

MODEL FOR A UNITED CHURCH

Extract from the "Papers of the 9th General Assembly 2010" of the UPCS, Page 97

INTRODUCTION:

As far as possible this structure seeks to combine the strengths of existing systems of government and oversight in the Member Churches of the Church Unity Commission. As it draws on the traditions and experience represented by these Churches, it also seeks to separate government and administration as far as possible from ministerial oversight, giving the former broadly speaking to elected Councils in which Council members, ministers and Bishops (in the case of the higher Councils) serve and make decisions together, and making Bishops key figures in the latter as *pastores parochiarum*.

In this outline of the structure proposed for a United Church the term "congregation" is used throughout to represent what is now called a parish, local church, society or congregation in the various Member Churches, viz. Anglican, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches respectively. The term, "minister of word and sacrament" is used for those presently called priests in the Anglican Church and ministers in the others. It is envisaged that the present differences between their powers of ministry will be largely eliminated.

THE CONGREGATION:

As far as possible agreement should be reached before union on the governmental structures, offices, ministries, and procedures for the placement of minister and the election/appointment of office bearers and those with special ministries, the tenure of office of such people, etc. Some variety may, however, have to be allowed in some or all of these areas until the United Church decides to standardize criteria and procedures; and the United Church may discern a need to continue indefinitely to allow flexibility or variety in some areas of congregational life.

It is proposed that the United Church return to the New Testament understanding of the office/order of Deacon. This should be a separate order of ordained ministry comparable to that of Minister/Priest and Bishop. Deacons are not ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament; nor is the Diaconate a stepping stone to the other orders. A Deacon should be set apart for the ministry of love, justice and service to the congregation and the wider community. Deacons may be stipendiary or non-stipendiary.

The Church Council would therefore consist of a number of people elected by the congregation, including those chosen for particular offices such as secretary and treasurer, and any Deacons attached to the congregation. The elected members would not be ordained. In the initial period those serving on the equivalent of the Church Council before union, viz. Elders (Presbyterian), Deacons (Congregational), Parish Council Members (Anglican) and Class Leaders and Society Stewards (Methodist) would be included on the Church Councils and would continue to serve in their relevant capacities retaining their designations. The Church Council has oversight of all ministries within the life of the congregation, but is accountable to the congregation and through Presbytery to the Synod and Conference. The minister is a member of the Church Council and will normally be its Chairperson.

Stipendiary deacons are appointed by consultation between the Presbytery or Synod and the Church Council and serve on the Council. Non-Stipendiary Deacons may be elected to the Church Council. If a person feels called to the order of Deacon he/she would apply to the local Church Council for support and his/her name would be forwarded to the Fellowship of Vocation, the Presbytery and the Bishop in Synod. If accepted, the person would be trained accordingly and, if approved, ordained.

Besides the Church Councillors (or whatever they come to be called) there should also be an Order of Lay Preachers, with recognition from the Church as a whole and qualifications set by it.

Some functions of local church government, especially those concerning finance and property, should be handled by a committee appointed by the Church Council or by an elected body, which would report to the Council and fall under its authority. Initially such bodies could include those who formerly served as Church Wardens (Anglican), Circuit Stewards (Methodist) and in Stewardship Boards/Deacons' Boards (Presbyterian).

Inevitably some people will serve in more than one of the above capacities. Some anomalies may be created by this structure, but the aim is to recognise the enormous spiritual resources represented by Deacons, Elders, Lay Preachers and others and to enable them to be blessings to the United Church.

PRESBYTERY:

It is proposed that a group of approximately 10 congregations in a local area or district will form a Presbytery. Oversight of these congregations will be in the hands of all the ministers in that Presbytery and at least one Church Council member from each congregation (possibly two from bigger congregations). The Council of Presbytery will be presided over by a Moderator, who will be elected for a period of office from the membership of the Presbytery. The Moderator's main function is to be an impartial chairperson and facilitator in the Presbytery meeting. The number of congregations is kept low in order to encourage fellowship, mutual support and up-building in the faith among congregations and among the ministers and other members of the Council of Presbytery.

SYNOD:

Approximately 10 Presbyteries will be grouped together in a Synod unless national boundaries indicate otherwise. The Council of Synod will consist of a representative number of ministers and lay Council members from each Presbytery and will be chaired by a Bishop, elected by the Synod and consecrated by three other Bishops. The Synod will hear appeals against Presbytery decisions and matters referred to it by Presbyteries and will make policies and provide resources for ministry within its area, but the direct day-to-day oversight of congregations will remain with the Presbyteries.

CONFERENCE:

It is proposed that the highest decision-making body will be the Conference, which will consist of all the Bishops and a representative number of ministers and other members of the Synods. This body will make policy decisions for the whole United Church, e.g. on processes, standards and requirements for ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament, for the sake of unity and consistency in

the Church. It will be chaired by a Moderator or other similar officer elected from the members of Synods and will speak for the United Church as a whole, though it may appoint its chairperson or the chairperson and others to speak on its behalf.

RELATIONSHIP OF VARIOUS LEVELS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT:

All levels of church government submit to the authority of Conference, but it is to be noted that the various councils and individual/s have the right of presentation of their concerns or requests to the wider councils of the Church, as far as Conference. An overriding principle in all the councils is the right of appeal to a more senior council against decisions (See also under Episkopë (Oversight))

The Conference, Synod, Presbytery and Church Council have the right to determine the mission of God for their own areas. At all times the local needs have to be held in the wider context of the Church's ministry.

EPISKOPË (OVERSIGHT):

It was agreed that there was no difficulty in giving to the Bishop leadership in the area of providing a vision for the mission of the church in the Synod. Leadership covers a range of responsibilities—pastoral, administrative and spiritual. Within the four-tiered structure of the Church (Conference, Synod, Presbytery and Congregation) the mission of the Church will be implemented at each level with the freedom to do so without specific instructions from a higher level. For example, the Conference might decide that poverty is to be one of the mission priorities of the Church; this would then be implemented by the Church at the other levels, with each body going about it in its own way. The Bishop and Synod together could then formulate a vision for the mission of the Church in their area and that vision could be carried out by each Presbytery and Congregation according to its particular context.

The Bishop's role in the implementation would be to meet with local leadership in the Presbyteries, listen to their ideas and give them information about resources available and what is being done elsewhere. His/her role is not to manage the implementation on a daily basis, but rather to provide direction.

The committee was quite clear that the Bishop must exercise leadership in the whole life of the Church in the Synod, but do it together with the Synod and Presbytery. There is thus a balance of power between the Bishop and the Synod and there is a collegial ministry, with the Bishop as a representative figure.

An example of how the Bishop and Synod would work together is when the decision on ordination of candidates for the ministry is taken. Apart from his/her chairing of the Synod the Bishop also plays an important part in the selection, training, ordination and pastoral care of ministers within his/her area. Candidates will be processed by Presbyteries in the first instance and those thought to have a genuine call and suitable qualities will be referred to the Bishop, who, with the Synod, will make the final selection of candidates and decide on appropriate training for the ministry. The Bishop will also make proposals to Synod as to whether and when candidates are ready for ordination and if necessary where they should be placed for their first appointment. The Bishop and the Synod must reach consensus. There is no 'last word' from either party. If either party is opposed to the ordination, it cannot go ahead. The impasse would be resolved by suspending the decision, with the status quo remaining until the two sides can find an agreed way forward through consultation.

The third main function of the Bishop will be to act as the focus of unity within the Synod and as its spokesperson and the spokesperson of the Church in its area.

THE MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENT:

Ministers will exercise leadership and pastoral care in their congregations, under the direction of Presbytery, and will have pastoral care from the Bishop. They will have power to preside at the confirmation and reception of members, as well as in the celebration of the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion/Eucharist.

APPOINTMENT OF TRANSFERS OF MINISTERS:

The following three needs are to be taken in account when considering the placement of a Minister: the need of the Synod, the need of the congregation and the need of the Minister.

There will be a standing Synod Stationing Committee chaired by the Bishop. When the Presbytery becomes aware of a pending vacancy, the Presbytery appoints an Interim Minister who facilitates the election of a congregational call committee and looks after the congregation during the vacancy. The call committee meets with the Synod Stationing Committee and they recommend a name to the congregation. If the congregation rejects the nomination, the Synod Committee brings another name and once a consensus is reached the nominee is approached. If the consultation and nomination process has gone on for a reasonable period or a certain number of candidates has been offered and rejected, the Synod Stationing Committee has the right to appoint a candidate of their choice. A minister who feels that he/she would like to move, is able to give his/her name to one or more Synod Stationing Committees.

The implication of this system is that there is a specific decentralising of the appointing system and the movement of ministers can take place at any time during the year. Ministers serve congregations for a set term/s with a review process set in place.

ELECTION OF BISHOPS:

The concept of a Call would be applied to election of Bishops, with one nomination being dealt with at a time in the Synod. We did not determine how that person would be nominated in the Synod. This election would need to be confirmed by the Conference.

The Bishop would have a limited term in office in a particular Synod. After a period the Bishop's position would be reviewed and his/her appointment could be renewed for a shorter term/s. Upon leaving the Synod, the Bishop would either serve as Bishop in another Synod or as a minister of a congregation or in some other capacity within the Church, but would remain a Bishop for life.

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION:

It is proposed that the following paragraph, taken from the First Draft of the Plan of Union, published by the Church Unity Commission in 1972, should be reaffirmed by the Member Churches and should be the basis of the United Church's thinking and practice.

Apostolic succession is succession in the faith, witness, life and commission of the apostles and thus belongs to the Church as a whole

and not to any group within it.

For many centuries episcopal consecration with the laying on of hands has been widely regarded as an element within the many strands which make up the meaning of the apostolic succession. The importance of this, however, must not be overstressed.

The methods of ordination in all our Churches express real continuity with the Church and ministry of the earliest years.”

ISSUES FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION:

The following issues were noted by the Doctrine Committee of the CUC as needing further attention:

It was noted that an investigation needs to be made by the CUC into the possibility of co-ordinating theological education in Southern Africa as well as integrating the process of selection of candidates for the Ministry and the co-ordination of standards

There is a need to revisit the issue of special dispensation given to people not ordained to the Ministry of word and sacrament to preside over the celebration of the Sacraments in certain circumstances.

The whole issue of probationers, including their qualifications, time of commencement of service, etc.

Ordination vows must be considered before union with special reference to the vows of obedience.

There is a need to consider the relationships between the United Church and the world-wide Communion and Ecumenical Councils to which we belong.

It is noted that our representation is complete in South Africa but, varies from country to country in the SADC region.

In South Africa all five of the CUC Churches are represented (ACSA, EPCSA, MCSA, UCCSA & UPCS)

in Namibia, ACSA, MCSA, UCCSA, UPCS

Angola, ACSA

St. Helena, ACSA

Botswana, MCSA, UCCSA

Zimbabwe, UCCSA, UPCS

Zambia, UPCS

Mocambique, ACSA, MCSA, UCCSA

Swaziland, ACSA, MCSA

Lesotho, ACSA, MCSA.