

United Congregational Church of Southern Africa Newsletter

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36TH ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

NEW UCCSA LEADERSHIP 2011 TO 2013



President
Rev. Basil Manning



President-Elect
Rev. Phillip Strydom



Imm. Past President
Rev. Hendrick Pillay



General Secretary
Rev. Dr. Prince Dibeela



Treasurer
Mrs. Florence Norris



Prof. Thabo Masihleho
INVESTMENTS CHAIRPERSON



Rev. Aubrey Ntshakang
MISSION COUNCIL CONVENOR



Rev. Muriel Mothibi
TMC CHAIRPERSON



Reflections on The 36th UCCSA Assembly – Matola - Mozambique!

The General Assembly of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa ended its first-ever meeting in Mozambique.



I was blessed to attend the Assembly along with Rev. Sandra Gourdet, Africa Regional Executive for Global Ministries, the UCC-Disciples Mission partnership. During the Assembly Sandra was honored for her many years of peacemaking ministry in Africa.

The Assembly was a gathering place for the rich diversity of UCCSA...with its numerous ethnic groups, five nations and multiple language groups. In deference to our hosts, many of the sessions were translated into Portuguese. The

Our gatherings took place in a large assembly hall on the campus of Mozambique's Frelimo Party training center in Matola.

The food was prepared by women (and a few men) from the seven Congregational Churches nearby. We may have grumbled at the limited variety but their accomplishment in serving ample food for the crowd at each meal was amazing.

The business agenda seemed remarkably familiar: restructuring, financial shortfalls, inclusivity, incorporation of youth, standards for ministry/just compensation, etc. Delegates were not shy about going to the microphone but the detailed proceedings were expedited as the Assembly President would precede each vote by asking "agreed?" .

This was surrounded by fabulous hospitality from UCCSA's Mozambique constituency and lively, inspiring worship. Songs and spirit-filled dances filled the air spontaneously adding a faith-filled dimension to the proceedings. The preaching was spectacular!

Global Ministries personnel Jon and Dawn Barnes relocated earlier this year with their two children from South Africa to new ministries in Mozambique. Together with their two children they are settling in to this new environment with its horrific disparities between wealth and abject poverty. They will be working with the churches to address issues of food security and HIV/Aids.

Many thanks to our UCCSA partners for inviting me to join in their Assembly.

Rev. Dr. John R. Deckenback (Conference Minister - United Church of Christ Central Atlantic Conference)



Induction of Rev. Basil Manning New UCCSA President

During the 36th Assembly Closing service, Rev. Basil Manning was inducted as our new denominational President.

All the past UCCSA Presidents, present at the Assembly joined Rev. Hendrick Pillay and Rev. Dr Prince Dibeela, in performing the induction ceremony.



New Ordinands welcomed during opening service

Thirteen people ordained to the ministry since the last Assembly in Botswana were welcomed onto the Roll of UCCSA ministers at the opening Service of Worship.

Ministers of the denomination who had died since the 35th Assembly in Molepolole were also remembered and thanks given for their years of faithful service.

During the opening service, the President, Rev Hendrick Pillay preached a sermon, based on a text from Genesis chapter 4 and the gospel according to Luke chapter 4.

The Joe Wing Memorial Lecture was given by Dr. Simango Khumalo of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

He paid tribute to the contribution made by a long line of Congregational missionaries and indigenous leaders.

Apart from those mentioned earlier by the General Secretary, he paid special tribute to the late Dr Steve de Gruchy with whom he had worked.

***Christ Is Calling Us:
Participate
in
Suffering
And
Struggle***

Incoming President outlines challenges for the Church

In a video presentation titled "From Molepolole to Motala" the incoming President, Rev Basil Manning, reflected on the recent past story of the UCCSA, and outlined some of the challenges he has already begun addressing since being elected to office, and which he will continue to pursue during the next two years. He also attempted, in the interview conducted by Rev Alistair Arends, to outline some of the possible solutions he thought needed action. Among those he highlighted were the serious problems of injustice in both society and the church.



Included in the issues he raised were those of continuing discrimination against women; the increasing gap between the rich and the poor in all five countries; and the structures of the church which needed drastic change in order for the church to meet its calling to prophetic ministry.

GS gives a comprehensive overview of the church & society

"I wish to invite us to adopt a language of life; a language of self-belief and a language of hope. I saw it on the back of a youth T shirt that says 'UCCSA Rocks'."

With those words, the General Secretary, Dr Prince Dibeela drew his inspiring report to the Assembly on Friday morning. He asserted that the seemingly hopeless situation in Somalia, which was an African issue. All our countries have Somalian exiles living in our midst.

Dr. Dibeela lamented the fact that the church was being sidelined in the celebration of the century of the liberation struggle. He reminded the delegates of the long list of Congregationalists who were prominent in the struggle including Rev John Dube, Pixie ka Sema and Nkosi Albert Luthuli.

"We have a rich and diverse history" he continued. "We have to find ways of retrieving these memories; some very painful and some, at times, beautiful. In this way, we will be able to claim our voices that have been lost due to years of colonialism and other forms of oppression.

"Our history is also a church that dared to make difficult decisions when other churches chose easier options" he said, citing such actions as the adoption of the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism and the opposition to the Tricameral Parliament system in South Africa.

Dr Dibeela also highlighted the forthcoming 17th Session of the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework on Climate Change, which will be held in Durban in December.



Restructuring proposals spark lively discussion

During the thirteenth Assembly business session on Saturday morning, the report on the case for a new UCCSA structure was presented to the Assembly

Rev Alistair Arends introduced the report which proposes, among other things, that a denominational admin team be headed by the General Secretary and the Synod Moderators or Secretaries who would serve as Deputy General Secretaries;

That Assembly should appoint an Officers' Team and a Disciplinary Commission; and that the denomination should operate a central fund for support of the stipends of ministers.

In motivating the report, the President - Elect, Rev Basil Manning, reminded the Assembly of the Tswana proverb *'bana ba tshipa tshwaraganang'*, which literally means 'the children of the meerkats care for one another.'

As people in the household of God, we have the responsibility care for one another

One delegate responded that the proposals were literally a 'rewriting of Congregationalism'.

The Assembly then broke into discussion groups. In their reports back, the following concerns were raised:

- How are we going to deal with churches who say 'We are autonomous, we will not pay?'
- How do we deal with different countries' labor laws.
- Local churches must be fully informed to buy in to the process.
- We cannot bring this to finality now. More discussion is needed.
- The proposed changes might be challenged in court.

The General Secretary, Dr Prince Dibeela responded to the debate by assuring delegates that a lot of discussion and work still had to be done before the proposals could be brought to finality.

These proposals or recommendations would then be sent down for discussion at Synod, Regional & Local Church level before they could be implemented.

New Initiatives at Kuruman Moffat Mission To serve churches

The Kuruman Moffat Mission Board agreed to venture into various income generation programmes amongst many ventures.

The Board appointed the Rev Freddie and Mrs. Cathy Bott who has introduced a carpentry and textile shop respectively, at the Moffat Mission.

The vision of the Mission jointly with the UCCSA on this business venture is to provide anything needed in the ministry of the UCCSA as well as the open market.

These include stoles, pulpit falls and clerical shirts among others.

From the woodworking unit, they will take orders for things as small as offering plates all the way up to pulpits and pew.



We belong to the World church family

One of the delights of every Assembly is the welcoming of fraternal delegates from sister churches and partner organizations. Their presence and participation remind us that we are part of a global family – the worldwide church, and that Christians of other cultures and perspectives offer us support and value the gifts that the UCCSA can offer to their members. At this Assembly, we have been privileged to welcome back the Rev Patricia Johnston from the United Free Church of Scotland, who this time is accompanied by a layperson.

From the Council of World Mission, Dr Collin Cowan brought a message of solidarity and hope. A delegate from the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands was its Moderator, the Right Rev Oliver Daley, who delivered a powerful message from his church in the Caribbean context. Rev Dr John Deckenberg from the Global Ministries Division of the Disciples of Christ and the United Church of Christ in the United States became a familiar figure as he moved among delegates.

Also present was the principal of the Theological Education by Extensions College.



UCCSA Gaborone West Local Church Outreach Excursion to Shadishadi (By Dr Moffat Setshogo)



On the 13th and 14th August 2011, Gaborone West local church went on an outreach excursion trip to the village of Shadishadi in Kweneng North. The church has in the past three years established a friendship with Shadishadi Primary School. This primary school caters mainly for underprivileged children from Shadishadi and other neighbouring villages such as Sojwe. This particular excursion was the third visit in as many years.

The main aim of the excursion was threefold:

- hand over gifts from Gaborone West local church congregation. These were in the form of physical education attire being short pants and T-shirts for the 408 pupils at the school;
- play ball games with the pupils and provide entertainment in the form of Jumping Castles and music and;
- hold church service at the school in the morning of Sunday 14th August 2011.

During welcome remarks by the school headteacher, Ms Mokgadi. She related how her school, through God's grace, became friends with GWest UCCSA church three years ago. As she put it "We did not have to write to the church to become friends".

After the school headteacher had welcomed guests, Rev. David Taote Maitse explained how the relationship started. That one of the church members, while on an official working trip to the area, had noted the challenges the school was facing and had 'sold' the idea to the church on compassionate grounds. The church had made various visits to the school to find out how it could help. The church's mission for this particular weekend was somewhat different from those past visits. He said that for the first time in three years the church had seen it fit to spend its first weekend with the pupils to learn more about them and experience the way they lived.



Gifts were handed over to the school headteacher. Shadishadi Primary School in return gave the church a Certificate of Appreciation for the gesture. The visit was characterised by ball games between the pupils and members of the congregation. The teams played football, netball and volleyball. The scores really did not matter that much except to say that the pupils won by comfortable margins in all the games!

The response by G-West to the Shadishadi school is the Gospel imperative, to live the gospel by sharing the love with those underprivileged in our country, to go and be in their midst, to show love and compassion, more needs to be done, more can be done to transform, empower these children's lives. We are aware that many places have various needs, we only need to do more as UCCSA members.



JESUS' MOTHERS, BROTHERS AND SISTERS



By Rev. Majaha Nhliziyo

“Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.” “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother!” Mark 3: 31 – 35 (New International Version)

INTRODUCTION

The UCCSA 36th Assembly, 22-27 September 2011, left its own mark on the UCCSA and mission landscape. Taking place in Mozambican for the first time in its 44 year history, this Assembly was an eye-opener to many delegates and even to the local UCCSA members. It felt good to know that we belong to a wider family as UCCSA and also through our ecumenical links. The Assembly theme told it all by its approach that we are called to participate in the suffering and struggle that others are involved in. And this is the struggle for justice; the very same struggle that took Jesus so far away from his family that they began to think that he had become “mad”. Well, it should be counted an honour to be seen as being ‘mad for the sake of the struggle for justice.’

ABOUT THE TEXT

In this chapter, Mark has put together several stories that have a bearing on the family. From the story of the healing of the man with a shriveled hand and the one about the crowds that followed Jesus’ early ministry in Galilee, the appointment of the Twelve and the accusation of being demon possessed to our text, Mark 3: 31 – 35, the implications to the family are very instructive for us today. The mother of Jesus, Mary, appears to have led her family, the siblings of Jesus, in a bid to bring him home as they sensed that something was wrong and dangerous about the activities of Jesus. They seem to have shared the fears and concerns of some of the sections of the community about ‘this movement’ that was gathering pace and would soon attract the dangerous attention of the Roman rulers. Their request to meet Jesus outside and away from the crowds, seems to have been met with a negative answer from Jesus. “Who are my mother and my brothers?” He asked the surprised audience, before going ahead to show them who his mothers and sisters and brothers really were.

Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Jesus thus re-defined the meaning and bounds of “family”. Family is not just about ‘blood’ or cultural or even nationality relatedness; it is more about human solidarity *“at the point of deepest need”*.

UCCSA theme: Christ is calling us: Participating in Suffering and Struggle

The UCCSA theme should remind us of the many cases of suffering that abound in our context, particularly in the local communities where the glare of television and newspapers does not always reach. Our calling is to join in the struggle for life and make positive change.

Actions of solidarity in the local context, will help link the Assembly pronouncements with the reality on the ground. And as this happens throughout, the UCCSA shall be transformed into a hive of Missional actions for and with the people of God. And by so doing we shall be acting in accordance with the will of God, thereby joining the circle of those whom Jesus pointed to as he answered the question about his mother, sister or brother: **Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother!** Indeed we should say with Jesus that “our mothers and our sisters and our brothers are those who care about those in need as they care about their own personal needs.

May God bless the delegates, visitors and guests to the Assembly as they return home with refreshed commitment and focus to respond to the calling of Christ to all to participate in the struggle for life, which is justice.