

## **CHURCH UNITY COMMISSION** **ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2010 – 2011**

It has been a year of mixed fortunes for the CUC, with progress and good news in some areas of ecumenical work and delays and setbacks in others.

### **RELATED ORGANISATIONS**

The CUC has been kept informed of two encouraging developments in the Western Cape, which involve two or more of our Member Churches. Discussions are well under way concerning the formation of a Federation of Reformed Churches, involving the UCCSA, UPCSA and others, with the aim of promoting co-operation in mission, ministry and theological reflection.

A more broadly-based organization, involving about a dozen denominations and named “Ekklesia”, has been launched to provide in-service education and training for ministers. Ekklesia has become involved in the compiling of a book of preaching studies and liturgical suggestions based on the Revised Common Lectionary.

It was encouraging to hear that the Theological Education by Extension College (SA) is doing well. It now has about 3300 students and its courses have been officially recognized, but it needs more staff.

Recently the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the much smaller Reformed Ecumenical Council united to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches, with over 80 million members in 230 Churches, based in 108 countries. Significantly for Southern Africa, and especially for the Reformed and CUC groupings, the Commission elected as its first President the Rev Dr Jerry Pillay, the General Secretary of the UPCSA, and as a member of the Executive the Rev Dr Kobus Gerber, General Secretary of the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk, an Observer on the CUC. Dr Pillay will serve for seven years.

### **STANDING COMMITTEES**

The Rev Keith Griffiths, as Convener of the CUC’s Liturgy Committee, continues to be involved in broadly based ecumenical liturgical groups, including the CUC Churches, and has met separately with representatives of three CUC Churches. In August of this year he will attend two liturgical conferences in France, where he will represent the CUC, as well as the ACSA.

The Women’s Committee, under the leadership of Mrs Jenny Frye, who was until recently also the Vice-Chairperson of the CUC, continues to promote unity and co-operation among the women of the Churches, focusing mainly on the constituted women’s organizations. Keeping continuity is difficult, because of changes in elected leadership and breakdowns in communication. The annual National Day of Prayer has however been widely observed in South Africa and a very successful one-day course on Christian listening was held in Johannesburg in July, 2010. Mrs Frye feels that the time is approaching for her to step down and that the Committee is giving serious prayer and thought to its future modus operandi.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will be observed from Ascension Day to Pentecost, 2nd – 12th June, 2011. Once again World Council of Churches materials have been adapted and augmented and three pamphlets produced for circulation to the Churches, via their Denominational or Diocesan Offices. They are English & Xitsonga Orders of Service and a set of Bible readings, plus a Unity Prayer in eleven languages. Congregations are encouraged to use and adapt these materials in any way they see fit. There is no need to stick closely to the format given, unless those leading worship are under instructions from their own church authorities to do so. The main point is that Christians all over Southern Africa should join together to pray and reflect on the unity which is God's gift to us in Christ. This would be even more meaningful if congregations of Member and Observer Churches joined together in local areas at some time during this period.

Having discovered that its website had not in fact become operational, as was thought, the CUC has moved to get this up and running. Enquiries should be addressed to the Rev. Colin Campbell at [colincampbell@xsinet.co.za](mailto:colincampbell@xsinet.co.za) or P O Box 275, Boksburg 1460; tel. 011 917 6275.

### UNITED CONGREGATIONS

The support of united congregations continues to be an important part of the work of the CUC, extending where possible to those based on the Congregational-Presbyterian model.

In the past year the CUC has heard of two areas where there is an interest in establishing united churches on the CUC model, viz. Silvermine in the Southern Cape Peninsula and in the St. Francis Bay – Jeffrey's Bay area of the Eastern Cape. Sadly a newly-formed congregation in the Still Bay – Riversdale area now wants to become independent of the participating Churches. After a very long delay the matter of the dissolution of Bluewater Bay United Church in Port Elizabeth seems to be moving towards finality.

Periodic questions and occasional difficulties over the appointment of ministers to united congregations prompted the CUC to put this and other concerns that have been raised about the equipping and the good governance of united churches on the agenda of a planned Consultation of United Congregations. This was to have been held in Port Elizabeth in March, but had to be postponed because of a very poor response. The Consultation has been rescheduled for early August and moved to Johannesburg. It is hoped that this will elicit a better response.

### MEMBERSHIP

In 2007 the CUC established that the Member Churches had accepted a proposal put to them in 2005, to the effect that the Churches which had Observer status on the CUC be invited to apply for full membership. These were the Ethiopian Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCSA), the Moravian Church of SA and the Roman Catholic Church, as represented by the SA Catholic Bishops' Conference. Although the CUC has followed this matter up over a period of years, and has held meetings with representatives of the Churches, where this could be arranged, it has finally been decided to shelve the idea, mostly because a lack of clear

responses. The SACBC early on indicated it was unable to join as a Member, but it continues to participate actively in meetings and in the Week of Prayer.

### MODEL FOR A UNITED CHURCH

Another area where it seems “the mills of God grind slowly” is the consideration by our Member Churches of the request made to them in 2009 to comment on a proposed Model for a United Church and the idea of a commitment to a closer relationship, described as Full Communion, as a step towards union.

The Bishops of ACSA were the first to react, writing a carefully considered letter to the other Churches, addressed to the Moderator/Chairperson/Presiding Bishop, but the lack of response suggested that this letter should be considered by the CUC, initially, along with all the other responses. These responses have been slow in coming, but the Central Committee was able to consider responses from all Member Churches except the EPCSA. An analysis of these responses is attached as Appendix A.

In the course of reviewing the areas of agreement and disagreement several points emerged quite clearly. While no Church questioned the commitment to the search for organic union, made 40 years ago, all the respondents emphasized the difficulty that could be expected by anyone proposing that their Church take formal steps towards that goal now. While some older members had bad memories of schemes of union and draft covenants that were not accepted by all parties, others had no memory of the CUC at all. This was because a younger generation of ordained and lay leaders had grown up who knew little or nothing of what their Churches had done through the CUC and who did not own the commitment to the search for union which was made before their time.

The responses also made it clear that the Member Churches are still a long way from agreement on matters such as orders of ministry, structures and government. Some of the differences run deep and will not be easily or soon resolved. It also emerged that entering into a relationship of Full Communion, involving full mutual recognition of ministries of Word and Sacrament was not an option, at least for the Anglican Church, unless an acceptable agreement was reached on the form those ministries would take in a future United Church.

On the other hand the Committee acknowledged with gratitude the growth in unity and co-operation which had taken place. Besides the formal agreements on intercommunion, the mutual acceptance of members and the mutual acceptance of ministers, there was also the establishment of between 25 and 30 united congregations and the provision of liturgical and other resources for them, the annual celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and various other forms of co-operation.

The meeting became more and more convinced that, while organic union was not attainable in the foreseeable future, there was much that could be done to build on the unity we already enjoy and to promote various forms of co-operation. At the same time we need to recommit ourselves to a serious effort to reach a deeper understanding of the issues that still divide us, with a view to resolving them. There the particular the emphasis is on issues of orders of ministry and oversight. All this

should be driven by the motive of serving the mission given by God to his Church and facilitated by the holding a Consultative Synod every five years or so. Appendix B sets out in more detail the proposed new direction for the work of the CUC.

### NEW OFFICE BEARERS

The Central Committee of the CUC, in terms of the CUC constitution, held elections in March for the positions of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. The Rev Peter Langerman, a minister of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, was elected Chairperson, the first Presbyterian to hold this position. He succeeds the Rev Paul Verryn, who has given bold and challenging leadership over the past 10 years. Mrs Jenny Frye, out-going Convener of the Women's Committee, has also given sterling support as Vice-Chairperson. She has been succeeded by the Rt Rev Peter Lee, of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

As mentioned last year, the position of General Secretary will become vacant at the end of 2011 when the incumbent retires. A search committee has been set up and an advertisement for the position, with a revised job description, has been circulated to the Member Churches.

The retiring General Secretary records his gratitude to God for the opportunity to serve this arm of the Churches, whose work has always been close to his heart, and prays that the Lord of the Church will continue to grant grace and wisdom, direction and perseverance.

P.D. LANGERMAN, CHAIRPERSON      A. RODGER, GENERAL SECRETARY

### PROPOSALS

1. The Assembly/Conference/Synod receives the report.
2. The Assembly/Conference/Synod agrees to the budget request of R..... for 2012
3. The Assembly/Conference/Synod, while not abandoning the ultimate goal of organic union of the Member Churches of the Church Unity Commission, agrees that until that goal is judged to be more attainable the priorities, modus operandi and intermediate goals of the CUC should be those set out in the relevant Appendix to this report.