



**PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEES OF URCSA AND DRC
TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE ENTIRE CHURCH**



8 May 2017

Dear Brother/Sister

Introduction

The executive committees of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) met at Le Chateau in Kempton Park on 25 and 26 April 2017 to reflect on the state of affairs in church and society. The spirituality of the meeting centered on John 20:19-23 and John 17:10 ff. The emphasis was on peace and unity. Hence the executive committees greet you with this word: "Peace be with you all. As the Father has sent me, I send you." We are all called by Christ to be messengers of reconciliation and peace. The meeting also reflected on the history of the church unity process from both the perspective of URCSA and the DRC. The respective decisions on church unity and the Belhar Confession by the churches were also reviewed. The acceptance of a provisional interim church order by the general synods of both churches (2015 & 2016) was a historical milestone. The executives were inspired by the words of the preamble of the Provisional Church Order:

"We as the four churches have decided to journey together called by the Triune God to participate in His mission to the world, so that the world may believe that God has sent Jesus as Savior to the world. We therefore, envisage a new reunited church in the DRC Family, which is missional, committed to the Biblical demands of love, reconciliation, justice and peace. We realize this process will present many challenges and issues to contend with, but we accept the challenges in being obedient to our Lord and His Word. We are called to a life, and ecclesiology of obedience and sacrifice. Knowing that walking this road will ask us to put all selfish ambition aside and to give ourselves as Christ did, we do this in active response to the gospel that Christ in His mercy poured out on us. We respond to Christ's love and Spirit who unites us to Christ in a deep and eternal fellowship. We acknowledge that Christ already gained the victory over all opposing forces so that we can look forward in hope to that day when all knees shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 1:27 - 2:18). We are committed to accept all the gifts brought by the four churches to the reconciliation, restoration and reunification process."

The two executive committees realized that there was a need to mutually check the energy levels for church unification in the respective churches. We also reflected on the way forward and the current political and socio-economic climate in Southern Africa.

The way forward

The joint meeting has decided to implement the provisional order as the legal document for the unification process. We also accepted that point 3.3 of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the two churches would be the point of departure for the practical church unification process from local congregational level. The agreement of both churches in 2012 in the MOA states that:

“As reformed churches we believe that the local congregation is the expression of the church of Christ in a local community, but we also believe that local congregations live in communion with one another and this communion is expressed in various manners e.g. presbyteries, synods. The two churches undertake to identify ways in which the local churches can express their unity with each other inter alia forming uniting congregations, receiving ministers across cultures, starting uniting commissions and projects, re-aligning the congregations with their full consent to incorporate wards of other cultures.”

There will be challenges towards the implementation of this process, but the two churches have already highlighted these challenges in the MOA in point 5.2.2 as follows:

“We accept the reality that conflict, bitterness, hatred, racism, ethnicism, classism, sexism and a lot of emotional pain is still very much part of society. We must address some of the core reasons for conflict like: misunderstandings and poor communication, bad and corrupt leadership, language, culture and religion, ideologies and the greed for political power, injustices, personalities, scarce resources and imbalances in society.”

The meeting has identified the Season of Human Dignity (<http://humandignity.co.za/>) as the vehicle to assist us in addressing these challenges as we begin to journey from local congregations (presbyteries and synods included) as the point of departure for practical church unification.

Herewith the steps to be followed by the executive committee to actualize all plans and objectives to unite the church.

1. The pastoral letter to be written and distributed to all member congregations to inform them about the journey to practical church unity from local congregational level.
2. The executives will call a broader meeting of the church leadership of both URCSA and DRC. The meeting will comprise of the chairpersons of all participating synods of the DRC and moderators of regional synods of the URCSA as implementing synods to join the journey to practical church unity and to encourage each other to facilitate the process in local congregations, presbyteries and regional synods.
3. Both churches to report to their respective General Synodical Commissions and Regional (Participating) Synodical Commissions about the progress on church unity.
4. Congregations, presbyteries and synods that are ready to start with the process will serve as pilot (pre-test) study for the broader church unity of the two churches.

5. The executives of both churches to keep on engaging with the other family member churches to journey together towards this practical church unity.

The executives of both churches acknowledge that we will have to develop greater passion and willpower to really make a difference. We will have to name the areas of conflict, face it and engage in the situation. But we cannot achieve it alone. We need the support and direct participation of each and every member of the two churches towards full unity.

Current socio-political state of Southern Africa

It would have been irresponsible for the leadership of these two churches-not to reflect on the political situation in our countries. The meeting executives have acknowledged that we are inter alia members of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and that all statements issued by the SACC is the inclusive voice of the member churches. The executives have jointly committed itself to together engage thoroughly with domestic and international political issues before we henceforward will be able to provide informed prophetic guidance. The executives nevertheless at this point in time call on our members from all corners of Southern Africa to pray for the socio-economic and political situation in our countries and to participate in all activities that will bring stability and peace to us all.

We believe that the almighty God, (the God of Jesus of Nazareth, not the false god that blesses slavery, apartheid, corruption, nepotism, genocide, exclusion, and internalized domination and oppression), is a God of justice, and that God calls the church to pursue justice for all God's people.

Signed by



Rev. Nelis Janse van Rensburg
(DRC Chairperson)

cjrens@telkomsa.net
082 821 2730



Rev. Prof. Dr. Leepo J Modise
(URCSA Moderator)

modislj@unisa.ac.za
082 949 4164