

CHURCH UNITY COMMISSION
REPORT TO MEMBER CHURCHES - APRIL 2017

1. Introduction

In a variety of combinations, the Member Churches of the Commission serve congregations in nine countries of Africa as well as the island of St. Helena. It would be difficult to establish the number of languages that are used in those churches, and to that must be added the languages spoken by the refugees who are drawn into services on a regular basis. It is important for the Member Churches to recognise the opportunity it has to unite Christians in Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It is also important that this unity should be visible and effective at all levels of the Churches involved, from the interaction of the Heads of Churches, through the regional leadership of the denominations through to the interaction at community level.

2. Quest for Unity

Representatives of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Church, the Lutheran Church and the Focolare movement of the Roman Catholic Church have been regular Observers at the meetings of the Central Committee of the CUC for many years, and in March 2017 the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa attended the meeting as well. The initial invitation to the mainline churches in 1968 was an invitation to engage together in the search for unity. The 50th anniversary of that original invitation will be celebrated in 2018 and it was felt by the Central Committee that there would be merit in again issuing the invitation to the present Observer Churches and others with the aim of growing the movement at a time when other attempts to develop ecumenical engagement seem to be stalled.

The celebration in 2017 of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's action at Wittenberg Castle when he first presented his 95 Theses has sparked a number of activities in Southern Africa. An ecumenical working group including representatives from the Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, and Roman Catholic Churches continues to meet to consider both the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and the present Pope's most recent statement on Ministry.

3. Visits to Church National Bodies

During 2016, the Secretary General attended the UCCSA SA Synod in Pacaltsdorp and the UPCSA Assembly in East London during July. This was followed by his attendance at the MCSA Conference in Pretoria and the ACSA Provincial Synod in Benoni in September. The Chairman had also been present at the opening service at the ACSA Synod. In October the Secretary General attended the Moravian Synod in Port Elizabeth.

It is important that these visits should be used to keep the Member Churches aware of the work of the Central Committee and to help develop relationships between the Member Churches and the Commission. The personal contacts at such gatherings help to keep the Churches abreast of the developments in ecumenical work over recent years.

4. Legislation by Member Churches of the Agreements already reached

Many of the agreements that have already been reached over the years of the Commission have still to be incorporated into the legislation of the member Churches. This step is required to ensure that the leaders of subsequent generations are all aware of the implications for the churches and for their members. It will also mean that the legislation can be applied without any hindrance as circumstances arise. It is important that the details of such legislation are forwarded to the CUC Central Committee for recording in the minutes of that body.

5. Communication with Leadership of Member Churches

In the early years of the search for unity, the Churches were represented by members of their denominational leadership. Much of the work was done in sub-committees where the membership included specialists with particular gifts and responsibilities. Over the years the representation on the Central Committee was expanded to include such members which has, in practice, meant that the denominational leadership attended the meetings less frequently. It is clear that this has weakened direct communication with denominational leadership which has resulted in lengthy delays in the adoption of the work of the Commission.

6. Developments in Ecumenical Engagement

The Commission has had a busy year with particular emphasis on Theological Education and developing the programme of community engagement. Both of these issues featured at the Consultation in Randburg in August and were followed up by gatherings at Rhodes, Alice and FEDSEM during January and February of 2017. The work of developing relationships with communities throughout the country has progressed to the point that there are activities in each of the nine Provinces of South Africa as well as with a number of groups of refugees who are struggling to settle here.

The following particular engagements form the core of the work over the past year.

6.1. Second Unity and Mission Consultation

The Consultation was held at Randparkridge United Church in August 2016. The focus was on the five Trajectories of Unity and Member and Observer Churches were asked to send representatives with a clear indication that they should be people who could contribute to the discussion within the Trajectory Groups and be able to report back to their Church leadership on the issues raised at the Consultation. Time was set aside on the final morning for the CUC EXCO to meet with the Heads of Churches to follow up the very helpful interaction at the first Consultation in 2013. However, not all of the churches were able to ensure that senior members were present.

6.2. Development of Task Teams for the Trajectories of Unity

In response to suggestions raised at both of the Consultations, it was agreed that the Task Teams for each of the five Trajectories should be established with a Champion for each team who would attend meetings of the Central Committee and head a team with representatives from each of the Churches who would be able to report back to the leadership of their church and to the relevant department within their church.

It is expected that the Task Teams would promote and develop the practical aspects of ecumenical engagement within the scope of their Trajectory.

6.3. Gatherings at Rhodes/Alice/FEDSEM See Appendix A for full report

Theological Education has been a constant concern to the Commission over several years. It has become clear that most of the Churches have some difficulty in preparing ministers for formal ministry across the countries and denominations.

It has been evident for some time that there was a need to address the issues that had led to the closing of the Faculty at Rhodes University, the move of FEDSEM from Alice to Pietermaritzburg and its eventual closure. A Committee of representatives of the Member Churches was brought together to plan the Gatherings and the Heads of Churches as well as the people responsible for Theological Education were invited as well as Alumni of the three institutions.

The Gatherings included presentations, discussions and a celebration of the Eucharist at each of the venues. The details of the work are included in Appendix A, and it was strongly suggested that a Colloquium/Indaba during 2017 to explore the situation with regard to Theological Education going forward.

6.4. Hearings for Healing and Centres of Hope **See Appendix B for full report**

The work of hearings has continued to grow and develop over the past year. Regular engagements take place in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KZN, Mpumalanga, North West and the Western Cape. The work continues to engage a wide range of stakeholders including government, communities, the private sector, and increasingly representatives of the diasporas from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda.

There is a great need for the Member and Observer Churches to get involved in the work that needs to be done in communities across all of the countries that are served by the Commission. In addition, it is important that the Commission be assisted in terms of the financial support that is essential for getting core persons to the different meetings that are needed in the scattered communities.

6.5. Inclusion of Organisations and Associations within Member Churches

Leaders of the Women's Organisations and Associations have been meeting on the day after the Central Committee meetings for a number of years. The original intention formulated by Sheila Burnett was for them to gather to pray for the process of seeking unity as well as the leaders of the churches engaged in the negotiations. The content and format of these meetings had varied in recent years, as had the support for them. At the Central Committee meeting in November 2016, the question had been raised regarding the contribution of the Men's Associations and Organisations in the search for unity.

A meeting was arranged for 11 March 2017 at which it was recognised that there was already a degree co-operation between the different Associations and Organisations, but this could be developed within the local communities and that this aspect of the work of the Commission would best be located within the ambit of the Trajectory for Mission and Ministry in the local community.

An important aspect of the inclusion is to ensure that there are clear and direct lines of communication between the Central Committee, the leaders of the Associations and Organisations at denominational level and the local bodies within the communities.

6.6. Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity material is prepared annually for the period from the Feast of the Ascension to Pentecost. It is distributed to the head offices of Churches electronically so that congregations can adapt it to the regular format of their service material. However, it is a sad reality that the material is not always distributed to local congregations timeously. This will often preclude any co-operation between local churches in preparing combined services or pulpit swops or other celebrations of the week.

6.7. Liturgical and Preaching Material

In conjunction with Ekklesia at Stellenbosch University, Liturgical and Preaching material following the Revised Common Lectionary were prepared again for the Sundays and Feast days for Year A – Matthew with John. *Woord en Fees* and *Word and Worship* have become a regular source of material for preachers across and beyond the member Churches.

A two-day meeting arranged by Ekklesia in Stellenbosch in March 2017 gathered a number of people from the churches to explore possible additional material that might be developed to expand the use of RCL to engage with different aspects of pastoral life, weekly Bible Study material, the Catechumenate, Ministry with young people and children.

6.8. The ongoing development of United Churches

With a few notable exceptions, communication with United Churches has been sparse over the past year. A common difficulty is the reduction in the ministers who can be made available from the Member Churches to lead these important elements in the journey towards unity.

In addition, there have been discussions regarding the New Worshipping Communities that are being established through the Fresh Expressions movement. There are a number of options for such communities either being attached to a denomination, or staying independent of such a connection or being established as a United Church under the CUC.

6.9. Maintaining the Collective Memory

The development of a Collective Memory of the history of the search for unity continues, but this project will require the support of the member and Observer Churches to be able to feed in the formal responses from Assemblies, Synods and other formal responses to the resolutions that have already been adopted.

7. Financial Issues

7.1. Servicing the important projects

Hearings for Healing

The details of the project are set out in section 6.4 of this report. During 2015 and 2016 the Commission made R100 000.00 available to assist this work across the country. This was not a budgeted figure and money was provided from accumulated funds to support the work.

Ecumenical Theological Education

The Commission undertook to arrange and invested an amount of R 91 571.15 from accumulated funds to ensure that these gatherings could be arranged with the excellent support of the Rhodes and Fort Hare universities. It made it possible to arrange for speakers at all three venues who presented some challenging papers that need to be digested by those responsible for theological education.

7.2. Engagement within the communities

In addition, there needs to be input and support from the Churches operating within the communities where the 'Hearings for Healing' are starting to take root. It is essential that the local churches support the many groups that have already been set up, and assist with the practical aspects of the desperate needs that exist within their parochial and regional boundaries. The most effective work will be done by people who live within the community, and the Church remains one of the few institutions that are trusted by the community.

Further information on this work is recorded in Appendix A attached to this report

8. Leadership of Central Committee

8.1. Election of EXCO for the period 2017 – 2020

At the March meeting the following were elected to the Executive Committee:

Chair	Revd. Peter Langerman	UPCSA
Vice-Chair	Revd. Thulani Ndlazi	UCCSA

The additional members of EXCO will be nominated by ACSA and MCSA respectively.

8.2. Appointment of Secretary General

The March 2017 meeting of the Central Committee was made aware that the Revd Keith Griffiths will be standing down as Secretary General during the course of 2017. A Search Committee was appointed including the following persons:

Revd. Peter Langerman	UPCSA
Revd. Thulani Ndlazi	UCCSA
Lay Canon Robyn Beneke	ACSA
Revd. Sikawu Makubalo	MCSA

9. Applications for additional Member Churches

There has been discussion on the process of opening the way for other Churches to become Member Churches of the Commission. The agreements that have already been established by the Member Churches will be formulated into a resolution that will be forwarded to the present Member Churches along with the applications for membership as a first step in the process of dealing with these applications.

10. Concluding Reflections

It would appear that ecumenical engagement has dwindled in recent years, and yet there have been several attempts to establish new ecumenical bodies both regionally and nationally. It is within that context that the Commission will, in the next eighteen months, celebrate 50 years since the invitation to all main line churches to come together to seek unity.

There have been some bold steps taken together, and some periods of drought during this time. The original enthusiasm to become a single United Church has waned, and yet it is evident that there is an awareness of the strength of the Christian witness in the community is strongest when local Churches are seen to be working together, and in the nations served by the Commission when the Churches are seen to be standing together to speak truth to Power.

It is vital that these two different but equal ways of presenting the gospel to the world are strengthened and seen to be consistent with our Lord's prayer in John 17, "Holy Father, keep them in your name ... so that they may be one". (John 17:11 *The Kingdom New Testament* N.T. Wright)

Appendices

A. Gatherings at Rhodes/Alice/FEDSEM Report to Church Unity Commission by Revd. Paul Verryn

Introduction

Whenever the conversation around Ecumenical Theological Education arises, the closure of the Faculty of Divinity at Rhodes and, particularly of FEDSEM, seems to present an impasse to further discussion. The issue of trust being impaired, has been a major consideration.

The committee consisting of Barney Pityana, Makhosi Nzimande, Des van der Water, Craig Morrison, Charmaine Morgan, Purity Malinga, Zwai Mthyobile, Graham Duncan and Paul Verryn decided to convene in Grahamstown, Alice and Pietermaritzburg to "Remember, Rejoice and Renew". The gatherings took place on 21st and 22nd of January in Grahamstown and Alice respectively and then on 18th February in Pietermaritzburg.

The basic outline of the programme consisted of:

- a gathering on the sites of the Faculty and FEDSEM;
- a discussion on Ecumenical Theological Education;
- a Eucharistic celebration.

The order of events differed in each context. Letters were received from previous students, staff members and governing committee members. These were read at all three events.

In all three gatherings we tried to answer the following questions:

- What have we lost?
- How do we regain what we've lost?
- How do we shift the impasse to future co-operation?

The Grahamstown gathering

In Grahamstown, Dr Donald Cragg facilitated the discussion, Dr Itumeleng Mosala preached and church heads con-celebrated in the Chapel near the old Faculty of Divinity. Dr Sizwe Mabizela enabled the catering and organising of the facilities for us. Monica Gaybba helped in co-ordinating logistics with the Vice-Chancellor's office and the press.

Dr Cragg introduced the discussion under the topic; 'Ecumenical Theological Education: its practice and effect'.

The following reflect some thoughts expressed in this event:

1. Churches to blame. They contributed the same to the Faculty for the years 1950-1980. There was little or no teaching or mentoring in terms of ecumenism.
2. There was a need to integrate theology, pastoral studies and spirituality.
3. Building of non-racial relationships.
4. The costs relating to married students became prohibitive.

What would shift us? Economics? A deeper analysis of what closed the faculty, including questions around the viability of continuing the faculty needed further scrutiny. An important factor raised was the strongly identified antagonism of the then Vice-Chancellor and his considerable power base.

We were reminded of Desmond Tutu's statement that a university without a Faculty of Theology could not be regarded as a true University. Working in silos is not sustainable. Do we consider cross-subsidisation? What is the status of Theological education in a secular state?

There is no compatibility between capitalism and Christianity. Our divisions constitute heresy.

The Alice gathering

In Alice, Prof Tinyiko Maluleke facilitated the discussion, Prof John de Gruchy preached and church heads con-celebrated. In the service Dr Mvuyo Tom, Dr Donald Cragg and Dr Itumeleng Mosala spoke about Theological Education. The service took place in St Peter's Chapel on the Fort Hare University campus - the site of FEDSEM until its expropriation in 1973. Whilst Dr Tom was still Vice-Chancellor at Fort Hare, he organised all the logistical support for the event. The Rev Vukile Mngxuma arranged, with the Ministers' Fraternal, for catering for the event.

Prof Maluleke introduced the discussion as per the format of the previous day. The following reflect the thoughts of the event:

1. There is a fragmentation of theological education. Some Churches have resources to go it alone.
2. There is a crisis of leadership which is related to theological training.
3. The ANC's policy of non-racial, non-sexist democracy has not delivered in over twenty years.
4. Social cohesion and standards of leadership are big issues.
5. Ethics. What is happening from our pulpits and what insights do our people receive on corruption.
6. Commercialisation of religion. We are in an era of Doom Healers, U-tube Bishops and Prophets.
7. An Ecumenism of crisis. Forces us together.
8. We need to link our ecumenism to the grassroots.
9. Critical Solidarity.
10. Universities and Churches want, and need, ecumenical education.
11. Ideologies of scarcity and abundance.
12. The CUC must bring churches together in Universities. The CUC must formalise links with the Universities. Churches have a critical role to play in ensuring integrity of qualifications.
13. There must be report backs to all structures of the Churches.
14. Teaching children is important.

The Pietermaritzburg gathering

Dr Paul Verryn facilitated the discussion, Prof Barney Pityana and the Rev Lebaka-Ketshabile preached and the church heads and their representatives con-celebrated. We were hosted by the Presbyterian Church in Imbali and the Rev Lindani Sokhela facilitated our accommodation and catering for the event.

We began the day with a visit to the site of the FEDSEM, which was only accessible through the backyards of the settlement that has established itself there. As we gathered in the ruins of the FEDSEM buildings, the impact of our loss imposed itself vividly upon us. The death of our life together was felt in sadness and anger and the pain of our grief was given some time, in the silence, to be realised. The sound of the singing of the SMMS campus brought a conflicted life into the space of death. We were on sacred ground. We were led in prayer and returned to the church for our service.

After lunch, the discussion was introduced by The Revs Purity Malinga(ex-Staff) and Roxanne Jordaan(ex-student) and Prof Vuyani Vellem(ex-student). There was an energetic participation from the floor, some of which is reflected in the following:

1. There should be no basis for ecumenical theological education that derives from only an anti-apartheid narrative.
2. We need an Ethics for Social Transformation (CCLT). Black theologies based on black epistemologies. We must not think diversity, but plural versatility. Diversity is not irrelevant to ecumenicity.
3. 'Unthink' the West. Black theologies to be further developed. FEDSEM is not suppressed.
4. What broke FEDSEM was not ecumenical division, but divisions within the different denominations constituting the FEDSEM.
5. FEDSEM taught critical thinking. Read, Comprehend, Criticize what you are thinking.
6. Creating and keeping alive the prophetic voice of the Church. Challenging injustices and speaking with one voice.
7. Having knowledge of and respect for one another.
8. How do we open dialogue to include the wider church. How do we engage other Theological Institutions like CEDARA, COTT, TEEC, SMMS? Further, when and how do we engage the Pentecostal and 'extending' communities of faith?

There was a concern that the land still belongs to the church and that there could be some possibility of compensation. It has subsequently been pointed out that the government has compensated the respective churches involved in the FEDSEM conclusively. There has been a suggestion that some memorial be erected to mark the profound contribution the FEDSEM has made to the Churches and the country. Engagement with the established community on the property is also a challenge to be considered from an ecumenical standpoint.

Two further suggestions were that consideration be given to changing the name of SMMS to FEDSEM and that some form of apology be given to the people of Imbali.

Random further Considerations and Analyses

1. There was a strong motivation for a colloquium on theological education. In the light of the possibility that continued government subsidy for theological education could be threatened, important work needs to be done in healing the scars that are unresolved relating to closure and serious planning must be done in imagining future permutations of co-operation.
2. A strong opinion still prevails that the reason closure finally happened, was that the larger, more financially powerful churches took decisions that compromised the smaller, more vulnerable denominations. Power dynamics will have to be on the agenda of reconciliation. Furthermore, an opinion was expressed that at the time of closure FEDSEM was suffering from a pathology of Institutional Psychosis. We need to beware of romanticizing FEDSEM.
3. We will always need to ensure that we remain sensitive to our insistence on inclusiveness.
4. A distinction needs to be drawn between seminary training which tends to be insular and university training, which is secular. There are pros and cons in both systems that need further debate.
5. Resources that are still at our disposal in this discourse are The Joint Board and SACTE.

A huge indebtedness is owed to the Rev Zwai Mthyobile for arranging so extensively the logistics around accommodation, catering and transport for all three events. There are still a few outstanding accounts to be settled and he will produce accounts on these matters before the end of March.

One of the prevailing challenges that remains after all these events, is the challenge to the integrity of our ecumenical relationships. The ruins of FEDSEM in Pietermaritzburg expose our vulnerability and duplicity in the journey. May the Lord have mercy upon us.

Appendix B. Hearings for Healing and Places of Hope

Report to Church Unity Commission by Revd. Paul Verryn

1. Introduction

The work of hearings has continued to grow and develop over the past year. Regular engagements take place in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, KZN, Mpumalanga, North West and the Western Cape. The work continues to engage a wide range of stakeholders including government, communities, the private sector, and increasingly representatives of the diasporas from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda.

2. Report on Engagements in Provinces

2.1 Eastern Cape

Partnerships continue with several stakeholders including the Project for Conflict Resolution and Development, a network of ministers in Port Elizabeth and there is a growing relationship with the mulwanas in PE. Further work continues in partnership with the four universities in the Province.

Recent work has included:

- Pursuing opportunities with young people from Walmer township.
- Working with representatives from Rhodes University on a range of issues related to the exceptionally high levels of rape and other issues pertaining to transformation.
- Engagement with the Xolobeni community, where there has been significant conflict and attacks relating to mining activity. Opportunities to develop a relationship with the Wild Coast Sun International institutions are being explored.
- Work with ministers and community members in Lutsikisiki, where the municipality demolished RDP Houses.
- Engagement with the South End community.

2.2 Free State

Representatives of the Anglican, Catholic and Dutch Reformed Churches continue to explore the issues of fatherless children, and the struggles ex-offenders face when re-entering communities. Substantial counselling and trauma work was also undertaken towards the end of 2016 with students who had been beaten and threatened during the Fees Must Fall protests.

2.3 Gauteng

- Orange Farm

Regular meetings are held with different representatives of the communities of Orange Farm, Palm Springs and increasingly some members from the Vaal. A wide range of issues have emerged during this work including access to title; municipal debts; unemployment; labour disputes; difficulties in regard to transport and a wide range of issues relating to documentation. Multiple social justice organisations partner with the Orange Farm Advice Office and the hearings to pursue the issues raised.

- Mabopane

Work has continued in the development of the agriculture cooperative in partnership with Sun International and the community. A preliminary evaluation of the project identified an urgent need for more young people to participate.

Tensions in the Soshungu and Mabopane communities in regard to xenophobia remain high.

- Work continues with residents in informal settlements to the north of Johannesburg including Clay Oven and Zandspruit. The Clay Over residents remain highly vulnerable as developers continue to build on the land adjacent to the settlement. In Zandspruit serious concerns about the capacity of the Clinic to serve the population are being pursued.

2.4 Kwa Zulu Natal

- The most substantial work has taken place in KZN over recent months. This work is driven by different stakeholders and includes:
 - a. Ongoing work through the Diakonia Council of Churches and Denis Hurley Institute for Reconciliation to address the trauma experienced through xenophobia and an ongoing effort to monitor and address issues of violence in the hostels
 - b. Work with communities in Northern KZN and outside Pietermaritzburg relating to education, domestic violence and people exposure to violence
 - c. Work with traditional leaders and communities in Southern KZN with particular focus on the ANC and IFP conflicts which took place in the 80s and 90s.
- Regular meetings with representatives from the DRC and Rwandan communities have been held and hearings commenced. This work is still in its infancy and has to be carefully managed given the very high levels of vulnerability and fear which exist in the communities.

2.5 Limpopo

Little work has happened in this Province in recent months,

2.6 Mpumalanga

Work continues with the communities near EMalahleni which are adversely affected by coal mining activities. Very serious issues relating to the pollution of air, water and soil continue to be raised and addressed. Anglo Coal remains engaged in the work.

2.8 North West

Regular work with communities in the platinum belt takes place and Lawyers for Human Rights have remained an important partner in this work and to provide support to communities of workers in dispute over their employment. There are increasing reports that there is growing tension between NUM and AMCU. There are further tensions being raised among the widows of people who were allegedly killed by G4S security force.

2.9 Western Cape

This chapter meets regularly and consists of a wide range of stakeholders. These include representatives from universities, churches and members of the social work and psychological disciplines.

Work with communities affected by forced removals in District Six, Ocean View and Fishhoek continue.

Conversations with members of the diaspora communities of DRC and Rwanda have also started in Cape Town.