



CHURCH UNITY COMMISSION REPORT TO MEMBER CHURCHES 2020

Introduction

Mitzi J Budde, reflecting on unity through the sacrament of Baptism, says

Each of the baptised has a Christian vocation for unity and mission, given in baptism, guided through regular encounter with the Scripture, fed through the Eucharist and sustained in community. This call to unity and mission is not unique, rather, we are individually commissioned in baptism to participate with the church catholic in Christ's mission.

Further he says: "In baptism, we are individually and corporately commissioned for mission"

To give expression to this vocation the work of the Commission is structured in accordance to the 5 trajectories that were adopted in 2011. It is the hope of the commission that the 5 Trajectories become a vehicle used to overcome the challenge of the lack of visible unity at a local level, driven by the clergy and lay persons alike. Coupled with this, to actively implement the covenant as it stands at all levels of the church.

The 5 trajectories will be highlighted below describing the work done and the challenges to be overcome. Firstly, the report will touch on the executive and membership.

1. The Executive

The Revd. Peter D Langerman has served as the Chair of the Central Committee since 2012 and his term is concluding at the end of the current year. This being the case the Central Committee will be electing a chair at the November meeting. Currently the executive is inclusive of Rev Peter Langerman (UPCSA) as Chairman, Thulani Ndlati (UCCSA) as Vice Chairman, Mrs Liz Barnes as Treasurer and Sikawu Makubalo as executive.

Special word of recognition and appreciation is given to the former treasurer, Mr Howard Thomas, who served the Central Committee with excellence and integrity. After long illness Howard succumbed and went to sleep. We sincerely thanks Merle, his wife, and the children and grandchildren and assure them of our prayers.

Member churches representatives to the executive are Bishop Charles May (ACSA), Rev Mike Voster (MCSA), Rev Dr Gustav Claassen (NGK-SA) and Rev Paul Verryn as Additional Member.

2. Membership

Membership to the CUC has its roots in the adoption of the 1970 Declaration of Intention to Seek Union. With organic union as the main goal the member churches, which were ACSA, UPCS, UCCSA and MCSA grew stronger and closer in relationship adopting a covenant that bind and shape the relationship.

In 2011 the Central Committee adopted a new direction noting the difficulty in attaining full communion in the foreseeable future. In 2019 the DRC was received as a new member of the CUC, a first-time reception since the commission was founded in 1968. Over the years churches such as the ELCSA, SACBC, MCSA, URCSA and EECSA participated as observer members with justifiable challenges in fully accepting the covenant. As a result of what is noted, the central committee proposes a new membership structure that will include:

Full members - covenanting members committed fully to the covenant and work of the CUC.

Associate Members - invited to a "partial adoption of the covenant", financial contribution, full participation in the five trajectories, and representation in the central committee.

Observer Members -who are those who are not ready or able to make any definite commitment?



3. THE 5 TRAJECTORIES

The 5 Trajectories adopted in 2011 offer a clear way forward and an attainable agenda for unity and cooperation while recognising the challenge of attaining full communion in the present time. Efforts are being made to have the trajectories shape and structure the work of the CUC, hopefully, at all levels of cooperation and unity. To this end the work is reported in accordance to the 5 trajectories

TRAJECTORY 1: Promoting further co-operation in ministry and mission at local level including the examination and development of models of local ecumenism and united congregations

The goal of this trajectory is self-explanatory and relevant to the covenant and expressions of visible unity in worship, witness and service. 2 areas affected by this trajectory are reported on, viz,

- **Regional consultations:** These consultations are intended for reps from united congregations and regional leaders such as Synod and Dioecian Bishops, Presbytery Moderators and Regional Chairpersons and their reps. Two consultations were held in the year 2019 in Cape Town and East London. It is with disappointment to report the absence of regional leaders at both, save for the UPCSA.
In Cape Town a second attempt was made with the help of Rev Colin Campbell of the UPCSA. This second attempt was attended by ministers and reps from the UCCSA and UPCSA who account for more united congregations between the congregations in the area.
- **United Congregations:** There are about 25 United Congregations continuing in a CUC arrangement.
Stationing ministers to the united congregations is persistent challenge that seeks immediate resolution. Contributing factors to this challenge include communication between united congregations and regional leaders as well as denominations, lack of oversight and reporting and congregations changing their constitutions.

This challenge requires a new approach in stationing / appointing ministers to United Congregations as well as improving communication. A proposal to this effect is attached for member churches to affirm.

TRAJECTORY 2: Development of Common Preaching and Liturgical Resources

Rev Keith Griffiths of ACSA retired in 2019. He served in the central committee for more than 10 years with dedication and passion. His passion was mainly evident in the work he did as the Liturgy Convener which later developed to this trajectory. The work includes editing Word and Worship, preparing the prayer for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Ascension - Pentecost), preparing prayers and liturgy for conferences and worship services and representing the CUC to worship and liturgical conferences.

The Central Committee wishes Keith well for his retirement with gratitude to him and his wife, for his excellent service.

Material for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is available on the website and has been distributed via emails. Local congregations are encouraged to hold combined services during this period.



TRAJECTORY 3: Cooperation in Ecumenical Theological Education

Rev Paul Verryn continues to lead a team that discusses issues of cooperation in the training of ministers and post ordination training. In this regard the team highlighted the following as important for the curriculum on ecumenical training: Sexuality, Contemporary Spirituality, Dialogue on Ancestors and Spirituality and Our Relationship with the State

It was further highlighted that training should prepare ministers to engage a context governed by the constitution with human rights enshrined. The team is expected to be addressed by a human rights lawyer with regard to what would be important for ministers in training to know as they entered parish work. The following areas identified Doctrine and Human Rights, Marriage in terms of Church Law and LGBTIQ rights, Marriage as being monogamous, Labour/employment Law (HR), Itinerancy, Sexual Harassment, Gender Based Violence, Homelessness, Refugee Law, Education (Church Schools).

Rev Herry Damons of the Association of Christian Religious Practitioners (ACRP) presented the work done by the association. This work entails facilitating registration and management processes for pastors and people in general ministry, registration of people and institutions offering ministry training and registration and designation of pastoral counsellors. The Central Committee recommends that member churches register students in training for ministry with the ACRP so as to obtain one common database and work with the ACRP in the registration and designation of ministers serving as both ordained and lay ministers.

Lastly in this trajectory, a symposium for students in training for ordained ministry is being organised and will be held at the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary on the 26th to the 28th of May. This will be the first symposium aimed to encourage ecumenical cooperation and instil an enthusiasm for ecumenism to those trained for ordained ministry.

TRAJECTORY 4: Developing and strengthening of Centres of Hope

Our understanding of unity is summed up by Prof de Gruchy in saying:

Unity has already been given in Christ. What we are trying to do is to discover what this unity means and how we could embody it in the life of our churches together. We cannot unite the churches, what we can do is to discover our unity in Christ and to find how we can express and embody this unity in the most practical way we can.

The most effective way of expressing church unity apart is being united in mission, the Missio Dei. The South African context suffering violence, inequality, trauma and wounds of injustice requires a united church voice and leadership in realising and restoring justice and reconciliation.

The CUC is grateful for the passionate leadership offered by Revd Paul Verryn, reaching out to communities in different provinces in Hearings for Healing. These hearings offer mediation and facilitation of a process of healing towards justice, and trauma counselling to broken and violent communities. The work was fully supported by the CUC and an approved contribution of R65 000 was made in 2019.

A detailed report on this work is attached.



TRAJECTORY 5: Doctrine

Since the early beginnings, doctrinal reconciliation was at the heart of the CUC work through the Doctrine Committee. Evidence of this work is found in the covenant and many papers written on the understanding of the Eucharist, Baptism and the Ministry of Oversight.

This work is now strengthened in member churches acceding to and signing of the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). This has opened a platform to discuss doctrinal differences with the Catholics, Lutherans and member churches of the CUC. Churches participating in the JDDJ discussions have presented papers on the Eucharist and the theological understanding of the open table. This work needs to filter down to the local congregations. Bishop Phalane undertook to present the work to the Vatican for further discussion.

Rev Zwai Mthyobile convenes this trajectory.

Proposals: Refer to attached resolutions from United Churches.
Planned event 2021: National Consultation 27 – 29 July 2021 in Johannesburg