 26:17 and Lk. 22:8 all agree that the Last Supper was a celebration of the Passover meal, and that Jesus was crucified the next morning (Mk. 15:25 says at 9 a.m.), whereas Jn. 19:14ff. maintains that Jesus was crucified *on the day before* the Passover, and *in the afternoon*!

- *Slips*. In the New Testament Mk. 1:2. makes a straightforward slip, or error, in attributing to Isaiah a quotation that is actually from Mal. 3:1. Some MSS correct this with an alternative reading, but they are later and inferior MSS.
- Another slip in Mk. is in 2:25f. (cf. I Sam. 21:1-6, 22:20). The later Gospels correct the slip by omitting the mention of Abiathar (Matt. 12:4 and Lk. 6:4), but too late to set Mk right. (This was the problem that finally dismantled the infallibilist view of the well-known American scholar, Bart D. Ehrman, Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina.)
- *Fashion*. In I Cor. 11:1-16 Paul himself confuses what is merely contemporary fashion in his social context with God's immutable will.
- *Sexism*. Jdg. 19:16ff. tells a story whose ugliness is partly due to an extremely sexist point of view that regards a man as justified in offering up a male guest's concubine and even his own virginal daughter to a rabble to rape, in order to save the guest from rape.
- Eph. 5:22-25, despite v. 21, 25ff., is deeply problematic in demanding that wives submit absolutely to their husbands: "*as [they submit] to the Lord*" and "*as the Church submits to Christ ... in everything*"! As such it also contradicts the Apostle Paul's fundamental principle of non-discrimination in Gal. 3:28: "There are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female . . . in Christ Jesus" (Jerusalem Bible). It is especially this passage in Eph. 5 that led the Church to insist that every bride vow to "obey" her husband at her wedding. But, after the centuries-long struggle for women's liberation by the suffragettes and others (often against Bible-quoting believers), feminists today rightly take serious umbrage at this kind of language and the sexism it presumes; and Churches no longer retain that wedding vow!
- Titus 1:5ff. envisages only men, no women, as being allowed to be ministers, and I Tim. 2:11-15 explicitly insists that women should "learn in silence with all submissiveness" and be excluded from teaching or any positions of authority over men (cf. also I Cor. 14:34f.). This was a relapse into the sexism of Middle Eastern culture. A few denominations (including the Roman Church) still today regard these texts in the Pastorals as expressing the immutable Word of God. But early Gnostic groups and later some Anabaptist groups allowed women to preach, and since the 20th century most Protestant Churches have admitted women to ordination. The UPCS, of course, has even elected woman ministers to be Moderators of General Assembly!

In the eyes of those who take a "critical" view of Scripture all such examples belie any claim that the text of Scripture is infallible or inerrant.

This second, or "historical critical", view of Scripture is sometimes expressed by speaking of Scripture as "*containing* the Word of God". It is to be noted, however, that this language is used even by the Westminster Shorter Catechism in speaking of "*The word of God which is contained in the scriptures*" (WSC, Qn.3).

4. The 'Neo-orthodox' Approach

Another distinct view of Scripture stresses that, *in the most exact sense, it is not Scripture as such but Jesus Christ who is the Word of God* (Jn. 1:1f., Rev. 19:13). That is, *it is most exactly in the person, work and teaching of Jesus Christ that God reveals himself*—which means in the person, work and teaching of Jesus Christ *as Scripture (the Old and New Testaments together) bears witness to these*.

The Barmen Theological Declaration (1934), the Confessing Church's statement of faith in the Third Reich, is a classic expression of this view. As the first two of its six theses and antitheses put it:

1. Jesus Christ, as he is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God that we have to hear and have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine that apart from and besides this one Word of God the Church could and should acknowledge as a source of its proclamation yet other events and powers or figures and truths as God's revelation.

2. As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, in the same way and with the same gravity he is also God's mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him we have received joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world to serve his creatures in freedom and gratitude.

We reject the false doctrine that there could be areas of our life in which we would belong not to Jesus Christ but to other lords—areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

As these two theses and antitheses make clear, the Barmen Declaration itself emphasized the universal sovereignty of Jesus Christ as the one Word of God, i.e. his cosmic reign, or universal Lordship, as the one Word of God over every area of life including the political area (Matt. 28:18-20, Col. 1:15-18, Phil. 2:6-11, Rev. 19:11-16). In particular this was in opposition to Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, which opened the way for the *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung* (German Faith Movement) to support Hitler and the Nazis. (The attempt of the Dutch Reformed Churches in South Africa to find support for the apartheid ideology inside or outside the Bible without reference to Jesus Christ can be called a theologically parallel move to that of the *Glaubensbewegung*.)

This view is a post-critical one, i.e. one that takes the critical approach to Scripture and thus its fallible human aspect for granted. Scripture (the Old and the New Testaments) is inspired by God to be the *necessary and sufficiently reliable witness* to Jesus Christ as the Word of God. Nevertheless, revelation is not to be statically located in the inspired propositions of biblical documents, because God's Word is always dynamic and active. Instead that Word is most properly to be located in the event of God's self-disclosure of himself as God incarnate in the person, words and works of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, when God chooses to speak to us in the power of the Spirit through the words of Scripture, the very words of Scripture *become* God's Word to us. (Thus *Scripture alone, understood in that sense*, must govern all the teaching and proclamation of the Church.) But *the purpose of Scripture is really to point away from itself to Jesus Christ* (Jn. 5:39f.). Indeed, Scripture itself bears witness that *Christ is the Centre*, and not only the Centre but *the Lord and Judge, of Scripture* (e.g. Matt. 5:21-48). All Scripture must therefore be judged in the light of Christ himself, i.e. in the light of its witness to Christ. This means that some practices that the Old Testament describes as divinely commanded may be judged as indefensible in the light of the New; indeed it also means that even the New Testament may and must be judged in the light of Christ. For instance, the sexism of the Pastoral Epistles in shutting the door to women in the ministry may be judged in the light of Christ's making Mary Magdalene the first minister of the good news, the apostle to the apostles (Jn. 20:11-18).

(This view is associated most closely with Karl Barth and the so-called 'dialectical', or 'neo-orthodox', theology.)

Three more views of Scripture may be identified that, in contrast to the views above, contradict the Church's Standards of Faith because they do not hold to the final authority of Scripture and so are *incompatible with membership in the Church and unacceptable to the Church*.

5. *The "Liberal" View*

Recognition of the "human" element, or errors, in Scripture, of course, carries with it the danger that some people may not take it seriously enough as the Word of God, and tend to see it as a compilation of *essentially human religious documents*, which teach us about human religious, or spiritual, aspirations and morality. This has led some theologians in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries to engage, for instance, in a "quest for the historical Jesus" which has sought to distinguish the authentic historical data about Jesus from the elements that the early Church contributed to the Gospels on the rationalist assumption that the "real" Jesus is qualitatively different from the Christ of faith acknowledged by the early Church as Lord and Saviour. Some have thus ended up with a view of him as a religious pioneer and a supreme ethical example but not literally God incarnate as Scripture and the creeds witness to his being.

6. *The Sceptical View*

Recognition of the "human" element, or errors, in Scripture may disillusion some people with the Bible even to the extent that they lose sight of its divine aspect altogether, abandon the notion of it as revelatory and become outright humanists or agnostics. Thus for them scepticism replaces faith.

7. *The Mythical View*

Yet another view is that which accepts that *the story of Scripture as a whole or the gospel story or the Resurrection of Jesus in particular is true but only in some symbolic or "mythical" sense and not in any kind of historical¹² sense*. This view is also a post-critical point of view: it takes the critical approach to Scripture very much for granted. It may model itself on Plato's use of what he called μύθοι ("myths"), by which he meant stories that were illustrative of truth but not historically true. It has been particularly associated with the philosophical thinking of G.F. Hegel in the 19th century and with the so-called "existentialist" exegesis of Rudolf Bultmann and the "philosophical theology" of Paul Tillich in the 20th.

8. *Conclusion*

The representatives of the scattered Presbyterian congregations and presbyteries in South Africa came together in 1897 to negotiate and form the Presbyterian Church of South (later Southern) Africa. One of their tasks was to choose the confession of faith to which the PCSA would adhere. The Westminster Confession of the Church of Scotland was an obvious option. But in the end they preferred the confession of the Presbyterian Church of England called The Twenty-Four Articles of the Faith and made that their Church's confession of faith. The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, on the other hand, as a mission Church of the Church of Scotland inherited the Westminster Confession as its confession of faith from its mother Church.

When the UPCSA was formed in 1998/9 it initially adopted both of these confessions as its standards of faith. However, some members of the UPCSA were unhappy with this, in part because allegiance to the Westminster Confession required allegiance to the infallibilist

¹² "Historical" is admittedly a problematic word in that it sometimes means demonstrable by the objective criteria that a critical or "scientific" historian uses. In that sense the Resurrection is as such not historical because it cannot be proved to have happened on the basis of historical criteria but needs faith to be believed in. But the Resurrection *was* historical in the sense of being *an event that happened in the course of human history*, not just in human imagination, and that is the sense in which the word "historical" is used here.

view.¹³ For this reason, the Assembly eventually agreed to mandate the drafting of a new confession, which then came to replace both earlier confessions.

The fact is that the clergy and members of the UPCS have different views of Scripture. Clergy who have been trained at Bible colleges may favour the infallibilist view; those who have been trained at university are more likely to favour either the critical historical view or the neo-orthodox view. Lay members in turn are likely to conform to the views that their ministers adopt and teach. The Confession thus declares that all of the first three views outlined above are acceptable, or to be tolerated—with the provision that all three groups are *required to believe that God's Word to us in the Bible, or in Jesus Christ as the Old and New Testaments bear witness to him, is the final criterion for the doctrine, preaching and teaching of the Church?* The footnote to Art. 6.4 of the Confession therefore recognizes this.

Some members of the Church, however, have expressed the concern that these three views are so essentially incompatible and divergent in their esteem for, and interpretation and application of, Scripture and will thus lead to such differences in doctrinal and ethical convictions and practices that for the UPCS to tolerate all three together will inevitably and inexorably in the end cause it to break up into separate bodies, or denominations.

Four points need to be made in refutation of this concern:

1. in the first place it needs to be made clear that the UPCS is not as such propagating three views at once or trying to fuse them together, but instead accepts, or tolerates, within itself three different views held by different ministers and members of the Church;
2. The really critical criterion is not whether or not we believe that the Bible is *infallible*, or inerrant, but whether we all give our allegiance to the Word of God in Scripture, or in Jesus Christ as Scripture witnesses to him, as the *unique and final authority*, or authoritative criterion, for all the Church's doctrine, preaching, teaching, theology and ethics;
3. a minister or member who accepts that the Bible has a very human aspect and so has errors in it, but accepts this *unique and final authority or criterion* is not to be denied the status of a true believer or member—or minister—of the Church;
4. with and within this common understanding the UPCS is in actual practice holding together in unity, harmony and peace; on the other hand to insist that all the ministers and members of the UPCS should give their allegiance to a single *one* of the three views is what would endanger the unity of the Church, simply because those who hold the other views could not do that in good conscience.

Instead of bemoaning our diversity within the proviso, therefore:

1. we should rejoice that we all recognize *Scripture as a sufficiently reliable and true record and representation for God to speak his Word to us through it and so to reveal Jesus Christ to us all as our common Lord and Saviour*; and
2. we should recognize and be grateful that within the bounds of this proviso, or condition, the unity and peace of the denomination are in actual fact being preserved.

¹³ The other reasons were that the Westminster Confession gives "the civil magistrate", i.e. the civic authority, the right to proceed against deviant opinions and practices (Art. XX.iv) and (somewhat unecumenically for the 21st century) designates the Pope as "that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself...against Christ and all that is called God" (Art. XXV.vi).

Section B. The Right of all People to be Treated with Respect and Protected from Violence and Abuse

The Doctrine Committee Report expresses concern about the Single Marriage Act in Parliament and specifically about its proposal to redefine marriage by including same-sex, transgender and polygamous unions. It sees this as increasing pressure on the Church to conform to “secularised views of marriage”, against which the UPCSA needs “to proactively affirm and uphold its biblical and confessional stance on Christian marriage” as “the lifelong covenantal union between one man and one woman”. “The Church should uphold a biblical sexual ethic that recognizes gender as a divine creation of male and female and affirms the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4-6).” (This is a summary of what the Report itself spells out at great length.)

The Doctrine Report further points out that:

- the General Assembly of the UPCSA has consistently affirmed “this biblical definition of marriage”, and
- most recently the Executive Commission of 2024 reiterated this position, underscoring “the Church’s commitment to uphold orthodox Christian teaching on marriage and the family”.

In this context the Doctrine Report focuses on *The UPCSA Confession of Faith*, art. 20.3, and *The Essential Points of Doctrine*, Clause 15. Art. 20 in the Confession is about “The Image of God” and clause 3 in it states:

Because God created all people equally in that image and Christ gave his life to restore it, every person’s life is sacrosanct. Everyone has a God-given dignity and a right to be treated with respect and protected from violence and abuse, no matter their gender, age, race, social status, sexual orientation, religion and despite any mental or physical handicap. God judges those who in any way abuse or oppress others and calls us to oppose such abuse.

Clause 15 in the Essential Points of Doctrine (a summary of the essential items in the Confession) states:

In Christ there is no ground for separation or discrimination between people on grounds of race, colour, social status, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation, either in Church or in State.

Three things should be noted here about this Article in the Confession and this Clause in the Essential Points:

1. The inclusion of the term “sexual orientation” does not, and was not intended to, say anything about sexual activity or behaviour, one way or the other; it refers only to sexual orientation *as such*, and its concern is the abuse and violence that so many people whose sexual orientation differs from the norm have to suffer.
2. It is now accepted that people do not *choose* their sexual orientation; a person’s sexual orientation is a *given*. A statistic that dramatically illustrates this is that after the London blitz in World War II it was found that a significantly higher than normal proportion of pregnant women who had had to seek safety in underground shelters gave birth to children who later turned out to be homosexuals. The mooted medical explanation is that the extra adrenalin their bodies produced in reaction to the anxiety these women experienced caused this effect in the fetuses they were carrying. As the evangelical preacher and writer Tony Campolo puts it, “People can repent of what they do, but they cannot repent of who they are. Being homosexual is not just a bad habit that can be broken. It is an essential part of the identity of some of our brothers and sisters.”¹⁴ Likewise Graham Ingram, who in his book, *Out of the Shadows* calls himself “a convinced Evangelical; a Bible-believing Christian of the more theologically conservative Calvinistic kind...a pastor and Bible-teacher

¹⁴ T. Campolo in his book *Was Jesus a moderate?*, quoted in G. Ingram: *Out of the Shadows* (Hertford, UK: Church Home Group Resources Ltd, 2008), p.30.

for more than forty years", tells the story of how he struggled to suppress and deny his homosexual orientation but in the end was forced to conclude: "I am by sexual orientation gay.... That is part of the total package of who I am."¹⁵

3. A great many people whose sexual orientation happens to be different from the general norm suffer greatly from prejudice, ostracism, hatred, harassment, humiliation, abuse and violence—and, as a result, depression, which in many cases leads to suicide.

The Doctrine Report itself in fact concedes the first of the above three points. It goes on nevertheless to allege two things

1. It alleges that these clauses in the Confession and the Essential Points have been "misappropriated" by some, for example, in petitioning the Church to permit the blessing of same-sex unions. It also cites the last Executive Commission as having ruled that, "in terms of the articles in question", church leadership should not be discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation, suggesting that this is "not a factor to be considered in qualifying for church ministry or leadership roles".
2. Quite separately, right near the end of its section on this issue in the Confession, the Report alleges indeed that

The unqualified inclusion of the term "*sexual orientation*" in the Confession of Faith articles relating to the non-discrimination of the gospel gives the impression that the gospel condones every and any form of sexual orientation or expression. The term itself is not explained and is subject to misconstrual and misapprehension.

The Doctrine Report concludes that "to avoid ongoing confusion it is therefore proposed that the term 'sexual orientation' be removed from the respective articles of the *Manual*."

In answer to these two allegations and the Report's proposal the following needs to be said:

1. The first allegation itself concedes that the use of the phrase "sexual orientation" that it criticizes depended on a *misappropriation* of the relevant clauses in the Confession and the Essential Points.
2. The Report cites no evidence at all that the clauses in the Confession and the Essential Articles had anything to do with motivating the petition to permit the blessing of same sex unions. Indeed it cites no actual evidence either from the reports to the Executive Commission or from the minutes or resolutions of the Executive Commission or the debates in it to back up its allegation that these clauses played any part at all in motivating, or in arguing for, the Executive Commission's rulings that it also criticizes.
3. *The Doctrine Report itself concedes* that these clauses in the Confession "rightly reflect the biblical injunction that no one is excluded from the gospel call (Gal 3:28)" and the term "sexual orientation" was introduced into these articles "with the intention to emphasize the universal offer of the gospel and its social concern for all people, regardless of their description" and was "not intended to condone homosexual acts". (As we have already pointed out, the term "sexual orientation" is concerned simply with sexual *orientation* as such.)
4. The Doctrine Report fudges the distinction between sexual orientation and sexual acts in implying, as it does, that those who are homosexually oriented *choose* to be so. In fact, as we have pointed out, that is an outdated idea that no longer finds support in psychology, as far as genuine homosexuals are concerned.
5. The Doctrine Report further states that its stance
is not to suggest that non-heterosexual people do not have as much right to protection from abuse or violence as any other. Protection of human rights or vulnerable groups is not in question here. This report does not intend a homophobic stance.

¹⁵ G. Ingram: *Out of the Shadows*, p.5f. See also the earlier book by Paul Germond and Steve de Gruchy: *Aliens in the Household of God, Homosexuality and Christian Faith in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997).

But this is naïve, because to delete the phrase “sexual orientation” from the clauses in question would declare precisely that non-heterosexual people are not to be included among those who have “a right to protection from abuse or violence”. It is likewise naïve to suggest, as the Doctrine Report does, that a “positive pastoral approach” would in any way mitigate that. The Report adds: “Protection of human rights or vulnerable groups is not in question here.” But this is fatuous, because that is precisely what the articles in the Confession and the Essential Points *are* concerned with, *and* thus precisely what the removal of the phrase “sexual orientation” would be perceived to be about.

6. We need to take seriously that we live in a society in which homosexual people suffer continually from a great deal of prejudice, hatred, discrimination, and violence.¹⁶ Do we as Christians then instead want to be like the priest and the Levite who “passed by on the other side” of the road?
7. It would be ironic indeed for a Church Assembly by implication to be denying the right to be protected from violence and abuse to those of a different sexual orientation—especially so soon after the recent assassination of the Muslim imam Muhsin Hendricks, who faced so much danger and so many threats to his own life because he was homosexual and courageously tried to protect other people who were being persecuted for their sexual orientation from abuse and violence.

Section C. Remaining Work

[See the *Papers 2019*, pp.271f.]

The Task Team still has the following work before it:

- to complete its examination of the arguments for and against the *filioque* in the Niceaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed;
- to consider the critique of the Apostles’ Creed by the German Reformed theologian, Prof. Jürgen Moltmann, that in it “the earthly life of Jesus is reduced to a mere comma between ‘born’ and ‘suffered’”¹⁷—and what, if anything, can and should be done about this;
- to draft a short introduction to the UPCS A Confession of Faith;
- to draft a summary version of the UPCS A Confession of Faith for use by lay, and especially young, people, e.g. in confirmation courses;
- to revise the introductions to some of the various confessions of faith that have been placed on the UPCS A website, in order to make these introductions more appropriate;
- to revise the old RPC catechism to align it more closely to the Confession of Faith, for use in the UPCS A; and
- to draft further lessons in accordance with the instruction of the Executive Commission in 2009 to the Confessions Task Team “to draft a course on the basics of the faith for use in preparing young people for believers’ baptism or ‘confirmation’—when it has finished its other work” (*Papers, Proceedings and Decisions* of the Executive Commission 2009, pp.49, 290).

Convener

Douglas Bax

Email: douglas.s.bax@gmail.com

Proposals

1. The Assembly receives the report. (T)
2. The Assembly instructs the webmaster (M)
 - a) to restore the key text, Jn. 1:1-18, to the beginning of the parenthesis at the end of the third bulleted point in Art. 6.4, footnote 2, in the version of the UPCS A

¹⁶ See the book by Graham Ingram: *Out of the Shadows* (cited above).

¹⁷ J. Moltmann: *Wer ist Christus für uns heute?* (Gutersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 1994), p.8f.

Confession of Faith on the UPCS website (from which it has somehow inadvertently fallen out);

- b) to add Rev. 19:13 at the end of the same parenthesis (see footnote 1 on the first page of the report); and
 - c) to strengthen the final sentence of the footnote by amending it to read: "All three of these views are permitted within the UPCS, provided that those holding them all confess that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, and that the Scriptures, as the indispensable witness to Jesus Christ, are inspired by God and are the unique, adequate and ultimate authority for all the Church's doctrine, teaching, preaching, theology and ethics.
3. The Assembly (M)
- a) approves Section A of the report on 'Different Views of Scripture';
 - b) reaffirms its acceptance of the three different views of Scripture listed in footnote 2 attached to Art. 6.4 of the UPCS Confession of Faith, along with the proviso in the final sentence, as amended; and
 - c) instructs the webmaster to place Section A on 'Different Views of Scripture' on the UPCS website as an aid to the better understanding and teaching of this issue in the Confession of Faith.
4. The Assembly reaffirms both (M)
- a) the statement in Art.2 0.3 of the UPCS Confession of Faith that:
Because God created all people equally in that image [the image of God] and Christ gave his life to restore it, every person's life is sacrosanct. Everyone has a God-given dignity and a right to be treated with respect and protected from violence and abuse, no matter their gender, age, race, social status, sexual orientation, religion and despite any mental or physical handicap; and
 - b) the parallel summary statement in clause 2 of The Essential Points of Doctrine that:
In Christ there is no ground for separation or discrimination between people on grounds of race, colour, social status, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation, either in Church or in State.

CHURCH IN SOCIETY

Supplementary Report to the General Assembly 2025

GENDER DESK

INTRODUCTION:

The Gender desk is the subcommittee of the Church in Society Committee, meant to address the gender issues within the UPCSA. There are times when we are not pro-active but react on different matters. There are times when we don't pronounce when we should have. All these are sometimes as a result of lack of human capital and sometimes because of resources.

The Gender Desk works towards levelling the playing fields, it is concerned about the inclusivity of all and the real unity of the church where peace, love, acceptance and recognition of all is practiced. The Manual of Faith and Order assists all the Presbyterians in this regard:

"The Uniting Church affirms its right to formulate, adopt, modify and interpret its doctrinal statements, always subject to the Word of God, under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit and in accord with the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Of this accord this Church itself shall be the sole judge. This Church recognizes liberty of opinion on all points of doctrine not fundamental to the faith. But it retains the right in every case to judge what falls within this description and to guard against any abuse of this liberty that may injure its witness, unity or peace."

The Gender desk call upon all in the UPCSA to watch what we say to each other and how we treat each other, but as human being created by God. We want to remind the church of what we ascribe to as it is legislated in chapter two (2.4) of the Manual of Faith and Order of the UPCSA which states that:

The Human Predicament

Human beings were created in the image of God, as creatures little lower than the angels. As the story of Adam and Eve portrays, however, the tragic paradox is that humankind has from the beginning yielded to temptation and turned away from God. Instead of trusting and obeying God we have rebelled against God's holy will. In pride we have aspired to be like God, self-sufficient and autonomous, choosing our own moral laws. Instead of living with and for God, and so also for other, as human beings we have come to live primarily for ourselves. It is God's grace and holiness in Jesus Christ that reveal what sinners we are and how empty before God every human claim to be righteous is. Christ claims the whole of life for God and so reveals how far short of grateful and loving obedience to God we have fallen. That he needed to die for our sins shows how grave sin is. Human society is capable of degrees of justice, and human beings of great altruism, heroism and self-sacrifice. Yet both societies and individuals are also capable also of appalling brutality and degradation. The most just society is radically flawed with injustice, and our noblest deeds and highest virtues with individual or group egoism, pride and self-interest. Group and individual interests distort even how we judge between right and wrong. Sin is a corruption of our very nature; it infects and dominates the whole of human life. In our private and our public lives we fall under the power of evil. We sin individually and collectively. We are proud, self-centred, resentful, lustful, greedy, corrupt; we hurt, exploit, discriminate against and oppress others; we neglect the needy; we sin by commission and by omission. Sin misuses our greatest technological advances, so that instead of caring for the creation we pollute and ruin the environment and deplete the earth's resources, overpopulation spreads hunger and starvation, and modern weapons threaten us all with destruction. Sin warps religion itself with individual and group egoism, self-righteousness and prejudice.

WORK DONE IN 2024/25

The beginning of 2024 was a challenge because of changes in the lives of both the coordinators. We started slow but eventually managed to pick up. The following are the activities that we achieved:

1. Bible Study

We started the year with a series of bible study by one of the Ministers of the UPCS. The topic we explored was "you are God's masterpiece (Ephesians 2:10). The Bible study was well attended and thanks to those who supported the initiative.

2. 24-hour prayer 2024

Theme: based on Psalm 107:6 "Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress."

This is a program that we embark in every year. All Presbyteries and Fellowships were once more given different slots, praying for different things affecting the UPCS, the church universal and our societies. The 24-hour prayer always sets the tone the 16 days of activism. We would like to thank the Presbyteries for taking this initiative seriously, taking into consideration the fact that the UPCS is a praying church.

The Gender desk would like to once again encourage the Presbyteries to participate in this year's 24-hour Prayer. We would also like to plead with the Presbyteries to send suggestions should they wish.

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM:

This is the program that we are pushing as the desk, but it is most unfortunate that there is not much support and action during this period. We want to change this by encouraging Presbyteries and congregations to send suggestions to the committee on what practical things can be done.

We have been without fail involved in "Thursdays in black campaigns." Every Thursday we join the world in wearing black. We therefore urge the members of our denomination to wear black on Thursdays and send their pictures especially when they are groups to us so that we can post those in the webpage of the denomination.

UPCS WOMEN CLERGY CONSULTATION:

The Gender desk in May organised a consultation for women Clergy. This was to begin to sensitise women of the oncoming 50 years of Ordination of women in Ministry celebration which will be happening next year. It was meant to feel the pulse of women as we were reflecting on the milestones, and also trying to project the future. It was wonderful to have Ministers of our denomination together reflecting on the journey they have travelled all these 49 years.

It became clear that there are still obstacles women encounter towards ordination and in ordination. There is a strong feeling that women are not treated with the same respect as their counterparts (men) even though they go to same schools to do their theological studies, seat in the same classrooms with the same lecturers, same graduation in the same graduation halls, same probation period, attend same FoV classes, Ordained by the same Presbyteries, celebrate the same sacraments, preach from the same bible but they are still undermined. They feel that they always have to work twice harder than their colleagues.

The UPCS women Clergy feel and had expressed the need to be a structure not under Church in Society but be under Ministry as they are Ministers recognised by the church. They would like to remind the General Assembly that they are the full members of this beautiful UPCS ordained, and in good standing.

POLICY DOCUMENTS

SEXUAL HARRASMENT POLICY

The Executive Commission in 2024 sent down this document to all the Presbyteries for consideration. We would like to urge the General Assembly to now take the further step, by enacting this policy in the Manual of Faith and Order. The policy is attached as Annexure A.

PROPOSALS

1. The General Assembly receives the report. (T)
2. The General Assembly encourages Presbyteries and Congregations to participate in the 24-hour prayer and to send their prayer suggestion by the 30th September 2025. (T)
3. The General Assembly encourages all its members to observe Thursdays in black. (T)
4. The General Assembly notes the 16 days of Activism will start on Tuesday 25th November until 10th December 2025. (T)
5. The General Assembly encourages Presbyteries to organise programs for the 16 days of activism. (T)
6. The General Assembly places the Women in Ministry structure as a subcommittee of Ministry Committee of the General Assembly. (M)
7. The General Assembly instructs the Priorities & Resources, Assembly Business, and Ministry Committees to work together in designing a program for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women. (M)
8. The General Assembly instructs the Assembly Business Committee to include the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Executive Commission agenda for 2026. (M)
9. The General Assembly adopts the Sexual Harassment Policy. (M)

Annexure A of the Gender desk report

SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY OF THE UPCSА

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The Uniting Presbyterian Church in South African ("hereinafter referred to as the "UPCSА/ the Church") is committed to preventing sexual harassment and sexual misconduct but also addressing it when it occurs. Effective ministry in Christ requires that we maintain an environment in which all persons are respected, treated with dignity and are in a safe environment. The Church will respond to allegations of misconduct with justice and compassion.

It is then the UPCSА's policy that all its church members, officials, ministers, teachers, students, employees, and volunteers working in, with and for the Church, are to maintain the integrity of ministerial, employment, and professional relationships at all times. The UPCSА, prohibits sexual misconduct of any kind and will take appropriate and immediate action in response to complaints or knowledge of violations of this policy. This Policy is part of the UPCSА commitment to a safe church environment for worship, fellowship and programs. This policy prohibits any form of abuse, exploitation or harassment.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

We believe and affirm every person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). By recognizing that all human beings have sacred worth and are created in the image of God, we convey the good news of the gospel and provide an understanding of God. We further believe and affirm that sexual misconduct within the church is incompatible with biblical teachings and ethical standards. Even in the Bible these infamous sexual assault stories are recorded in the Bible with huge consequences on those who commit them. One of

these Biblical stories with these bad consequences is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is evidently one of those where power is abused against those who are powerless and vulnerable (Genesis 18-19). Sexual misconduct is an abuse of power and authority. It alienates persons from the ministry of the church. It tarnishes the church's ministry and mission. Those guilty of sexual misconduct bring real harm to persons, congregations and the church as a whole, as is written in Genesis 34 in the story of rape of Isaac's granddaughter Dinah.

DEFINITION

Sexual Harassment is a form of sexual misconduct that is defined as, ***"any unwanted sexual comment, advance, or demand, either verbal or physical, that is perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating or coercive. Sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than an exclusively sexual issue. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender."***

To clarify further, it is an unwanted sexual or gender-directed behaviour that is so severe or pervasive that it alters the conditions of employment, volunteer work, or unreasonably interferes with the complainant's performance or worship experience by creating a hostile environment that can include unwanted sexual jokes, repeated advances, touching, displays, or comments that insult, degrade, or sexually exploit women, men, elders, children or youth.

Courteous, mutually respectful, pleasant, non-coercive interactions between leadership, employees and members of the church, including men and women, that are appropriate in the congregation and acceptable to and welcomed by both parties are not considered to be harassment.

TYPES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

1. **A quid-pro-quo type of harassment** - where sexual favours are expected or requested from or offered in exchange for some benefit, or where discrimination or where discipline or sanctions is imposed or threatened if requests for sexual favours are not met. This kind of conduct generally involves a person in a position of authority.

2. **Maintaining, condoning, or contributing to an offensive work or worshipping environment** which may include, but is not limited to, a variety of unwelcome behaviour (listed below) which may create a hostile or intimidating atmosphere.

Sexual harassment makes a person feel offended, humiliated and/or intimidated. It includes situations where a person is asked to engage in sexual activity as a condition of that person's participation in church-related activities, as well as situations which create an environment that is hostile, intimidating or humiliating for the recipient. Sexual misconduct involves the misuse of authority, power, or influence in a trust relationship to gain advantage over another in an abusive, exploitative, and unjust manner for any purpose, including for personal pleasure. Sexual misconduct takes advantage of the vulnerability of persons who lack power to act on behalf of their own welfare, including children.

- a) Unusual and overly friendly attention, including such things as gifts, frequent social telephone calls, letters, private visits, etc.
- b) Persistent shadowing or following, repeated or prolonged staring
- c) Sexual talk and innuendo, dirty jokes, and offensive gestures.
- d) Sexual or intrusive questions about individuals' personal life
- e) Use of familiarities or diminutive such as "honey", "baby", "dear", etc.
- f) Whistling, catcalls, leering.
- g) Unsolicited or unwelcome flirtations, romantic gestures, advances, propositions, manner of dress or display of body.
- h) Graphic, degrading, excessive or unwelcome comments about another individual's appearance, dress, or anatomy.
- i) Display of sexually suggestive objects or pictures.
- j) Explicit descriptions of the employee or worshipper's own sexual experiences.

- k) Unnecessary, unwanted physical contact such as touching, hugging, pinching, patting, kissing.
- l) Verbal and emotional manipulation and control.
- m) Exposing genitalia.
- n) Physical or sexual assault
- o) Sexual intercourse or rape

Note:

Anyone can be a victim of sexual harassment or misconduct, regardless of his or her sex or the sex of the offender. UPCS Church recognises that sexual harassment may also occur between people of the same sex. The primary factor is that the sexual conduct is unwanted and unwelcome by the person against whom the conduct is directed.

UPCS Church recognises that sexual harassment and misconduct often, but not always, results as a result of an imbalance of power within unequal relationships in the church hierarchy. Anyone, including leadership, administrators, employees, members of the church who sexually harasses another or commits sexual misconduct will be reprimanded in accordance with this internal policy.

All sexual harassment or misconduct is prohibited whether it takes place on the premises of UPCS Church or away from the church, including, for example, during social events, community events, trips, worship services away from the church premises, training sessions or conferences. Calls, texts, emails, and social media usage can constitute unlawful harassment, even if they occur away from the UPCS premises, on personal devices or during non-work hours.

Nothing in this Policy should be read to prohibit an individual who is not the alleged offender or victim from reporting sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, verbal, or physical abuse if such violations are observed or made known to that individual.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the following persons in the church working environment and anywhere else as a result of church employment responsibilities or church relationships:

- Paid church employees at all levels
- Church Members
- Volunteers and or lay leaders elected or appointed to the UPCS
- Clients, suppliers, and contractors who are sourced for specific tasks or services by the UPCS
- Visitors to the Church
- All Ministers, Probationers, Elders, Lay Preachers, Deacons, Managers, Children Ministry, Women Ministry, Men Ministry, Teachers, Members in elected and appointed positions, students, or any other person employed or covenanted and representing the UPCS in any way
- Any other person/s who have dealings with the UPCS

STRUCTURE

The General Assembly shall authorize and appoint a Safe Church Compliance Team (hereinafter referred to as SCCT) that will be vested with authority to receive, investigate, make findings and report on complaints arising under this Policy. The SCCT of General Assembly will consist of 7 members – 4 females (2 ministers and 2 elders) and 3 males (2 ministers and 1 elder) and 3 alternates (2 young people (females) and young person (Male)). The General Assembly shall authorize funds to educate and train the SCCT members to fulfil their function.

The General Assembly will review the composition of the Compliance Committee at least bi-annually to ensure competence and effectiveness. These members shall not be appointed by the Nominations Committee of the General Assembly but shall be identified by the Moderator of the General Assembly the Clerk of Assembly the General Secretary Convener of CIS, and both Co-ordinators of the Gender Desk

The members of this team shall all be screened according to the Child Protection Register, as per the Regulation 44, Section 126 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 in South Africa.

This is done through the local police station. The UPCSAs (Zimbabwe, Zambia and DRC Congo) are to check their local protocols and legislation in this regard and advise the Gender Desk so that it be inserted in the policy.

The team shall be appointed bi-annually and may be re-appointed for another term.

The SCCT members shall therefore sign a Confidentiality declaration (Attached herein as an annexure).

The Presbytery shall establish SCCT teams at their levels comprising of 3 women (1 minister and 2 elders) and 2 men (1 minister 1 elder) and 2 alternates (I female youth and I male youth), who must also be screened accordingly. These may report directly to that Assembly SCCT through the Presbytery Clerk/Moderator. Presbyteries shall inform all their members of the availability of the Presbytery SCCT.

The Presbytery SCCT will be responsible in dealing with any sexual harassment cases within the Presbytery and congregations in that Presbytery.

All complaints against ministers will be reported directly to the Assembly SCCT who in turn will alert the Moderator of General Assembly of the said allegations, and the Moderator shall prioritise those cases and constantly report the progress made to the SCCT.

Each case shall be reported to the (structure of Assembly acting between Assemblies and to Moderator of General Assembly's) and an annual report shall be submitted to the General Assembly or Executive Commission. The Clerk of Assembly shall retain a copy of the Confidentiality declaration signed by members of the Team both at Assembly and presbytery levels. The work of the team shall be confidential, and they shall not be required to report to Presbyteries other than that they are available at all times to assist in cases of harassment or abuse. In the cases where there are allegations of rape and other brutal abuse, that need referrals or involvement from law enforcement, the Moderator of the General Assembly should be advised by the General Assembly SCCT solely for information purposes.

All complaints shall be treated with respect and in confidence. No complainant will be victimized or face retaliation for reporting any potential violations of this policy in good faith. UPCSAs Members are all encouraged to be truthful at all times when reporting sexual abuse cases.

The General Assembly shall authorize funds to educate and train the SCCT members to fulfil their function.

RETALIATION

Unlawful retaliation can be any action that could discourage someone from coming forward to make or support a sexual harassment claim. Adverse action need not be job-related or occur in the church to constitute unlawful retaliation (e.g., threats of physical violence outside of church or work hours).

Such retaliation is unlawful and will discourage members who:

- made a complaint of sexual harassment, either internally or with any anti-discrimination agency.
- testified or assisted in a proceeding involving sexual harassment.
- opposed sexual harassment by making a verbal or informal complaint, or by simply informing a supervisor, manager or church leader of harassment.
- reported that another employee or volunteer has been sexually harassed; or
- encouraged a fellow employee, church member or volunteer to report harassment.

Even if the alleged harassment does not turn out to rise to the level of a violation of law, the individual is protected from retaliation if the person had a good faith belief that the practices were unlawful.

However, this retaliation provision is not intended to protect persons making intentionally false

charges of harassment.

SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES

All church leaders, office bearers of the church at all levels including fellowships who receive a complaint or information about suspected sexual harassment or observe what

may be sexually harassing behaviour or for any reason suspect that sexual harassment is occurring, are mandated to report such suspected sexual harassment to the SCCT, as outlined below. In addition to being subject to discipline, if they engaged in sexually harassing conduct themselves, supervisors and church leaders will be subject to discipline for failing to report suspected sexual harassment or otherwise knowingly allowing sexual harassment to continue. Supervisors and church leaders shall also be subject to discipline for engaging in any retaliation.

COMPLAINT PROCEDURES AND INVESTIGATIVE AUTHORITY

Reports of allegations of sexual harassment or misconduct should never be taken lightly or disregarded. Preventing sexual harassment is everyone's responsibility. UPCSA cannot prevent or remedy sexual harassment unless it has knowledge of such improper actions. Reports of allegations shall be handled confidentially, both before and after they have been submitted to appropriate person(s), as outlined below.

Anyone who is subject to sexual harassment or misconduct, exploitation, physical or verbal abuse should, if possible, inform the alleged offender that the conduct is unwanted and unwelcome. The UPCSA recognises that sexual harassment or misconduct, exploitation, physical or verbal abuse may occur in the context of an imbalance of power as a result of a superior and a subordinate relationship, and that it may not be possible for the victim to inform the alleged offender.

If a victim cannot directly approach an alleged offender, he or she may approach any member of the SCCT to register a complaint. In the alternative a victim may also approach any member within the church leadership, who will then promptly relay the complaint to the SCCT.

When the SCCT receives a complaint under this Policy, whether one of sexual harassment or misconduct, exploitation, physical or verbal abuse, the SCCT will:

- immediately disclose any conflict of interest presented by the particular matter to the SCCT, who will then inform the General Assembly Moderator and Clerk of Assembly who will promptly replace the conflicted member(s) in the particular inquiry from the alternates. The conflicted members shall remain on the SCCT for all other matters)
- As promptly as possible, but in no more than 7 working days of receiving the complaint, the SCCT shall initiate an investigation to determine whether there is a reasonable basis for believing that the alleged violation of this policy occurred.

- immediately record the date(s), time(s) and facts of the incident(s)
- ascertain the views of the complainant as to what outcome he/she wants
- ensure that the complainant understands UPCSA procedures for dealing with the complaint (especially chapter 18 MOFAO when necessary)
- discuss and agree on the next steps: either informal or formal complaint, on the understanding that choosing to resolve the matter informally does not preclude the complainant from pursuing a formal complaint if he/she is not satisfied with the outcome.
- keep a confidential record of all discussions (consent to be sought from the client first)
- respect the choice of the complainant
- bear in mind that the accused is entitled to due process

The SCCT, in its discretion, may seek legal counsel whenever such is deemed prudent to fulfil its duties.

Throughout the complaint procedure, a victim/survivor is entitled to assistance from a counsellor within the UPCSA community. The SCCT, as part of its duties, will identify and engage a sufficient number of counsellors with special training to enable them to assist victims/survivors of sexual harassment or misconduct, exploitation, physical or verbal abuse. UPCSA recognizes that because sexual harassment or misconduct, exploitation, physical and verbal abuse often occurs in unequal relationships, victims often feel that they cannot come forward. UPCSA must understand the need to support victims in making complaints.

INFORMAL COMPLAINT PROCESS

If the complainant chooses to address the matter informally, the SCCT shall:

- give an opportunity to the alleged offender to respond to the complaint

- ensure that the alleged offender understands the complaint process
- facilitate discussion between both parties to achieve an informal resolution which is acceptable to the complainant, unless the supervisory relationship or severity of the allegations indicate that this would be unsafe or unreasonable.
- ensure that a confidential record is kept of what happens
- remind all parties that retaliation is prohibited
- follow up after the outcome of the complaint process to ensure that the behaviour has stopped
- ensure that the above is done speedily once the complaint is made
- bear in mind that the accused is entitled to due process

FORMAL COMPLAINT PROCESS

If the complainant wants to make a formal complaint or if the informal complaint process has not led to a satisfactory outcome for the complainant, the formal complaint process should be utilized to resolve the matter.

When a formal complaint is made, the SCCT shall institute a formal investigation. The SCCT, in its discretion, may deal with the matter internally, or refer the matter to an internal or external investigator.

In carrying out the investigation, the SCCT or the investigator at its direction shall:

- interview the complainant and the alleged offender separately
- interview other relevant third parties separately
- decide whether the complaint is credible and the reasons if they feel it is not credible
- produce a report detailing the steps in the investigation, findings, and any recommendations
- obtain and preserve any tangible evidence bearing on the investigation, such as emails, text messages, voicemail messages, photos, etc.
- if the complaint is found to be credible and that the harassment, misconduct, exploitation, or physical/verbal abuse took place, decide what the appropriate remedy for the complainant is, in the particular circumstance, in consultation with the complainant (e.g. - an apology, a change to working arrangements, training for the offender, discipline, suspension, dismissal, etc.)
- follow up to ensure that the recommendations are implemented, that the behaviour has stopped, and that the victim is satisfied with the outcome
- if it cannot determine that the harassment, misconduct, exploitation, physical or verbal abuse took place, he/she may still make recommendations to ensure proper operations of the church
- keep a record of all actions taken
- ensure that all records concerning the matter are kept confidential
- ensure that the process is pursued thoroughly, but as quickly as possible
- remind all parties that retaliation is prohibited
- report violations of this Policy to the appropriate law enforcement authorities, where warranted
- bear in mind that the accused is entitled to due process

The SCCT should establish a register of offenders which should be kept by the Clerk of Assembly for future reference.

LEGAL PROTECTIONS AND EXTERNAL REMEDIES

Sexual harassment is not only prohibited by the UPCSA, but it is also prohibited by the law. Aside from the internal process at UPCSA, employees may also choose to pursue legal remedies with the appropriate governmental entities after all the internal processes have been exhausted.

CHILD ABUSE

In any instance where the SCCT has reasonable cause to believe that a minor is being subjected to abuse, neglect or exploitation, either within the scope of UPCSA operations or otherwise, the SCCT shall immediately contact the appropriate child welfare authorities,

state or local agencies, and refer the matter for their investigation, in addition to taking necessary steps to secure the safety and well-being of the minor(s) in question.

SANCTIONS AND DISCIPLINARY MEASURES

Anyone who has been found to have violated this Policy is subject to any of the following sanctions:

- verbal or written warning
- adverse performance evaluation (if a church employee)
- reduction in wages (if a church employee)
- removal from current position or re-assignment
- demotion from current position
- suspension from position
- suspension from affiliation with UPCSА
- dismissal from affiliation with UPCSА
- personal civil liability
- criminal culpability

The nature of the sanctions will depend on the gravity and extent of the violation(s). Suitable deterrent sanctions will be applied to ensure that incidents of sexual harassment or misconduct, exploitation, physical or verbal abuse are not treated as trivial. Certain serious cases, including physical violence, will result in the immediate dismissal of the offender.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY

The UPCSА will ensure that this policy is widely disseminated to all relevant persons. It will be included in the church policies and procedures. All church leadership, church members, administrators, and staff must be trained on the content of this Policy as part of their induction or continued affiliation with UPCSА and must undergo refresher training at least yearly. All church members and volunteers must be made aware of this policy at regular intervals but at least yearly.



The Accra Confession

Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth

What is the Accra Confession?

The Accra Confession was adopted by the delegates of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) 24th General Council in Accra, Ghana (2004), based on the theological conviction that the economic and environmental injustices of today's global economy require the Reformed family to respond as a matter of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Accra Confession calls upon Reformed Christians around the world to engage injustices in the world as an integral part of their churches' witness and mission. [See page 2 for a list of North American churches represented.] The full text of the confession begins on page 2.

Why does the church need the Accra Confession?

1. Justice is a matter of faith. The Accra Confession states that matters of economic and environmental justice are not only social, political, and moral issues: they are integral to faith in Jesus Christ and affect the integrity of the church. Being faithful to God's covenant requires that individual Christians and the churches take a stand against current economic and environmental injustices.
2. The unity of the church is critical. Unity is concerned with togetherness, however divisive the issues confronting the confessing body may be. While the complex realities of globalization have not led to a full consensus, the global Reformed family addresses the problematic nature of today's global economy in the Accra Confession.
3. The church stands in solidarity with persons who are suffering and struggling. Following the justice traditions of the biblical prophets and of Jesus in the Gospel narratives, the Accra Confession views the current world (dis)order by "looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people." It calls the churches and society to hear the cries of the people who suffer and the woundedness of creation itself, over-consumed and undervalued by the current global economy.

The story of the Accra Confession

The Accra Confession is the outcome of a fifteen-year-long process...

- 1989 – At the 1989 World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) General Council in Seoul, Korea, "An Open Letter to the Children and Young People of the Planet" called upon WARC member churches to enter into a covenant for justice given "the threats to life in our age, for the sake of the whole creation, the future of all humanity and especially for the children and young people of the planet."
- 1995 – The call was intensified in 1995 when the African churches at a consultation in Kitwe, Zambia, suggested to the Alliance that the current global economy be declared as antithetical to the Christian faith in a manner similar to the confessing churches' historical stances against Nazism and apartheid.
- 1997 – The 1997 WARC General Council in Debrecen, Hungary, called WARC member churches to engage in "a committed process of recognition, education, and confession regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction." The process later became known as *Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth* and was implemented in the various regions of the world in partnership with the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation.
- 2004 – The 2004 General Council at Accra, Ghana, was a culminating point of the *Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth* process. The churches from the global South in particular challenged the Reformed family at Accra, asking how long they would have to wait for a unified confession of faith against the harm done within the current global economy. While some of the churches from the global North were not willing to take a doctrinal confessional stance, in the end there was consensus regarding the problematic nature of today's global economy and the injustices it produces. Hence, the assembly reached a decision to respond in a confessional manner, that is, to take a faith stance regarding current global economic injustices and ecological destruction.

Though not a doctrinal confession like the Heidelberg Catechism or Westminster Confession, the Accra Confession challenges current economic doctrines with the traditional Reformed criticism of idols (i.e., Mammon, consumerism, the financial and speculative markets) that deny God's life-giving sovereignty and defy God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable, and the whole of Creation from the fullness of life.

What is the World Alliance of Reformed Churches?

WARC is a worldwide movement working together for unity and fullness of life for all, both within the member churches themselves and in the wider context of a world that cries out for justice. A fellowship of 75 million Reformed Christians in 214 churches in 107 countries, WARC member churches are Congregational, Presbyterian, Reformed, United, and Waldensian churches with roots in the 16th-century Reformation led by John Calvin, John Knox, and others. WARC has a small secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland, and regional councils in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and North America.

WARC Member Churches in North America and the Caribbean

Christian Reformed Church in North America
Cumberland Presbyterian Church
Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America
Dominican Evangelical Church
Evangelical Presbyterian Church
Guyana Congregational Union
Guyana Presbyterian Church
Hungarian Reformed Church in America
Iglesia Presbiteriana Reformada en Cuba
Korean Presbyterian Church in America
Lithuanian Evangelical Reformed Church
Presbyterian Church in Canada
Presbyterian Church in Grenada
Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Presbytery of Guyana
Reformed Church in America
United Church of Canada
United Church of Christ
United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

The Accra Confession

Introduction

1. In response to the urgent call of the Southern African constituency which met in Kitwe in 1995 and in recognition of the increasing urgency of global economic injustice and ecological destruction, the 23rd General Council (Debrecen, Hungary, 1997) invited the member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to enter into a process of "recognition, education, and confession (processus confessionis)." The churches reflected on the text of Isaiah 58.6 "...break the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free", as they heard the cries of brothers and sisters around the world and witnessed God's gift of creation under threat.
2. Since then, nine member churches have committed themselves to a faith stance; some are in the process of covenanting; and others have studied the issues and come to a recognition of the depth of the crisis. Further, in partnership with the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and regional ecumenical organizations, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches has engaged in consultations in all regions of the world, from Seoul/Bangkok (1999) to Stony Point (2004). Additional consultations took place with churches from the South in Buenos Aires (2003) and with churches from South and North in London Colney (2004).
3. Gathered in Accra, Ghana, for the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, we visited the slave dungeons of Elmina and Cape Coast where millions of Africans were commodified, sold and subjected to the horrors of repression and death. The cries of "never again" are put to the lie by the ongoing realities of human trafficking and the oppression of the global economic system.
4. Today we come to take a decision of faith commitment.

Reading the signs of the times

5. We have heard that creation continues to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation (Rom 8.22). We are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself. We see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation.
6. The signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted. The root causes of massive threats

- to life are above all the product of an unjust economic system defended and protected by political and military might. Economic systems are a matter of life or death.
7. We live in a scandalous world that denies God's call to life for all. The annual income of the richest 1 per cent is equal to that of the poorest 57 per cent, and 24,000 people die each day from poverty and malnutrition. The debt of poor countries continues to increase despite paying back their original borrowing many times over. Resource-driven wars claim the lives of millions, while millions more die of preventable diseases. The HIV and AIDS global pandemic afflicts life in all parts of the world, affecting the poorest where generic drugs are not available. The majority of those in poverty are women and children and the number of people living in absolute poverty on less than one US dollar per day continues to increase.
 8. The policy of unlimited growth among industrialized countries and the drive for profit of transnational corporations have plundered the earth and severely damaged the environment. In 1989, one species disappeared each day and by 2000 it was one every hour. Climate change, the depletion of fish stocks, deforestation, soil erosion, and threats to fresh water are among the devastating consequences. Communities are disrupted, livelihoods are lost, coastal regions and Pacific islands are threatened with inundation, and storms increase. High levels of radioactivity threaten health and ecology. Life forms and cultural knowledge are being patented for financial gain.
 9. This crisis is directly related to the development of neoliberal economic globalization, which is based on the following beliefs:
 - unrestrained competition, consumerism and the unlimited economic growth and accumulation of wealth are the best for the whole world;
 - the ownership of private property has no social obligation;
 - capital speculation, liberalization and deregulation of the market, privatization of public utilities and national resources, unrestricted access for foreign investments and imports, lower taxes and the unrestricted movement of capital will achieve wealth for all;
 - social obligations, protection of the poor and the weak, trade unions, and relationships between people are subordinate to the processes of economic growth and capital accumulation.
 10. This is an ideology that claims to be without alternative, demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and creation. It makes the false promise that it can save the world through the creation of wealth and

- prosperity, claiming sovereignty over life and demanding total allegiance which amounts to idolatry.
11. We recognize the enormity and complexity of the situation. We do not seek simple answers. As seekers of truth and justice and looking through the eyes of powerless and suffering people, we see that the current world (dis)order is rooted in an extremely complex and immoral economic system defended by empire. In using the term "empire" we mean the coming together of economic, cultural, political and military power that constitutes a system of domination led by powerful nations to protect and defend their own interests.
 12. In classical liberal economics, the state exists to protect private property and contracts in the competitive market. Through the struggles of the labour movement, states began to regulate markets and provide for the welfare of people. Since the 1980s, through the transnationalization of capital, neoliberalism has set out to dismantle the welfare functions of the state. Under neoliberalism the purpose of the economy is to increase profits and return for the owners of production and financial capital, while excluding the majority of the people and treating nature as a commodity.
 13. As markets have become global so have the political and legal institutions which protect them. The government of the United States of America and its allies, together with international finance and trade institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization) use political, economic or military alliances to protect and advance the interest of capital owners.
 14. We see the dramatic convergence of the economic crisis with the integration of economic globalization and geopolitics backed by neoliberal ideology. This is a global system that defends and protects the interests of the powerful. It affects and captivates us all. Further, in biblical terms such a system of wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is seen as unfaithful to God and responsible for preventable human suffering and is called Mammon. Jesus has told us that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Lk 16.13).

Confession of faith in the face of economic injustice and ecological destruction

15. Faith commitment may be expressed in various ways according to regional and theological traditions: as confession, as confessing together, as faith stance, as being faithful to the covenant of God. We choose confession,

- not meaning a classical doctrinal confession, because the World Alliance of Reformed Churches cannot make such a confession, but to show the necessity and urgency of an active response to the challenges of our time and the call of Debrecen. We invite member churches to receive and respond to our common witness.
16. Speaking from our Reformed tradition and having read the signs of the times, the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches affirms that global economic justice is essential to the integrity of our faith in God and our discipleship as Christians. We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization and therefore we confess before God and one another.
 17. We believe in God, Creator and Sustainer of all life, who calls us as partners in the creation and redemption of the world. We live under the promise that Jesus Christ came so that all might have life in fullness (Jn 10.10). Guided and upheld by the Holy Spirit we open ourselves to the reality of our world.
 18. We believe that God is sovereign over all creation. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Ps 24.1).
 19. Therefore, we reject the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political and military empire which subverts God's sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God's just rule.
 20. We believe that God has made a covenant with all of creation (Gen 9.8-12). God has brought into being an earth community based on the vision of justice and peace. The covenant is a gift of grace that is not for sale in the market place (Is 55.1). It is an economy of grace for the household of all of creation. Jesus shows that this is an inclusive covenant in which the poor and marginalized are preferential partners and calls us to put justice for the "least of these" (Mt 25.40) at the centre of the community of life. All creation is blessed and included in this covenant (Hos 2.18ff).
 21. Therefore we reject the culture of rampant consumerism and the competitive greed and selfishness of the neoliberal global market system or any other system which claims there is no alternative.
 22. We believe that any economy of the household of life given to us by God's covenant to sustain life is accountable to God. We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and wellbeing of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation. We believe that human beings are called to choose God over Mammon and that confessing our faith is an act of obedience.
 23. Therefore we reject the unregulated accumulation of wealth and limitless growth that has already cost the lives of millions and destroyed much of God's creation.
 24. We believe that God is a God of justice. In a world of corruption, exploitation and greed, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, the exploited, the wronged and the abused (Ps 146.7-9). God calls for just relationships with all creation.
 25. Therefore we reject any ideology or economic regime that puts profits before people, does not care for all creation and privatizes those gifts of God meant for all. We reject any teaching which justifies those who support, or fail to resist, such an ideology in the name of the gospel.
 26. We believe that God calls us to stand with those who are victims of injustice. We know what the Lord requires of us: to do justice, love kindness, and walk in God's way (Mic 6.8). We are called to stand against any form of injustice in the economy and the destruction of the environment, "so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Am 5.24).
 27. Therefore we reject any theology that claims that God is only with the rich and that poverty is the fault of the poor. We reject any form of injustice which destroys right relations—gender, race, class, disability, or caste. We reject any theology which affirms that human interests dominate nature.
 28. We believe that God calls us to hear the cries of the poor and the groaning of creation and to follow the public mission of Jesus Christ who came so that all may have life and have it in fullness (Jn 10.10). Jesus brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind (Lk 4.18); he supports and protects the down-trodden, the stranger, the orphans and the widows.
 29. Therefore we reject any church practice or teaching which excludes the poor and care for creation, in its mission; giving comfort to those who come to "steal, kill and destroy" (Jn 10.10) rather than following the "Good Shepherd" who has come for life for all (Jn 10.11).
 30. We believe that God calls men, women and children from every place together, rich and poor, to uphold the unity of the church and its mission so that the reconciliation to which Christ calls can become visible.

31. Therefore we reject any attempt in the life of the church to separate justice and unity.
32. We believe that we are called in the Spirit to account for the hope that is within us through Jesus Christ and believe that justice shall prevail and peace shall reign.
33. We commit ourselves to seek a global covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in the household of God.
34. We humbly confess this hope, knowing that we, too, stand under the judgment of God's justice.
 - We acknowledge the complicity and guilt of those who consciously or unconsciously benefit from the current neoliberal economic global system; we recognize that this includes both churches and members of our own Reformed family and therefore we call for confession of sin.
 - We acknowledge that we have become captivated by the culture of consumerism and the competitive greed and selfishness of the current economic system. This has all too often permeated our very spirituality.
 - We confess our sin in misusing creation and failing to play our role as stewards and companions of nature.
 - We confess our sin that our disunity within the Reformed family has impaired our ability to serve God's mission in fullness.
35. We believe in obedience to Jesus Christ, that the church is called to confess, witness and act, even though the authorities and human law might forbid them, and punishment and suffering be the consequence (Acts 4.18ff). Jesus is Lord.
36. We join in praise to God, Creator, Redeemer, Spirit, who has "brought down the mighty from their thrones, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands" (Lk 1.52f).

Covenanting for Justice

37. By confessing our faith together, we covenant in obedience to God's will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships. This binds us together to work for justice in the economy and the earth both in our common global context as well as our various regional and local settings.
38. On this common journey, some churches have already expressed their commitment in a confession of faith. We urge them to continue to translate this confession into concrete actions both regionally and locally. Other churches have already begun to engage in this process, including taking actions and we urge them to engage further, through education, confession and action. To

those other churches, which are still in the process of recognition, we urge them on the basis of our mutual covenanting accountability, to deepen their education and move forward towards confession.

39. The General Council calls upon member churches, on the basis of this covenanting relationship, to undertake the difficult and prophetic task of interpreting this confession to their local congregations.
40. The General Council urges member churches to implement this confession by following up the Public Issues Committee's recommendations on economic justice and ecological issues (see Appendix 18).
41. The General Council commits the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to work together with other communions, the ecumenical community, the community of other faiths, civil movements and people's movements for a just economy and the integrity of creation and calls upon our member churches to do the same.
42. Now we proclaim with passion that we will commit ourselves, our time and our energy to changing, renewing and restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our descendants might live (Deut 30.19).

Terms used in the Accra Confession

Capital speculation – The buying, holding, and selling of stocks, bonds, commodities, currencies, collectibles, real estate, derivatives, or any valuable financial instrument to profit from fluctuations in its price as opposed to buying it for income or for use.

Commodification – Turning what is normally a non-commodity into a commodity. Assigning economic value to something that traditionally would not be considered in economic terms, for example, persons valued only according to the work they are able and/or forced to do, or nature valued only according to its consumer use-value.

Complicity – Association or participation in a wrongful or unjust act or system.

Deregulation – The process by which governments remove, reduce, or simplify restrictions on business and individuals with the intent of encouraging the efficient operation of markets. Regulations that provided protections to low-income people, farmers, local businesses, the environment, or other groups are often lost after deregulation.

Domination – Having unjustified control or power over persons, things, or nature. A totalitarian regime, for example, seeks to unjustifiably enforce political domination over its citizens.

Empire – The convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic, and military imperial interests, systems, and networks for the purpose of amassing political power and economic wealth. Empire typically forces and facilitates the flow of wealth and power from vulnerable persons, communities, and countries to the more powerful. The Bible is full of stories of empires rising, over-extending, and falling. Empire today crosses all boundaries, strips and reconstructs identities, subverts cultures, subordinates nation states, and can marginalize or co-opt religious communities.

Human trafficking – The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people for the purpose of making money. Trafficking involves a process of using illicit means such as threat, use of force, or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability.

Ideology – An ideology can be thought of as a comprehensive vision, a “lens” or “filter” through which the world is viewed, and/or as a set of ideas proposed by the dominant class of a society to its members. The purpose of an ideology is to promote a particular social, economic, or political model through a certain way of thinking about and understanding the world.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) – The international organization entrusted with overseeing the global financial system by monitoring exchange rates and balance of payments, as well as offering technical and financial assistance when asked. Many IMF policies have proven to be destructive of the people and economies of countries in the global South.

World Bank – Part of a group of financial institutions, the World Bank focuses on the reduction of global poverty and seeks to achieve this through the provision of low- or no-interest loans and grants to countries with little or no access to international credit markets. The World Bank (as a financial institution) also seeks to safeguard its own financial interests and has been criticized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments, people’s groups, and citizens for its structural adjustment programs (SAPs) which attempt to implement neo-liberal economic policies (i.e., deregulation and privatization) in the countries where the World Bank operates.

World Trade Organization (WTO) – The successor to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the WTO deals with the rules of trade between nations at a near-global level; it is responsible for negotiating and implementing new trade agreements, and is in charge of policing member countries’ adherence to all the WTO agreements, signed by the bulk of the world’s trading nations and ratified in their parliaments. The structure of the WTO allows the interests of the major industrialized countries of the global North to dominate the processes and agreements.

Liberalization – Liberalization is a relaxation of previous government regulations and protections which often occurs along with privatization. Liberalized and privatized public services may be dominated by just a few big companies, particularly in sectors with high capital costs, or high sunk cost, such as water, gas and electricity.

Neoliberalism/Neoliberal economics – In its dominant international use, neoliberalism refers to a political-economic philosophy that de-emphasizes or rejects government or other intervention in the economy; it would allow the market to operate without restraints or protections. In the U.S. and Canadian contexts neoliberal economics is more aligned with conservative and neoconservative political views than with liberal ones. Neoliberal economics focuses on free-market methods, fewer restrictions on business operations, and property rights, rather than human rights. It promotes the market as the primary engine of human economic activity, emphasizing competition and growth, and upholding individual self-interest over the common good. Neoliberal economic policies include privatization of services such as education, water, and health care; deregulation which often results in reduced rights and protections for workers and the environment; reductions in government spending on social programs, such as education, and erosions in the safety net for the poor; the free flow of investments, products, and jobs (but typically not persons) across national borders without restraint; and increased trade.

Oppression – The negative outcome experienced by persons who are marginalized or dominated by those in power in a particular society or social group. Oppression is primarily used to describe how a certain group is being kept down by unjust use of force, authority, or societal norms; the term itself is derived from the notion of being “weighted down.” Oppression is most commonly felt and expressed by a widespread, if unconscious, assumption that a certain group of people are inferior (i.e., persons of color or women). The Biblical prophets and Jesus preach frequently about bringing justice to the oppressed as integral to faith in God.

Privatization – The process of transforming property, businesses or natural resources (e.g., water) from public ownership or trust to private ownership and/or transferring the management of a service or activity from the government to the private sector. Corporate profits, not the good of the community or country, become the overriding concern.

Using the Accra Confession with your congregation

- Read the Accra Confession together and, at the end of a section or the document, look up some of the Bible verses and discuss the ones that are most applicable to your local (or regional) economic context. Which ones do you see as applicable to the current global economic context? What Bible stories related to economic justice are missing in the Accra Confession?
- The Accra Confession is a faith statement that commits churches to “covenant in obedience to God’s will as an act of faithfulness in mutual solidarity and in accountable relationships.” This covenant “binds us together to work for justice in the economy and the earth both in our

common global context as well as our various regional and local settings. In what ministries of economic and environmental justice-making are your congregation and/or community groups presently engaged? What are some of the economic or environmental injustices that your community or neighboring communities face?

- In the Bible, Jesus teaches us that that we cannot serve God and Mammon (Lk 16:13). The Accra Confession calls us to reject today’s culture of rampant consumerism based on our faith in God. Name some examples of consumerism that you see in your daily lives and in the world. How does consumerism keep you from fully loving yourself, others, and God and from caring for Creation? How might consumerism contribute to the suffering of other persons and creation?
- Numbers 17-36 of the Accra Confession are written in liturgical confessional form. Are there ways in which such statements of confession, belief, commitment, and praise might be incorporated into your congregation’s worship? The liturgy from the Trade Week of Action Resource may be helpful in putting together the worship service; go to www.tradeweek.org/typo3/en/worship.html.

Resources for further study

Books

Blank, Rebecca M. and William McGurn. *Is the Market Moral? A Dialogue on Religion, Economics, and Justice*. Washington: Brookings Institute, 2004.

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Denominational resources

Christian Reformed Church in North America – *Shalom Seekers: Living the Call to Do Justice*. www.crcjustice.org.

Presbyterian Church in Canada – *God is Our Refuge: Security in an Insecure World, part 1*. Report of the International Affairs Committee to 129th General Assembly, 2003. Acts and Proceedings, pp. 297-309. *God is Our Refuge: Security in an Insecure World, part 2*. Report of the International Affairs Committee to 130th General Assembly, 2004. Acts and Proceedings, pp. 310-324.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) – *Just Globalization: Justice, Ownership, and Accountability*. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) PDS#OGA-06-090, 2006. www.pcusa.org/acswp or www.pcusa.org/oga

Reformed Church in America – *Globalization, Ethics, and the Earth*. Minutes of the General Synod/June 2005, pp. 344-364.

United Church of Christ – *A Faithful Response: Calling for a More Just, Humane Direction for Economic Globalization*. A Pronouncement by the General Synod XXIV, 2003. www.ucc.org/justice/issues/pdfs/A-Faithful-Response-Calling-for-a-More-Just-Humane-Direction-for-Economic-Globalization.pdf.

United Church of Canada – *Living Faithfully in the Midst of Empire*. A Preliminary Report to the 39th General Council of the United Church of Canada, August 2006.

Learn more about:

- WARC and Covenanting for Justice at www.warc.ch.
- the regional arm of WARC in North America and the Caribbean, CANAAC (Caribbean and North American Area Council) at www.canaac.org.
- how your church can be involved in the Covenanting for Justice movement in North America by contacting the Rev. Gretel Van Wieren, coordinator of the North American Covenanting for Justice Working Group, at gretel.vanwieren@yale.edu.

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