



THE UNITING  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
IN SOUTHERN  
AFRICA

08 January 2014

2 Corinthians 5:9

Dear Colleagues,  
**HAPPY NEW YEAR**

Greetings in Jesus' Name.

I have not written a love-letter to you since before the Executive Commission in July 2013 and I am truly sorry about that. I think the least a Moderator of General Assembly could do is send a monthly letter to each of his colleagues.

"Busyness" could be an excuse but I do not believe Moderators work any harder than the average, well-motivated minister. But it has proved harder to achieve all the personal goals I set for myself as Moderator than I had hoped.

In Nigeria our fellow Presbyterians elect a Moderator for 5 years – ouch! 5 years!! – but then they do so only when he is close enough to retire. He is freed from his congregation on Induction and retires at the end of his term of office. (I'm not sure if they allow "hers" and "shes" yet – so we need to teach them).

I'm raising the fact of different models of Ministry because one thing being Moderator has taught me is a fresh respect for those brothers and sisters whose model of ministry is different from mine.

God bless you for:

- \* every well prepared sermon, even if the congregation doesn't respond well;
- \* every pastoral visit with common sense and compassion;
- \* every occasion you point to Jesus when you could have pointed to yourself;
- \* each time you lead your Session with wisdom, a leader among leaders and not President over a bunch of civil servants;

and God bless you also

- \* When at times you are low, depressed, doubting but you still do your job, build hope and proclaim what you may not have;
- \* when you "earn" respect because you are humble and treat other with respect;
- \* And know how wonderful you have been on those occasions when you remember a colleague and phone/write to him/her to send your love and to praise them.

I think the ministry is, and should be, a mutual admiration society.

So thank you to all of you who are an example to me in faithfully doing-the-job of being pastor/teacher in your local church, for the long hours you work, for the distances some of you have to drive and walk

Thank you to all who are an example to me in continuing to minister when you have no electricity, poor plumbing, not sufficient space for your family's needs, and when your stipends are not paid on time or paid in full.

Some of our colleagues have secular jobs and parishes to look after. I was quite shocked in Soweto recently when a senior elder asked me: "Moderator, what is your job?" When I explained what being Moderator of GA means he said, "No, no, what is your job?" So, now I told him about being at Bellville for 34 years. Again, he replied, now exasperated: "No, no, Moderator. Who is your employer Monday to Friday?"

It emerged he simply believed all ministers work outside of the parish ministry and only do "ministering work" on the weekends, and if there are no funerals then only on Sundays.

I was and remain shocked and sad! Being a fulltime minister for the last 37 years has been marvellous and I still am fulfilled in that job!

I am even more sad that while we have good procedures to help when it becomes needful for a minister to consider two jobs too many colleagues 1st find the outside work and then announce they have a job and then (maybe) ask for permission to take on that outside work.

In poor times we may all have to go to a "tent-making" ministry but I urge you to follow the procedures 1<sup>st</sup>. That way we remain vulnerable, humble, respectful and gentle towards others who sacrifice so much so we can live, mostly, so well.

Please pray about the position of General Secretary: encourage those you feel fit for the post to apply. Toward the end of 2014 we will also have to look for a new Assembly Clerk as Tom retires at the end of the year. So, think, pray, talk about and encourage people to apply. This person does not have to be a minister.

Lastly, some of my reading this Christmas season has again brought to me a challenge from C S Lewis. In his "Screwtape Letters" he reveals we are tempted to think of our faith as "Christianity and ...". The temptation is that we become bored with the "same old thing": the "same old" themes Advent, epiphany, Easter, Pentecost; bored with the "same old" truths of Christ's life of work. And the temptation runs to the place where in trying to apply the Gospel to social issues we can (and do) forget Christ, take the faith for granted and just teach on the social issues. It is subtle but can produce a generation (as in Joshua's time) who did not know the Lord. I know some of you will disagree with me and C S Lewis but I challenge you to preach sound doctrine, in season and out, and always be ready to account for the hope we have, which comes from the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Preach well. Love the poor. Encourage your colleagues. Respect your Elders and members. Please continue to pray for me.

Thank you.

Much love, always



Moderator of General Assembly.