

**CHURCH UNITY COMMISSION**  
**REPORT TO MEMBER CHURCHES - APRIL 2016**

**1.0 Introduction**

The Report to Member Churches in April 2015 included two particular items of major importance. The first was a record of a number of Issues of Concern (Section 3.0), several of which were noted in an accompanying Action List that the Central Committee put to the Member Churches. The second was a presentation of the work being done under Section 4.4, the fourth of the five Trajectories of Unity that have guided the work of the Central Committee over the past four years.

The extent to which these issues were discussed or acted upon by the executives of the Member Churches is uncertain as the Commission has not received any formal feedback as yet.

The first quarter of 2016 included two meetings that were well attended by representatives of all Churches. These open up exciting new directions as discussed in this report.

**2.0 Visits to Church National Bodies**

The 2015 meetings of the Executive Committees, Standing Committees and other national bodies of Member and Observer Churches during 2015 were not easily accessible and few visits were managed. However, these meetings for 2016 have been arranged in such a way that it should be possible to ensure a formal CUC presence for part of all of the gatherings.

**3.0 Legislation by Member Churches of the Agreements already reached**

The gathering of the texts of the various agreements already reached by Member Churches since the Services of Commitment to the Search for Union in 1974 is almost complete, and these are being consolidated into a single document due for the July meeting of the Central Committee.

However, these agreements have not always been legislated into the formal documents of the Member Churches. It is vital that such agreements be incorporated into the legislation to ensure that the leaders of the subsequent generation of all member Churches are aware of the commitments as they stand, as well as the way in which the terms of these agreements are to be applied across the several Member Churches. It is important that the details of such legislation are forwarded to the CUC Central Committee for recording in the minutes of that body.

**3.1 The Mutual Acceptance of Ministries**

The Mutual Acceptance of Ministries has been accepted for over 20 years now, and it is important that Member Churches and the ordained ministers of those churches are all well aware of the implications of the agreements for the appointment of ministers between denominations and to United Churches.

**3.2 The Questions about Oversight**

While acknowledging that the search for agreement on Oversight and Full Communion dominated the work of the Commission for a number of years without resolution, the need for ongoing discussion must not be overlooked. At present the work of the Commission with regard to the five Trajectories of Unity continues to provide ample opportunity for developing relationships between ministers and laity across denominational boundaries at all levels of church life.

**4. Developments in Ecumenical Engagement****4.1 Receptive Ecumenism**

Professor Paul Murray of Durham University was invited to South Africa by the Catholic Bishops Conference and offered to the CUC to provide input at a Consultation on 14 January in Benoni. The Consultation was attended by a broad representation of Member and Observer Churches as well as the Coptic Church and the Evangelical Alliance.

Prof. Murray addressed this third stage of ecumenical engagement while remaining realistic that organic unity was still a long way off. This stage seeks to create space for churches to

move beyond seeking to show others what it is of value they bring to the common discourse and to begin asking what it is that each can learn from other traditions to develop the strengths that can be drawn into their own way of engaging with the *Missio Dei* in the present generation and the lived experience. A full report on the Consultation is attached as an appendix to this Report.

#### **4.2 Second Unity and Mission Consultation**

The first Unity and Mission Consultation held in 2013 provided an opportunity for representatives of Member and Observer Churches, as well as individual United Churches, to reflect on the work of the Commission at that time and to raise matters that needed to be taken forward. It was also an opportunity for all the Heads of Member and Observer Churches to share together with the CUC EXCO some of the issues that hindered the work of ecumenical engagement at that time.

A second Consultation is planned for August 2016 at which the whole of the second day has been set aside for representatives to consider pressing issues from each of the Trajectories of Unity.

1. Mission and Ministry at a local level
2. Development of Preaching and Liturgical Resources for Southern Africa
3. Theological Education and Training
4. Hearings for Healing and Centres of Hope
5. Doctrinal Issues

It is hoped that the Churches will take care to ensure that they are represented at this Consultation by persons who will be able to report back to their decision making bodies Churches so that the conversations started at the Consultation will continue at all levels of the Churches.

#### **4.3 Hearings for Healing and Centres of Hope**

The major section of the 2015 CUC Report was concerned with the work led by Revd Paul Verryn in conjunction with a number of NGO's as they engaged with communities wracked by conflict and neglect across all of the Provinces of South Africa. The issues raised at these meetings covered the same range as was recorded in the 2015 Report and the only change has been a marked increase in the number of interventions needed, and an acute awareness of the conditions under which so many people are living today.

There is an urgent need for support for this work in two distinct ways:

- There is a need for active participation from the Churches in the local situations. While there has been support from individuals in some places, it is imperative it is a united Church that acts together locally and regionally to support initiatives that bring relief where needed.
- There is an urgent need for financial support for the process. The CUC has provided financial support from reserves for this work in an amount of R40 000.00 in 2015 and a further R60 000.00 for 2016. If the Church is to play its proper role in this work, it is vital that the Member Churches meet with the Executive of the CUC to discuss how this ministry can be supported and to release additional funds to the CUC to ensure that the work continues.

### **5. Appointment of Representatives to CUC Central Committee**

Attendance at and participation in the work of the Central Committee of the Commission has been patchy for a number of years. It is seldom that more than 50% of the representatives attend the meetings of the Committee and the discussions and decisions do not appear to be conveyed adequately to the Executive bodies of the Member and Observer Churches. In addition, the decisions are seldom passed down to the regional leadership and so they rarely get down to the leadership in the local situation. It is vital that the Churches, meeting in their national Synods and Assemblies, elect or appoint to the Central Committee a team of people who are able to ensure that

the flow of information from the Churches to Central Committee and from Central Committee to the decision making structures at every level of the Member Churches is fully supported at all times.

**6. Conclusions**

2015 was a very busy year for the Central Committee, much of which was identifying areas that needed attention. It is hoped that the plans set out for the year ahead will allow for a strong witness to the unity that is our Lord's prayer for the Church in this generation so that we can address the critical needs in so many communities across the countries in which we serve.

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Keith Griffiths  
Secretary General

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Peter Langerman  
Chair: Central Committee