



UCCSA Newsletter

United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

July 2010

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Statement by UCCSA General Secretary: Calling for a welcoming spirit

The UCCSA Office has been receiving calls from Zimbabweans living in South Africa, requesting to be repatriated back to their country. The reason for this is that there is a malicious rumour doing the rounds that there will be a repeat of the May 2008 xenophobic attacks immediately after the world cup. We call on community leaders to address this unfortunate threatening of people's life and property. We also implore the police to be on high alert in order to avoid the repeat of what happened two years ago. South Africa has done itself and the continent of Africa proud by hosting a very successful and enjoyable soccer world cup and we do not want to blemish that through violence and intolerance of fellow Africans.

We also call on all churches and civil society groups to do what they can to encourage tolerance, peace and hospitality in their communities. We pray that these rumours and threats will come to naught and that ubuntu and our welcoming spirit will prevail.

Issued by the office of the General Secretary,
Rev. Dr. Prince Dibeela

UCCSA MISSION CONFERENCE Christ is Calling Us: Participating in suffering and struggle

The 35th Assembly of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) meeting in Molepolole in 2009 agreed to hold a Mission Conference with the view to discerning more faithfully what our missiological challenges are. Although the UCCSA has operated with a vision plan for the last four years, we have not afforded ourselves an opportunity for an in-depth missiological discussion to anchor our ministry and witness. The conference will therefore open space for us to share, discuss and come up with ideas for acts of faith in our current context.

The UCCSA as a church in five countries operates within a variegated and complex politico-economic situation that requires ingenuity, imagination and a spirituality that is at the cutting-edge. It can no longer be assumed that we know what the issues are and where we should be going, or that, in a constantly changing environment, that there is consensus on God's mission for our times. Through the Mission conference we hope to establish a culture of theological dialogue that will inform our programmatic work as well as our ecclesiological trajectories.

The Conference is to be held under the theme, Christ is calling us: participating in suffering and struggle. It will be knitted around the spoken word and dialogue, prayer, reflection, fellowship, and hearing and experiencing stories of suffering and struggle.

We hope that through this conversation we will be able to re-look at the use of our resources in such a way that it reflects our covenantal and justice ethos. In a world where the standard is determined by neo-liberal culture we have to seek just ways of using resources informed by our theological and missiological understanding.

The Objectives of the Mission Conference are:

- Create space for prayer, theological reflection and spiritual renewal
- Seek opportunities for immersion in the struggles of communities
- Listen to voices of ministry practitioners, political and social activists
- Develop life-affirming actions that will lead to a new accent in our missional expression
- Provide a platform for continuing missiological discourse that will inform behaviour, practice and the ecclesiological shape of the UCCSA in the coming months and years

The Mission Conference will involve participatory processes that shall involve a movement from seeing- analysis- and leading to faithful action.

New CWM general secretary



Rev Dr Collin Cowan has been selected to be CWM's new general secretary.

Rev Dr Collin Cowan has been selected to serve as CWM general secretary

Dr Cowan, general secretary of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands (UCJCI), will begin his new role at the start of 2011.

In his acceptance speech to CWM's trustees, meeting in Hong Kong, he expressed humility and gratitude for the vote of confidence the organisation had shown in calling him to such an esteemed position.

Dr Cowan, 52, said he intends to promote a "partnership of peace", and would be committed to making CWM an "agent of peace-making". He also welcomed the opportunity to develop a close-knit working team with existing staff at CWM

and paid tribute to the present general secretary Rev Dr Des van der Water, who completes his term at the end of 2010.

He said that he expected to be held accountable to the highest level of performance by the Trustees as he embarks upon an exciting new era for CWM.

The appointment comes at a critical time for CWM. The charity is undertaking a major review of its life, work and mission, and its trustees are currently discussing a new strategy that will take CWM forward into the next decade.

In his new role Dr Cowan will be looking to spearhead the implementation of this strategy alongside CWM's 31 member churches worldwide.

CWM must stand with poor

"CWM must stand with the poor" - that was the resounding message from CWM moderator Rev Dr Prince Dibeela to the charity's trustees on day one of CWM's Trustee Body meeting in Hong Kong.

Against a background of economic upheaval, environmental destruction and increased marginalisation of ethnic groups across the globe, he challenged CWM to move away from "desktop theology" to "street-talk theology" in order to allow the voices of the oppressed and marginalised to be heard.

"Our dream is to stand with the poor and to stand where God stands," he said. "We need to change our world view. We must refute the lies of empire and unlearn the things that empire has taught us about issues of power and our relationship with the environment."

The moderator challenged CWM's 31 trustees at the start of the week-long proceedings in Hong Kong where they have met to review CWM's work and direction for the next decade.

CWM has been conducting a series of reviews of its current, management, governance and location. Reports from these reviews will be presented alongside recommendations for a strategy that will direct CWM's work until 2020.

In his opening address Dr Dibeela said it was time for CWM to transform itself from a ecumenical movement that talks to a charity that acts.

"Let us welcome change, embrace the positives and learn lessons from the negatives of the past. I encourage you to be creative and collaborative. Our theology must emerge from the ground but not remain there. It must come alive in our relationships and when we come together. We must move away from the rhetoric to more transformational theology and actions."

He also went on to challenge the trustees about raising their voices against global capitalism and asked them where they thought CWM stood on world issues of justice and poverty – the conflict in Palestine in particular - and whether CWM should play a greater role in challenging G8 countries and confronting global capitalism.

During the opening proceedings, trustees also got the chance to hear from Rev Dr Jerry Pillay who presented the charity's strategy for the next nine years. The group will be given the opportunity to discuss the issues presented before making decisions on strategy proposals later this week.

WCRC head shares new focus for mission



First elected president of the recently formed World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and CWM member-church leader Rev Dr Jerry Pillay has talked of his hopes for the WCRC to build unity and drive change through mission.

Dr Pillay, who is also a CWM trustee and general secretary of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, told a media conference that he wanted the WCRC to join with member churches, "in being prophetic, in solidarity where that is needed, but also more particularly in working towards change, be it political, social, economic."

"That for me is mission," he added.

The World Alliance of Reformed Churches merged with the Reformed Ecumenical Council to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches at a special uniting ceremony at the Grand Rapids, United States, between 18 and 26 June.

The new ecumenical body groups 227 member churches representing 80 million Christians in 108 countries.

Mr Pillay said that through the organisation he wants to strengthen links with other Christian traditions and to be involved in dialogue with people of other faiths.

"I hope we will be able to create an impact in the world," he said. "Our focus is not just as Reformed churches, but our focus is about Christian mission, how we engage the world in the name of Christ. That will also define our programmes, our structure of operations and our objectives."

He added: "Mission does not exclude other faiths. Mission is about people who are not part of the same Christian faith."

AFRICAN REFORMED CELEBRATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AFRICAN AND REFORMED

Jon Calvin (10 July 1509 – 27 May 1564), father of the Reformed Tradition is being celebrated worldwide on Reformation Sunday. Elsewhere 500 years of the Reformed Tradition has been commemorated since 2009, but in Southern Africa Reformed Churches want to celebrate their reformed heritage by gathering the Reformed family in a conference during the weekend of 29 -31 October 2010. The eMseni Methodist conference centre in Gauteng will be used for the event which should bring together over two hundred delegates and visitors. Each of the nine Reformed Churches is asked to send 20 delegates to the conference which will be conducted under the theme: "African Reformed Celebration:

What does it mean to be African and Reformed? A programme and logistics committee is hard at work planning worship, bible studies and discussions during the weekend. Dr Setri Nyomi from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches will be the Sunday preacher, while various prominent scholars have been invited to conduct bible studies and lead electives on themes like: Reformed Worship in Africa; Reformed Public Life and Justice; Developing a Spirituality for Reformed Christians in Africa; The Relevance of Reformed Theology for Dialogue with Pentecostalism; and What is Reformed Theology?

Churches have been informed about their financial obligations and are expected to submit names of their youth and women sensitive delegations by 30 July.

10th INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON CALVIN RESEARCH 2010

All interested are cordially invited to the 10th International Congress on Calvin Research, hosted by the University of the Free State between 22 and 27 August 2010. More than 70 international scholars will be attending. The Congress provides a platform for international scholarly discussion of the latest historical and theological research on Calvin and the 16th century. In addition it aims to further the next generation of scholars. Two workshops in particular designed for postgraduate students are therefore incorporated in the programme and will be facilitated by international academics. The focus is on research methodology.

The Congress meets in Bloemfontein between 22 and 27 August 2010 – for the first time ever in Africa. The programme consists of keynote presentations, seminars and short papers, with adequate time for discussion. The Congress also makes an excursion to the Morija Theological Seminary in Lesotho. The Programme and Registration Form are attached or can be visited at the relevant website. If attending, please forward a completed Registration Form before or on 8 August 2010 to the organisers.

PARTICULARS

DATE: 22-27 August 2010
 VENUE: Centenary Complex, University of the Free State
 CONFERENCE FEE: R2000.00 (Registration Fee included; Breakfast and Lodging excluded)
 DAY TARIFS: Sunday: R150
 POSTGRADUATE WORKSHOP: R50.00 per workshop
 REGISTRATION FORM:
<http://www.ufs.ac.za/faculties/index.php?FCode=09>
 PROGRAMME:
<http://www.ufs.ac.za/faculties/index.php?FCode=09>
 ENQUIRIES : Me Annelien Labuschagne & Prof Dolf Britz

**UCCSA NAMIBIA SYNOD
 MINISTRY TO THE ELDERLY**

The UCCSA has agreed to add new ministry focus areas to the responsibilities of the Mission Council. One of these are Ministry to the Elderly.

The Namibia Synod of the UCCSA shares with us some of the work done by elderly and retired persons as the ministers and reach out to one another.

Here are some of the things they do:

SOUP KICTENS

The elderly also comes together every second week to give soup to the sick and poor.



The elderly comes together, UCCSA, VGK and the Christian women's organization to give soup and bread to the elderly when waiting to receive their pension because of long lines.

ELDERLY PARTICIPATING IN CHURCH SERVICES AND OTHER RETATED EVENTS:

The Elderly comes together as an organization to participate in talks, discusses, praying and worshipping.

The elderly at Windhoek Church gets a food parcel each month.



The older population of the Windhoek area alone presents a true mission field to be explored – not only because the numbers are large but also because the spiritual needs are so great. Older adults also represent an untapped group of people who have a need for participation in the total life of the church. A vital church ministry for seniors will not happen on its own. Namibia Synod has a well thought out plan for reaching and ministering to seniors. The leadership of the church has developed a unified vision – a heart and a burden, for ministering to older people. This vision must expand to include, not only those already within the Windhoe Church and Namibia Synod, but those out in the community as well.

Not only are people living longer these day, they are enjoying living longer. Longer life expectancies translate into better health and vigor enjoyed by older people. Today's seniors have realized that retirement doesn't necessarily mean the rocking chair. Many love to travel, sightsee, exercise, have

fun, make new friends and do all the things they were too busy to do when they were working.

by Jimmy Elliot Heyman : Ministry to and by the Elderly

UCCSA JUSTICE WEEK
27 September - 02 October 2010
ANTI -POVERTY WEEK

The focus of the 2010 UCCSA Justice Week will be on ANTI - POVERTY

The main aims of Anti-Poverty Week are to:

- Strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship around the world
- Encourage research, discussion and action to address these problems, including action by individuals, communities, organizations and churches

Everyone who is interested in helping to reduce poverty and hardship here or overseas are encouraged to organize their own activities during the Week or join in events being by others.

What are we expected to do - especially the Youth of UCCSA:

- Raise your voice and make sure that you challenge the unjust structures in society.
- Learn, pray and take action through the week.
- Hold a church service for Homelessness Sunday or Poverty Action Sunday
- Explore the theme with children and young people.
- Raise funds for vital projects and campaigns.

Its our time to act

An Exciting Opportunity is coming in 2011

"Now that the World Cup has come and gone Forget South Africa 2010, Its Scotland 2011" The world cup was being held in South Africa and there was a lot of excitement surrounding it, but now there is something far more exciting happening between UCCSA /UFCSO IN 2011. A group of young people from the UCCSA and a group of young people from the UF Church will work together for three weeks, spreading the word of God in and around Scotland! "We have a passion for our faith, so we intend to put that in good use"

August 2011 will be a really exciting time for the United Free Church of Scotland as teams of young people from UCCSA and the UF will reach out with congregations to the people of Scotland with the Good News of Jesus! The visit and mission will run for three weeks in August beginning with an orientation weekend for all involved and then time spent at a variety of projects around Scotland. This is the second part of the Africa Trip, which took place in 2008 when a group of young people from the UF Church came to Southern Africa. The young people from the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa will join the young people of Scotland for three weeks.

What will happen during the three weeks?

The team of around 24 young people, half from UCCSA half from Scotland, will meet together at the beginning of August for an orientation weekend. We will have the chance to get to know one another before splitting into 2 or 3 smaller teams and heading to the area and project(s) we have chosen to work in. The projects have all been suggested by the congregations of the UF and include schools work, summer clubs, musical projects, practical work and detached youth work with evangelistic outreach services and evenings. The members of the congregations' chosen will work alongside the team to reach out into their communities.

Why is this important?

When you look at Scotland today it is a far cry from what it should be. Statistics show that drugs, crime, poverty, teenage pregnancy and unemployment are on the rise, while church attendance is falling. People in poor situations and people in affluent situations need to know God equally. This mission gives us the opportunity to do several things:

- 1) To reach out to people in Jesus' name and tell them the Good News,
- 2) To work with Christian young people of different cultures and learn together,
- 3) To redress the balance of mission, we were once a nation who sent missionaries out, now we need missionaries here!
- 4) To reignite a passion for God's word and sharing it with people. As young people we have a passion for God and a commitment to living His way, we need to help others restore that passion once again!

This venture is something that really excites us and we hope it will excite you too!

How will the team be chosen?

Application packs will be sent out to young people both in the UF and UCCSA. Once these application forms have been completed and sent to the Church Office or Synod (Southern Africa), the applicants will be asked to come for an informal interview with the planning group. Applications are invited from those who will be 18-30 in August 2011 and who have an active church connection. The selection process will include references, and the emphasis will be on choosing those who will make the most suitable team for the particular work that will be carried out. The application process will be the same in Scotland and Southern Africa. A reference will also be asked for by your minister in support of your application. This allows your congregation to be aware of your desire to be part of this and to support you in it. Those who wish to apply must be able to work as part of a team.

Training and support:

There will be several meetings of the team beforehand to cover a variety of issues relating to the trip. Training will be given on working in schools, evangelism, music and drama, cultural differences etc. An orientation programme is being prepared and will be sent to those accepted on the team. Prayer support is essential and we will keep you informed so that people can pray about each aspect of the mission. Once both halves of the team are in Scotland, we will have a training and orientation weekend and a closing weekend to allow for the team as a whole to come back together for de briefing.

Further information and application forms from:
Youth Visit 2011 : www.uccsa.co.za
Wellington Mthobisi Sibanda - UCCSA Youth Convenor

People In the UCCSA Central Office:

Working in the UCCSA Central Office are a number of persons who offer support to the General Secretary in his ministry to the denomination.

They are persons who work behind the scenes to meet the needs of local churches, Regions and Synod.

This month we meet three of them:



Monalisa Bhebe : Monalisa is the Personal Assistant to the General Secretary. She comes from Zimbabwe and is a member of the Trinity Congregational Church in Johannesburg.



Noloyiso Lolo Lwana : Noloyiso or Lolo as she is called by most is the receptionist and general assistant in the office. Lolo hails from Kagiso in Johannesburg and belongs to the Kagison Congregational Church.



Thomas Mmolo; Thomas joined the staff at the beginning of 2010 after the retirement of Oom Freddy. Thomas is responsible for looking after the Joseph Wing Centre. He also serves as driver and would be the first person to meet visitors to the Office that need to be picked up at the Airport.

New UCCSA Website

After months of struggling to get the old website working properly, a new website has been launched. The new site can be accessed at www.uccsa.co.za.

Although the site has been launched, it is still a work in progress. We hope that soon it will be completed to the extent that it serves as a meaningful communication tool for all of us within the UCCSA.

A new addition to the Website is the UCCSA Website Well

Water is a necessity for life. Its preciousness is almost incomparable. It is not surprising then that the Bible devotes so much space to stories about water, especially its scarcity in a dry land like Israel. When rivers dried up wells were dug as is still the case in many rural communities. The well has therefore turned out to be a social centre while serving as a source of life.

It is for this reason that we have chosen to name this site the "UCCSA Website Well". It is designed to serve as a point of gathering of the community where we can meet and share experiences of faith. It is hoped that the visits to the Well will

be points of refreshment, encouragement for the journey of life.

We shall follow a wide range of themes and relate reflections to current issues in our neighbourhoods and worldwide. The overall theme of justice will be kept in sight all the time because justice can not be an option for Africa, it is like life-giving water.

Struggling for justice at the well Exodus 2:15b – 19

Sometimes people get so much abused by systems and practices that it becomes almost a way of life for them. Take the case of Zipporah and her sisters who had to suffer the bullying by the shepherds that it came as a surprise for their father to see them return home earlier than usual. They recounted how they had been helped by an Egyptian stranger, who even drew water for their flock.

The well is a source of water, a very precious resource without which no life can survive. And as often happens whenever there is not enough of resources to go around, the stronger and more powerful "grab and gobble" without regard to the weak, elderly and the powerless. What does this story imply for us today?

Firstly, we need to recognise that we live in a greedy world where the powerful will selfishly monopolise the resources. The weaker individuals and nations are often left to scramble for the scraps.

Secondly, the weak and disadvantaged need to team up, stand against the oppressive systems and fight for justice. Unity is essential if we are to defeat the oppressive systems. One can see from the story that it was the implied teamwork of Moses and the daughters of Reuel that tilted the scales in their favour.

Thirdly we have to make a deliberate choice for the weak and downtrodden. Moses' action of selflessness opened up, later, new ways of relating, where "an Egyptian stranger and fugitive, finds a home and becomes a son (in law) to Reuel the priest of Midian.

Let us conclude our reflection at the well today with a challenge to assess areas of our lives and economic systems where there is no fair share of God-given resources. Plan a response and take initiative in unity and partnership to fight for justice.

Prayer and Action Thought:

Lord, give me an eye to see the injustices and abuses that your children are subjected to on a daily basis. May you also grant me courage and strength to act wisely in all the situations that you will call me to. Amen

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The editors reserve the right to edit and or shorten articles.