

31st May 2020

TO THE UPCSА FAMILY

UPCSА MESSAGE ON THE ELECTION OF THE REV LYDIA NESHANGWE AS CWM MODERATOR: 2020-2024

Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ... She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'" Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." "Certainly, I will go with you," said Deborah. "But because of the course you are taking, the honour will not be yours, for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." (Judges 4:4-9 NIV)

The Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSА) congratulates the Rev Lydia Neshangwe on her election as the Moderator of the Council for World Mission (CWM) for the next four years: 2020-2024. She is the first woman to be elected as CWM Moderator.

The news of her election was received both as cause of celebration and as a challenge to the UPCSА, particularly. It is a challenge in the following senses:

1. The UPCSА has to support the Rev Lydia Neshangwe, as she executes the arduous tasks of the Moderator.
2. The UPCSА has to do an introspection on where it stands and how much it has done on the issues that CWM advocates for.

The Council for World Mission is a worldwide partnership of 32 denominations with a combined population of about 22 million Christians in over 50,000 congregations spread across 40 countries around the world. The 32 member denominations are in CWM's six regions - the Pacific (10), Europe (5), East Asia (6), Southern Africa (5), South Asia (4), and the Caribbean (2).

CWM's vision is: *"Fullness of life through Christ for all creation"*, and its mission is: *"Called to partnership in Christ to mutually challenge, encourage, and equip churches to share in God's mission"*. Its character is influenced by the following values:

- Justice in relationships
- Mutuality, equality and interdependence
- Unity in diversity
- Generosity of spirit

The theme of the CWM Assembly, which Lydia will preside over in June 2021 is: **Rising to life with Jesus: Breaking out from Babylon**. The CWM General Secretary, Rev Dr Colin Cowan says about the theme, "It is meant to inspire God's people to claim God's victory over death and destruction in all forms, and to pursue God's life-flourishing alternative for all."

Lydia is a minister of the UPCSA in good standing, serving at St Andrew's Hillside, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. She, currently, serves as the Clerk of the Presbytery of Zimbabwe, a member of the UPCSA General Assembly's Ecumenical Relationships Committee, and a representative of the UPCSA at the CWM's Annual Members' Meeting. She is one of the two chaplains of the current Moderator of the UPCSA General Assembly. She is one of the nominees as the UPCSA General Assembly Moderator Designate, and the election will be conducted at the next sitting of the UPCSA General Assembly.

In her profile, Lydia presents herself as married to Paul Neshangwe, a minister in the UPCSA and a mother of two boys (biologically) and many other children. That profile is getting expanded, as Lydia is also married to the Church and is becoming a mother of all in the Presbytery of Zimbabwe, in the UPCSA and in CWM. The UPCSA does not confine the election of Lydia as an achievement of the UPCSA or of CWM Africa Region, but as an achievement of the entire CWM family and an achievement of the rest of humanity. Her election is, indeed, "Breaking out from Babylon", breaking the stereotypes of patriarchy.

CWM is known for its resolve to do theology in the context of the empire and challenge the empire in all its manifestations. Empire is known for its obstinacy and its machinations to mutate, change faces while there is no substantial change on issues of justice and equality. It is known for managing the change of faces, while the voice and habits remain the same. This election takes place in a world that is engulfed in a plethora of challenges. The outbreak and rapid spread of COVID-19 caused devastation in human life and ushered in new normal. COVID-19 laid bare inequalities and injustices that still prevail among humanity. The death of George Floyd at the hands of police is an evidence of the denigration of human dignity and violation of human rights. The violence in the Holy Land is an issue of concern. The continued widening gaps between the rich and poor is a missional challenge. Lydia is called to lead a CWM Board of Directors in providing direction to CWM in this battle against the empire. As she engages in the battle, she should learn from the courage and determination of Deborah. May she always remember the words of Mordecai to Esther:

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this? (Esther 4:14 NIV)

The UPCSA pledges its unwavering support to the Rev Lydia Neshangwe and will continue to pray for her and the Board of Directors to fulfil the ideals of the reign of God – ideals of justice, righteousness and peace. May the honour not be Lydia's but be to the Lord who delivered "Sisera into the hands of a woman."

Yours in Christ.



Lungile Mpetsheni
GENERAL SECRETARY