



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

5th August 2013

From the desk of the General Secretary

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

KEEPING IN TOUCH 2013/3

Dear Friends,

Greetings in the precious name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. I trust that you are well and firmly rooted in the grace and love of our Risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

We are already in August and the winter seems to be passing. The changing seasons reminds us that life and experiences are not static but always changing, sometimes for the good and sometimes the not so good. We need to be assured in all these encounters that God is present. God never leaves us nor forsakes us. His presence is faithful and constant even when it doesn't look that way. Our faith should not fluctuate according to the environment but remain focused and steadfast in God. The Psalmist tells us why we should do this: *"Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever. As the mountain surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people both now and for evermore"* (Ps.125: 1-2.) In this we have the assurance that God will see us through and so in spite of our circumstances we need to keep putting our hope and trust in God. We need to believe in our hearts and minds that God has our interest in his heart even if our prayers are not answered exactly as we expect. God is good and his love endures forever!

I am pleased to let you know that we had a very successful Executive Commission in Kimberley in July this year. We were deeply blessed by the worship, sermons, fellowship and discussions that took place as we received reports from the various Assembly Committees. We had a session in which commissioners were availed the opportunity to have conversations with some of the committee conveners or representative and to share the work, concerns, joys and frustrations of congregations. This is something new that we introduced and it would become a regular feature at the General Assembly as well. This initiative is in keeping with our strategy of supporting and developing missional congregations. We want to relevantly address the challenges and concerns of our congregations to empower, equip and mobilise them for mission. We are really keen to support ministry where it matters most, that is, in congregations and local communities.

We did face a few challenging matters at the Executive Commission but we thank God that we managed to find ways to handle these issues with grace and wisdom. We were deeply excited by some of the things some of the Assembly Committees have engaged and are planning to do. No doubt, their reports brought excitement and joy to discover that God is calling us as the UPCSA to get in and really get stuck in making disciples, sharing the faith, addressing societal issues, encouraging worship, reflecting theologically and biblically on various matters, and seeking unity in our witness and work together as fellow Presbyterians. We seem to be entering into a new season in which God is doing some marvelous and wonderful things amongst us, in us and through us. For more detailed information on the Executive Commission, committee reports and daily news from the week in Kimberley please feel free to Google the UPCSA website.

As we talk about seasons, I am reminded that there is a time for everything as so clearly expressed by the writer to the Ecclesiastes in chapter 3 verses 1- 8. At the Executive Commission it was the time for some ministers to apply for retirement either by the end of this year or before the next General Assembly in July 2014. We express our sincere gratitude and thanks to the following ministers who applied for retirement: the Revs Geoffrey Jamieson; Dr Roger Tucker, David Glen van Duyker, Eleanor Gaunt and the Rev General Thanduxolo Mcoteli.

We thank God for their years of faithful service and ministry. Some have been long in the ministry and others only for a few years but they have each exercised their calling and service with diligence, loyalty and faithfulness to God. We thank God for these wonderful servants and pray that they will enjoy their retirement when the time comes for them to leave the respective congregations in which they currently serve. We express our thanks and appreciation to their families and loved ones who have supported them in ministry through the years in the midst of often making numerous personal sacrifices and efforts to serve both God and God's people.

On the ecumenical front, there are many meetings taking place to work toward a united Christian witness in South Africa. There are many people who are concerned about the political, moral, social, spiritual and economic climate in which we find ourselves. This month we also commemorate the Marikana anniversary and yet a year later the unrest with labour unions in the mining industry still continues. It is good to see church leaders now coming together to actively engage and respond to these issues. In the same breath, there are many efforts to revive the work of the SACC which is currently facing serious financial challenges. We are pleased as the UPCSA to play a vital part and to offer very significant contributions to the issues we are currently contending with. Our prayer in all these is that the sovereign presence and power of God may reign amongst us so that we are not misguided or led astray by the desires of men and women but by the wisdom and will of God - God's good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12: 2).

We continue to pray for Former President Nelson Mandela who has spent so many days in hospital, now running into months. We pray that God's will be done in his life as we give thanks to God for sparing him to celebrate his 95th birthday. This remarkable man is a legend and icon not only to South Africa but the world at large. His ability to forgive, seek reconciliation, work for peace, stability and equality for all is an example to be desired and followed. It is a real pity that some of our politicians and even members of his own family are not walking in his footsteps and upholding the values he stood for and even sacrificed many years of his life for in prison. We pray that God may accord him the necessary grace and dignity in these, what seems to be the final, days of his life on earth. We pray for his family, friends and South Africa at this time.

On another note, we think about our Church, friends and the people of Zimbabwe who just completed their National Elections. Many people, especially outside of Zimbabwe, have been praying and hoping, perhaps, for a different outcome. However, even though there have been reported irregularities, logistical challenges and questions it seems that the results reflects the will of the majority of the people who voted, according to the ruling of the Electoral Officers and the African Union. It may be that the election results will be contested but let us continue to give thanks for a generally very peaceful elections and pray that those in political power will put first the interest of the poor, needy and suffering in that land rather than that of their own. Let us continue to pray for the people of Zimbabwe.

Well there is a season for everything. In which season do you find yourself in your life, ministry and witness to Jesus Christ? Wherever you are be encouraged, inspired and filled with hope and thanksgiving. Why? Because God is in control and he has everything in his hands. God reigns! Isn't that all the reason we need to keep believing, trusting and hoping for a better tomorrow. Winter is here but spring is coming!

So keep on singing, praising and worshipping the King of Glory!

Stay Blessed!



Jerry Pillay

General Secretary of the UPCSA