



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

16 February 2010

**TO : ALL MINISTERS IN THE UPCSА –
PLEASE READ TO YOUR SESSION AND MAKE AVAILABLE TO THE
CONGREGATION**

KEEPING IN TOUCH 1/2010

*From the desk of the
General Secretary*

Dear Friends

Grace and peace to you in the precious name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. I trust that this New Year has started for you on a highly positive note. Indeed 2010 is going to be an exciting year for South Africa exploding in celebrations as we host the World Cup. The bigness of this event is certainly going to affect all of us including Zimbabwe and Zambia in some way or the other no matter what our views may be of the event itself. I personally am drawn to the fact that something big is going to happen!

I must confess that oftentimes as I think about the Church, I hope that something big is going to happen: that millions are going to come to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour, that the Church is going to have a huge impact in its proclamation and witness in the world and many are going to come streaming into the Church. I wonder is this just a dream? As I look into the UPCSА whilst there are so many things to celebrate and give thanks for yet it seems that in certain circles we have lost perspective of the big picture and purpose of the Church. We see fragmentation and divisions brought about the conflict in the Associations, the sense of congregationalism that tend to pervade our churches, struggling Presbyteries and congregations torn by strife and conflict. We need to be drawn into our actual purpose again. So what do we need?

Firstly, we need to come back to the core purpose of the Church. It is so easy to loose focus, perspective and energy. We need to come back to the purpose of our existence as a Church which is summarized for us in the Great Commission in Matthew 28: 19-20: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* The UPCSА Mission Statement is very clear on this as it calls us to **"Bear witness to Jesus, Build up believers in faith, love and obedience and (to) Be faithful in all relationships in life.** We need to align and measure what we do in our congregations to this Statement at all times to ensure that together we are moving in the same direction as we seek to remain faithful to our Triune God . We exist because of Jesus Christ! Our purpose is to proclaim Him to the world so that they may also believe.

Secondly, we need to have vision, commitment and responsibility. Whilst I do not fully endorse what goes on in some of the mega charismatic churches that surround us, I must admit that I am often moved by their sense of vision, commitment and passion. They are not afraid to think and do big things for God because they flow in the view that God is Big. I am reminded of the vision that the prophet Isaiah had in the Temple in chapter 6. He was overwhelmed by the presence of God. His vision took on a three-fold perspective: (1) He saw God in all His holiness and splendour, (2) He saw his own sinfulness, and (3) He saw the sinfulness of the people (community) around him. He was so moved that he responded to the call of God: *"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"* with the immediate response: *"Here am I. Send me!"* We need to restore commitment and passion which gives each of us in the pew the responsibility to work for Jesus wherever we are, not leaving it to the minister and elders. This is the only way in which we are going to meaningfully impact the world with the Saviour's love.

Thirdly we need to think beyond our local church. Now don't get me wrong I believe in the local church and I know that mission really happens through the local church, and I give thanks to God for the many faithful and flourishing congregations we have in our denomination, but what concerns me is the lack of desire to have a vision beyond the local church, in some places and ministries. Jesus' call was to the Kingdom and what we need to be encouraging is *Kingdom* ministry. Such ministry calls us to engage

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with the community in which we are found and to provide ministries that enable us to relevantly speak the presence and love of Jesus into that context. We also need to link up with the work of the Presbytery and that of the General Assembly. It means affiliating with the wider work of the denomination rather than becoming exclusively congregation focused as if ministry begins and ends there. There are many ministries that take place on the denominational level through the various committees, Associations and structures in our Church. As congregations you need to find those places in which you could be involved. How can you give life, effort and form to our three denominational Mission Priorities: *Evangelism and Mission, Stewardship and HIV and AIDS?*

It is a joy and delight to know that many Presbyteries and congregations are starting to take a greater interest in the work of the wider denomination and I want to personally commend and affirm such initiatives. Equally I would like to encourage those who are lacking in this area to prayerfully consider how they can become a part of the *whole* Church. Let us positively ask how we can work together as a Church to the glory of God. I was jolly pleased to discover when we were drawing up the 2010 Budget late last year that a little more than 50% (R3,5m) of our total Budget (brought in mainly by assessments) is really given back to congregations. We often work with the assumption that all of this money goes into the running of the Central Office. After some 24 years in parish ministry and now serving in the Central Office, I have come to dispel this much held belief, for myself, because for the first time I was able to see where the money really goes and who the real beneficiaries of the UPCSA's income are: congregations!

The biggest slice of our Denominational Budget goes toward the selection and training of ministers to *serve congregations*, providing *grants for congregations* to be able to have a minister, church development, holding workshops and conferences to encourage and empower ministries to *benefit ministers, elders and congregations*. The balance of the Budget goes towards the work of the Assembly Committees, the running of the Central Office and its service to the denomination, the holding of General Assembly/ Executive Commission, etc. It is the kind contributions of congregations, most times under really trying circumstances, that enables us to bless other congregations who cannot afford to have ministers and maintain ministries. I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation on behalf of the UPCSA to congregations who faithfully pay their assessments so that the rest of the Church may be blessed. **This is, indeed, a Kingdom focus!** By the end of 2009 we had allocated and, in most cases, disbursed about R 4 m given to us by the Council for World Mission (CWM) to congregations and Presbyteries for projects in line with our Mission Priorities.

Let me get back to where I started. We need as a denomination to impact this world with the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are to be successful in doing this then we need to have a fresh vision of God, ourselves and the world. If we are to be a denomination of any influence in Southern Africa then we need to *work together* to the glory of God. Rick Warren in his book, *The Purpose Driven Community* says, "We are better together! And together we can do more [for Jesus]. This is my appeal to us as a Church. We tend to focus on things that separate and divide us internally so much so that we are diverted from the real purpose of our existence as a Church. We need to be prepared to work together rather than work against each other which, by the way, the devil enjoys. It's time we give the Glory to God! It's time we focused on the Kingdom of God! I trust that would be your desire, prayer and action!

Shalom



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