

APPENDIX H POLICY ON GENDER JUSTICE

POLICY ON GENDER JUSTICE

- a. Introduction
- b. The Scope and Objectives of the Policy
- c. Biblical and Theological Foundation of Gender Justice
- d. Gender Justice Premised in the Doctrine and Faith of the UPCSA
- e. The Story of Gender Justice in the UPCSA
- f. The Concepts from the Perspective of the UPCSA
- g. The Guiding Principles
- h. Guidelines for Realisation of Gender Justice in the UPCSA
- i. Scope and Application of the Policy
- j. Authority of the Policy

INTRODUCTION

The good news is that God created all things through Jesus Christ, in an overflow of divine love, and thus created them all very good. All the vast universe is the theatre of God's glory. The heavens declare this glory, and human beings were created to glorify the Creator in word and deed: by delighting in communion with God and with one another, by rejoicing in creation and the blessings of life on earth, and by loving and serving God and one another. This remains God's purpose for humankind and is the reason why we exist. But humankind has fallen into sin, and sin brings us all under divine judgement.

(Manual of Faith and Order. Prelude to Chapter 2)

1. The Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) seeks to establish a just and equitable society for all – men and women. The latest and overarching development towards this pursuit has been the establishment of the Gender Desk, as per the resolution of the 2018 General Assembly. The Gender Desk has played the advocacy role and conceptualised the struggle for gender justice in the UPCSA. Through a variety of processes, the Gender Desk defined how gender justice should be understood. It also delineated the behaviours and actions which amount to and border on injustice and expressed uncompromisingly the need to fight against gender inequalities and inequities. It condemned gender-based violence and femicide. Gender justice, thus, is conceived as an ongoing

journey of prayer that is motivated by the Spirit. Gender justice includes just and right relationships, mutual respect and accountability, respect for creation and the rights of all people to live life in all its fullness. Gender justice addresses gender and economic injustice, gender-based violence and a whole range of social issues that are rooted in unequal power relations. It is a fundamental building block for church and society.

2. Gender justice is not just a women's concern or a concern about women only, but instead, is an issue for everyone, seeking to ensure that both men and women co-exist without any discrimination, undermining or prejudice. It seeks to address and dismantle patriarchy, which controls women's labour, sexualities, and fertility. Patriarchy also stereotypes and marginalizes men, who have been socialized into deeply held beliefs and values on what their roles should be. Patriarchy defines masculinity as showing bravery, virility, aggressiveness, dominance, competitiveness, and emotional repression. Men are often socialized into not dealing with their emotions, fears, and vulnerabilities. Men have a vested interest in changing these stereotypes so that they can become better sons, fathers, brothers, partners, lovers, and humans. Gender justice requires all genders to work together in partnership. It prepares women to occupy their rightful position in the society without seeking any favours. It empowers women to see men as fellow human beings in God's design, created in the image of God in a similar manner as women are created in the image of God.
3. Gender justice should be seen as an ongoing journey of prayer motivated by the Spirit. It is integral to our spiritual growth and must be realized in our right relationship with God. Gender perspectives require us to examine and unravel power relations across the breadth of gender identities, paying particular attention to those persons in the intersections of gender and race, colour, sexuality, class, disability, poverty, and social status. Our continuing concern and commitment to transformative gender justice is firmly rooted in the story and mission of the Church, the UPCSA particularly. Beyond formal equality, we are challenged to examine the deeper questions of substantive equality, that is, of achieving equitable outcomes, and thus creating a true community for all. God rejoices when we celebrate spirituality with holiness and integrity.

THE SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

4. This Gender Justice Policy is created to transform who we are, what we do, and how we act.
Grounded in respect for the body, it fosters physical, emotional, and spiritual health and wholeness. This policy is rooted in the scriptures and anchors on the Manual of Faith and Order of the UPCSA, and the constitutions of the countries the UPCSA operates in, in relation to the human rights enshrined therein. It is envisaged that this policy will assist the denomination in identifying positive actions to address all gender relations. It is supplemented by a Gender Desk Action Plan on Gender Justice. This policy will also help the denomination to deliberately or intentionally assist those genders that have been disadvantaged especially women and children in the church. It is envisaged that women will, through this policy, be recognised as having been created in the image and the likeness of God. Therefore, they should occupy leadership positions without prejudice and push their own agendas in the church without being judged based on their gender. Their voices must be heard. Through this policy, the UPCSA will be able to celebrate and restore the human dignity of all genders within the denomination. The objectives of this Gender Justice Policy include the following:
 - a. Transformation of the UPCSA and its communities so that God's desire for gender justice is realized and that human dignity is ensured for all.
 - b. Articulation and re-construction of our theology of gender justice built on sound principles of theological reflections.
 - c. Transformed Councils and structures of the UPCSA to ensure the full, just, and equitable participation of all persons in all aspects of church life.
 - d. Creation of safe environments to end marginalization and the abuse of persons by implementing policies and oversight mechanisms that address gender-based violence and sexual harassment.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF GENDER JUSTICE

5. When we celebrate Holy Communion, there are words that read as follows: "If, when you are bringing your gift to the altar, you remember that your brother has a grievance against you, leave your gift where it is before the altar. Go,

make your peace with your brother (and sister), and only then come and offer your gift." Christian men and women should understand that to continue bringing their gifts to the altar when they know that they continue with their discrimination of each other and have in their hearts this grievance is a travesty of gender justice. It is playing church. In Genesis 1:27, it is written, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Both male and female were created equally by God. God did not give a man a better blessing than a woman but blessed them equally and gave them a responsibility. Anybody in the church who believes that women are less beings than men should be judged of preaching heresy. The UPCSAs, through this policy, should remind all in the church that human beings are a creation of God and should be treated and viewed as such.

6. During Jesus' ministry, we are also provided with evidence that Jesus promoted the dignity and equality of women. In cases where women were despised, looked down upon, ill-treated, made to be outcasts in the society, Jesus came in and turned the tables, restored the broken people, sat and dined with them, promoted them to leadership positions, and made them His disciples. This is so clear when we read the story of the Samaritan woman (John 4) and in the stories of Mary and Martha (John 11). The role of women during the ministry of Jesus Christ is well documented in the New Testament. The church has no reason therefore to misquote the Bible when it wants to oppress women. The UPCSAs need to do what Jesus Christ did, to promote the fullness of life and to allow women to flourish and have life to its fullness.

GENDER JUSTICE PREMISED IN THE DOCTRINE AND FAITH OF THE UPCSAs

7. The UPCSAs' Manual of Faith and Order covers adequately the rationale for gender justice. See Chapter 2, para 1.1.
8. The UPCSAs is inclusive and welcomes all into the body of Christ. There should be no discrimination of whatever sort. See Chapter 2: "The Faith of the Church", paras 1.1. to 1.7, 20.1. to 20.4 and 22.8.
9. To conclude this section, we draw attention to the Declaration of the Church in Southern Africa which is shown below:

"We believe in the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe in the Father, who created and rules all the world, who will unite all things in Christ and who wants all his people to live together as brothers and sisters in one family. We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son, who became human and lived and died and rose in triumph to reconcile both the individual and the world to God, to break down every separating barrier of race, culture or class, and to unite all God's people into one body. He is exalted as Lord over all, the only Lord over every area of life. He summons both the individual and society, both the Church and the State, to seek justice and freedom for all and reconciliation and unity between all. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the foretaste of God's coming reign, who gives the Church power to proclaim the good news to all the world, to love and serve all people, to strive for justice and peace, to warn the individual and the nation of God's judgement and to summon them both to repent and trust and obey Jesus Christ as the King who will come in glory."

10. In later developments, the 2012 General Assembly adopted the current vision and mission of the UPCSA, which read as follows:

Our Vision

To be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ.

Our Mission

We will proclaim our Triune God in Southern Africa through

- *Bearing witness to the saving love of Jesus Christ;*
- *Building vital, reforming congregations for worship, ministry and discipleship; and*
- *Visibly proclaiming the Kingdom of God through unity, justice, peace and love.*

THE STORY OF GENDER JUSTICE IN THE UPCSA

11. The UPCSA, from its establishment in 1999, embarked on efforts to establish gender justice. The 2000 General Assembly passed the following resolutions, among others:
- 11.1 The Assembly urges Presbyteries to
- a. appoint Gender Issues Committees; and
 - b. give them copies of the first report of the Assembly's Gender Issues Committee.

- 11.2 The Assembly urges Sessions to
 - a. appoint women as well as men as commissioners to Presbytery; and
 - b. move towards parity in the number of men and women appointed as Commissioners to General Assembly.
- 11.3 The Assembly instructs all ministers in the UPCSAs, to make clear to their congregations that God may call women as well as men to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments.
- 11.4 The Assembly agrees to call on women as well as men, encourage suitable women as well, to consider whether they may be called to the ministry.
- 11.5 The Assembly urges all vacancy committees to consider all women as well as men among available ministers in deciding whom to nominate for a call.
12. There has been a long period of lull, where there was not much push towards the realisation of gender justice until the Ecumenical Relationships Committee of the General Assembly initiated the move towards the establishment of the Gender Desk in 2018. Eventually, the 2019 Executive Commission endorsed the establishment of the Gender Desk under the Church in Society Committee of the General Assembly. Thus far, the Gender Desk is the custodian of the gender justice initiatives. Its approach is informed by Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it." The objectives of the Gender Desk are as follows:
 - a. Building solid relationships between all genders.
 - b. To promote a culture of a Godfearing community.
 - c. Respond to all gender – based violence cases within the denomination.
 - d. Create a safe space/environment for all the victims/survivors of GBV.
 - e. Objective availability and listening to all without judging, by creating independent structures. that will deal with all cases of GBV.
 - f. Promote awareness and accountability.
 - g. To promote gender equity between men and women.
 - h. Promote the role of the gender desk of the general assembly of the UPCSAs.

- i. Assist and equip presbyteries with tools to respond as quickly as possible to all gender-based violence taking place within presbyteries.
- j. Investigate effective ways to prevent gender-based violence and to implement those.
- k. To put measures in place that will assist in eliminating all forms of harassment and discrimination, especially in the advertisements of employment of ministers by congregations of the UPCSА.
- l. To promote the vision of the UPCSА.

THE CONCEPTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE UPCSА

13. **Gender Equality:** As pre-empted in the excerpts from the Manual of Faith and Order, gender equality is about the equality of all and there should be no discrimination on any grounds, including age, sex, disability, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, or social status (marital status included). See MFO Chapter 7, section 7.53 St Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). "The equality and differentiation of women and men is based on their God-given, natural, biological, and specific personal constitution. Gender inequality is not a "women's issue" but should concern and engage men as well as women." (Catholic Gender Policy). The UPCSА has an obligation to affirm women that gender equality is a human right that is enshrined in the Bible. There is no reason whatsoever for men to discriminate against women.
14. **The Rights of Women and Men to Integrity:** All members of the UPCSА have the full right to integrity. They have the right to decide on what is right or not right for their bodies without certain individuals deciding on their behalf. No one in the UPCSА should be superior to the other. Every member should treat each other with integrity. Women should be given a space to make informed decisions about their bodies without the church exerting unnecessary pressure. For example, it is a democratic right for a woman to decide on whether/when to get married and/or not to get married, when to have children and/or not have children. It is, therefore, wrong and sinful for the denomination to allow the discrimination of those who do not want to get married not to be considered for employment by certain congregations. This infringes on human integrity.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

15. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. (Psalm 24:1)" All human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, all should be treated equally. We should love the other the same way as we love ourselves. Women should, therefore, be afforded the same opportunities as men. All Sessions should implement paragraph 7.53 of the Manual of Faith and Order when appointing Elders for Session. Women should be afforded equal chances as men to reach their full potential within the Councils and structures of the UPCS. The UPCS should be cognisant of the different backgrounds of women within its ranks. For example, some come from rural areas with different needs and disadvantages, others are disabled and others young. These factors should be taken into consideration when opportunities are being created. Hence, there is need for proper needs analysis.

GUIDELINES FOR REALISATION OF GENDER JUSTICE IN THE UPCS

16. This policy sets out the guidelines that should be followed towards the actualisation of gender justice in the UPCS. It is imperative that all the structures of the UPCS should implement and promote the guidelines:
 - a. **Women Empowerment:** This is essential as it is one of the tools to expose power dynamics in the church. When women are empowered, they will see the inequality and unequal power relations. It is through empowerment that women will begin to realise the need to be in control of their own lives, to demand equal participation in the denominational processes and demand that their voices be heard and not only in church but also in their own homes and in the society.
 - b. **Gender Equality:** It is compelling to the UPCS to integrate women in all the Committees, Councils, programmes, and structure of the church, not only to be members but to be in leadership positions even in all the strategic Committees of General Assembly.
 - c. **Equal Partnership:** Women should always be included in plans of shaping the present and the future of the denomination. The denomination needs to create an environment where women can articulate their needs, their

interests, and their own visions about the future of the church and about the issues that affect them now in the church. The decisions of women in this regard should be respected and taken seriously.

- d. **Collaboration with other Ministries:** To achieve the transformation envisaged by the UPCSА, it will be important to synchronise all the efforts towards the realisation of gender justice and encourage the Gender Desk to work hand in hand with other women and men's organisations within and outside of the UPCSА. Within the UPCSА, the Fellowships should be given priority. The UPCSА General Assembly already resolved that the Fellowships should be fully represented in the following Committee of the General Assembly: Priorities and Resources, Church in Society, Finance, and Mission and Discipleship. Other Committees may be considered.
- e. **Relationships Building and Healing of Memories:** The church that works as a unit has a better chance of achieving more. Working together and respecting one another's viewpoints are key. This only happens when people have good relationships, based on mutual respect. The UPCSА needs to build bridges when all will be able to find each other. This includes opening the wounds of the past and allow a space for healing to take place. It is envisaged that the UPCSА will undergo a process of redress. The General Assembly already resolved to establish a "Truth and Reconciliation" like structure to help the members to deal with the past and be able to move forward trusting each other.
- f. **Transformation:** The advertisements for vacancies in all the levels of the denomination should be written in a language that protects the dignity of all people. The language should be inclusive and the requirements for the job should not be discriminating, especially according to gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, and marital status. We should all strive for life affirming communities.
- g. **Representation:** There should be equal representation of genders in all the structures of the UPCSА. This should not be about the numbers only, but skills and abilities.

APPLICATION OF THE POLICY

17. This policy applies and binds all those who are full members of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (by baptism). The Council should ensure that the policy is

applied at all the levels of the UPCSA, particularly in the congregations.

AUTHORITY OF THE POLICY

18. This policy, having been adopted by the General Assembly in 2023, will have full binding authority to all the members of the UPCSA. It will form part of the laws of the denomination. All the Councils will be responsible for the enforcement of the tenets of this policy in their areas of jurisdiction. The Church in Society Committee, through the Gender Desk, is the custodian of this policy.