



## ST COLUMBA'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HATFIELD PRETORIA

(A Congregation of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa)

### SESSION CLERK

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Dear Saints at St. Columba's,

This is a circular epistle to all members and friends. I pray you are well.

St. Paul wrote to the church in Rome and expressed his heart-felt desire. He wrote these beautiful words in what we have as Romans 1: 11f (NIV):

"I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong — that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."

I fully identify with the apostle's yearning.

Speaking of verses in Scripture, if I asked, "What is the *shortest* verse in the Bible?" many of you would be able to answer, John 11:35, the verse that modestly and candidly professes, "Jesus wept." This is correct, of course.

There is another equally short but profound verse that declares, "Rejoice always," that we find at 1 Thessalonians 5: 16.

These are two opposite binaries in the Christian life, "Jesus wept" and "Rejoice always". However, they are not merely opposites, though. They are both features of human life. And as the book of Ecclesiastes says, "there is a season for everything under the Sun: there are times to weep and times to rejoice."

We have all been under the burden of lockdown conditions and perhaps for you there have been moments of weeping when you have dealt with anxiety, fear, need and/or grief. Someone we know recently experienced the death of a "fur-kid" when their pet cat died tragically and their grief under a stressful lockdown seemed so much more acute.

There may also have been moments of rejoicing for you. Times when we noticed acts of kindness, celebrated a birthday or anniversary, when you may have heard of accounts of bravery and/or compassion, or had renewed contact with family and friends, or been blessed by a devotion of a worship Service rendered to you electronically.

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**ST. COLUMBA'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH 327 HILDA ST, HATFIELD, PRETORIA**

**SESSION CLERK:** Ryan Johnson **ELDERS:** Nana Agyei, Vivian Agyei, Tshinanne Mutshatshi, Emmanuel Mwendera,

**ELDER EMERITUS (Pastoral)** Paula Cross **CHAIRMAN STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE (Acting):** Rev. Craig Morrison,

**TREASURER:** Fungelelani Mulaudzi

Friends, our prayer has to be for strength in times of weeping, and gratitude for moments of joy. May you experience a moment of delight, even today. May your heart know the gift of rejoicing and may you experience God's peace, that is beyond human understanding.

You are loved. You are surrounded by God. You are lifted up by grace. Stay safe, friends.

Grace and Peace,

Craig

## GENERAL

Folks, we have now moved to a slight easing of lockdown regulations. We are still urged to remain at home as far as possible, and there is also now an 8pm curfew. However, please let Paula and/or I know if you need help, assistance, someone to talk to, if you require food, or are ill, and especially if hospitalised.

We receive information confidentially and strictly on a need-to-know basis.

For most of us, asking for help can be awkward and embarrassing. Heck, even going to the doctor can be hard because it means admitting we need help! I understand this. But the church is a family, and we are here to support each other. We have access to food parcels for emergencies. We can collect and deliver urgent supplies or medication if necessary.

So do ask. Be brave. We are all in this together. In the book of Acts, sharing meals and providing for the needs of needy people was an important task for the church. You will remember how the first 'deacons' were specifically elected to carry out this work.

## SESSION

Even during lockdown, the Session continues to meet regularly via the internet. We have met every three weeks from our homes, for prayer, praying for the members, the congregation and the UPCSA at large, and to discuss pressing matters, and admin tasks. It has actually facilitated decision-making and decisions can be communicated and acted upon immediately.

The Worship/Preaching Schedule has been amended. Elders have stepped forward to assist with the weekly Sunday Services, either preaching or doing bible readings. These are accessible at any time on St. Columba's website at <https://stcolumbachurch.co.za>.

Our Session currently consists of 5 members, plus the local moderator of the congregation, of course, and right before lockdown we approached members (remember we requested volunteers a while back?) to come onto Session and to be trained up as elders. Our Session meeting has therefore increased by four, viz. Sarah Matshinhe, Rev. Roger Tem, Mr Phiwe Zulu, Mrs Sheila Mankuroane (Intern – UCCSA), and Ms. Dudu Molatlhegi (UP student).

Ja, they say there are *three* kinds of Minister: those who can count – and those who can't!



### STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

The StewComm has also met via internet meetings specifically to look after our church and manse premises. With the exception of the leaky church cry room, no other damage has been encountered since lock-down. I slip out regularly to check the church buildings are not burgled or vandalised in any way. The cry room repair will be attended to as soon as lockdown is eased to allow the builder to get to work.

The finances and books of the congregation are up to date, and all assessments, pension contributions and other statutory payments are done and are up to date. A huge thank you to all the members and friends for your faithful support during lockdown!

### MEMBERSHIP

We fortunately have had no bereavements even with an ageing congregation during the lock-down period. Praise the Lord!

We have a WhatsApp group set up specifically to communicate with members during COVID-19. Only the administrator may post there; it merely shares important and urgent church and denominational updates. To join, please contact the Session Clerk, Ryan Johnson. However, we are aware that not all the members and adherents in our congregation have WhatsApp.

Worship and Prayer Services are sent via the WhatsApp group (a voice note) that includes prayers, bible readings, sermons, and songs/hymns, and these are also accessible on our Facebook and congregational web-page for those wishing to listen in.

Some members have come forward to help the needy with food parcels, and/or financial assistance allowing them to buy food parcels. Please contact us confidentially either to offer help or to receive. Thank you to those who have made gifts available.

Occasionally, just for some fun and entertainment during this time, in the WhatsApp group we have had Bible quizzes, an organ quiz where we offered two prizes, and then also a general WhatsApp this week on some interesting history of our congregation.

### FINANCES

I often ask myself, "Is this the right time to raise this?" But the answer is often, "there is no right time." Folks, our congregation is surviving under trying times. Our plate offerings have naturally been affected by lockdown and the drop is around R20,000 per month.

We want to keep you as the congregation apprised of our financial situation as we trust God's provision. Thanks to the two friends who have made substantial donations this month. Keeping the lights on is a way for all of us to support the vital work we do. We make an eternal difference to people's lives because we partner with God. That's an amazing idea!

So we ask you to pray for the whole community of faith. The start and end of various New Testament epistles provide numerous examples of prayer for the church. Please pray!

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## DENOMINATION

God has been faithful to the UPCSA. We rejoice together for all the marvellous work being done throughout the denomination. Let us remember our Session Clerk who is also General Treasurer; and the General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Lungile Mpetsheni, who is also our member at St. Columba's, and all the office staff who carry the denomination every day.

We have kept out assessments' payable to the General Assembly and Presbytery up to date and have been able honour our commitments, and pay staff, etc.

Please pray too for the Tshwane Presbytery, and our sister congregations, and clergy.

## MODERATOR

I have been at work full throttle since the lockdown. Besides, tending my spiritual garden by reading widely, keeping up with my personal devotions, exercising, and giving my mental state some attention, I have had calls and internet meetings with individuals; undertaken counselling calls and screen sessions; made arrangements for food parcels; kept up denominational links and responsibilities (I am also Interim-Moderator at Mabopane); I have had a steep learning curve on sound engineering, video techniques, internet conferencing, video-making. I made a devotional video for the UCCSA.

I have written a number of articles for print on various platforms. In particular, I write liturgies and sermons for an Ecumenical project that publishes an annual lectionary resource to help clergy and lay-preachers with worship preparation, called Word and Worship, published by a project called *Ekklesia* (the NT Greek word for 'Church') housed at Stellenbosch University Faculty of Theology. My brief was to study the Book of James and to write an introduction (this is a technical word meaning an overview of this NT epistle.) And there were some liturgies and sermon work also. It is a collaborative effort across SA.

I have tended the St. Columba's Facebook page where we have reached over 380 people since lockdown, and made submissions to our church web-page. Our web-page Master is Mr Tiiso Agyei, son of our elders, Vivian and Nana.

I have coordinated the allocation of worship Service resource people, put the voice services together with software, and the usual preparation for devotionals and Services. Electronic Services take about 4.5 days to put together, but that is also because I am learning to use software.

We have held Ministerial Committee meetings (monthly clergy meetings) also on the internet – I hope we can continue this after lockdown because it saves a trip to Joburg! At any rate, all my denominational reports are up to date, including for Mabopane.

Regarding the manse in Colbyn, it has been thoroughly scrubbed, vacuumed, sanitised, washed, mopped and dusted a number of times since lockdown and is looking as clean as when we moved in. :) my deadline work should be complete by next week, and then I want to tackle the garden *ordentlik*.

Since I was given the task to work on the Epistle of James, I decided that my NT Greek is too rusty and needs some work, so I joined an online forum to polish up on my NT language study During Lockdown (this should be an official date designation now, as in BL/ Before Lockdown; DL/ During Lockdown, and AL!)

One development I need to share with you is during a recent clergy meeting last Wednesday, we collectively agreed and were conferred permission to host online Services for Holy Communion. Some things you need to know about this:

The clergy agree that it is better to have some kind of Communion Services than none at all.

Second, this is by common agreement amongst the clergy of the Gauteng-wide UCCSA Ministerial Committee. I always think it is important to have denominational clearance for things.

Third, we believe that clergy should lead the consecration of the Elements, Bread and Wine. Fourth, the liturgy will include a Confession and Assurance section to it.

So how I plan to do Holy Communion is to go live on our Facebook page on Sunday 03 May at 9h30am. This will be a live, real-time opt-in event.

I will set out the Table in the manse, and lead the Liturgy. Those watching from home may participate by setting out your own Bread and Wine/juice, and at the appropriate time will share your Elements with those present in your home.

At the same time, I will post the written liturgy to both Facebook and to the website, where a similar but pre-recorded video will be available at 9h30am on Sunday. We will also post the full text of the liturgy there for folks to follow if necessary.

So if you'd like to participate, please have your bread and juice and Table set ready for Sunday, so then there will be no break in the Service to set the Table – it should be ready by 9h30am please.

Looking forward to this immensely!

Well, Saints, that's about all the news I can muster. I shared with the elders of the congregation that we'd be doing an online Celebration on Sunday and also that I'd send this Pastoral Epistle to you all.

*So there is one item left to share with you:*

If you'd like to support the church with a financial gift but have no access to a bank or offering plate, the Session encourages those in this situation to use the Pick N Pay Digital Voucher system – and St. Columba's can use this money as cash and/or to pay Utility accounts, etc, - - - or even for us to purchase food hampers for the needy.

To use this facility, you can:

1. visit [www.webtickets.co.za/pnpvouchers](http://www.webtickets.co.za/pnpvouchers) and purchase a voucher to send to the church.
2. Visit any PnP Money counter.
3. You can then SMS or email the purchased voucher.
4. Vouchers can be between R50 and R1000, so it is super-convenient!

Love you ALL! Blessings! Grace and peace!



**Rev Craig**

Now finally, something fun!

Below is a Word Puzzle with some of the names of women in the Bible. See how many you can find! *You may have to print this page.* There are **12 names** in all.

C	L	E	H	C	A	R	D
H	A	Y	S	A	N	J	I
N	R	N	R	T	M	E	N
L	A	N	D	A	H	Z	A
E	G	O	R	A	M	E	H
A	A	T	M	A	C	B	R
H	H	A	L	I	L	E	D
A	B	I	G	A	I	L	H