



THE UNITING  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
IN SOUTHERN  
AFRICA

## LINKING PRESBYTERIANS TOGETHER



***THE PAST IS BEHIND,  
LEARN FROM IT.  
THE FUTURE IS AHEAD,  
PREPARE FOR IT.  
THE PRESENT IS HERE,  
LIVE IT.***

Thomas S. Monson

# BACK TO THE PAST

2020

COVID-19

***“The year we realised that no matter how advanced our technology, we are creatures of biology, able to die in great numbers from a single sweeping disease in the same way that humans have died throughout history. That no amount of knowledge can benefit those who refuse to accept it, that human cells have no politics and that the driving force of any civilisation should be protecting its populace.”***

- Mary McNamara

Once upon a time there was no COVID-19; then came the last day of 2019. On December 31, 2019, China flagged the threat with WHO and soon it cast a shadow so long that would define 2020.

2020 was the most devastating and disrupting year that we have lived through. This also means that we have the responsibility – and the promise – to both understand change as it has happened; and what this means for our future.

As complex challenges intertwine and overlap, they make everyday life even more difficult and dangerous for people already living through dire circumstances.

Yet in 2020 we saw people around the world come together to help others facing unnerving odds, as allies and advocates for not only their friends and community members, but for people they may never meet — providing financial support amid an economic crisis, donating protective gear to the people who need it most, and taking to the streets to demand justice for all.

Although the path forward from 2020 may feel uncertain, one thing has never been more clear: To change the trajectory for the better, we have to come together, work together, and support each other in building a brighter, safer, more just future we can all share.

There will indeed come a time when the smell of hand sanitiser will no longer be an emotional trigger and the parking lot at stadiums will be filled with sports fans rather than COVID-19 test sites. There will even come a time when people have stopped laying wreaths at yet-to-be-built pandemic memorials to honour those they've lost.

So will 2020 be remembered as the year we realised that it honestly does matter what we do? Our understanding of human history forms its skyline, the silhouette of events that loom large enough to be distinct. But each event is the product of many people doing small repetitive things. Wear a mask, wash your hands, avoid crowds, respect reality. Make 2020 a year we conquered, not the other way around.

## NOT EVERYTHING WAS BAD IN 2020

*It was really great to hear some good news in 2020. Congratulations to Duncan Murray on his 50th Anniversary of his ordination into the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa.*

Dear Friends in the UPCSA

I thought you may like to know that I celebrate the 50th Anniversary of my ordination into the Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa which took place in St George's Church, East London on the evening of 20th November, 1970. I grew up within the fellowship of St George's starting in the Sunday School, later taking part in the newly founded youth fellowships both junior and later senior and even doing a bit of Sunday School teaching in my senior years too. Alfred McRobert was the minister I started with and Bill Campbell the one came next and saw me off into my theological training at Rhodes University. My first appointment was as an assistant minister at St Andrew's, Pretoria, which also included the start of the Saints Presbyterian Church south of Pretoria. After three years I received my first call to St Columbia's Church, Queenstown and chaplaincy of the Presbyterian Children's Home. After the sad closure of the home I took a call to the City Church in Pietermaritzburg, which was to last for a long period with many varied areas of ministry both within the city and in the country areas around the city. It was also a time of very worthwhile ecumenical working together both with the city and also in a number of outlying rural congregations. I was also involved in assisting in the Northdale Congregation in the Indian areas of the city. The major ecumenical project was the founding of the All Saints United Church and I worked closely the Dean of the Anglican Church, Dean John Forbes, in a number of these projects. Eventually, of course, I felt a call to the Church of Scotland, partly because our two adult children, were looking to work abroad. In 2005 I took a call to a parish church in Chirnside, on the west side of the Scottish Borders. I served there for seven years.

Being in Scotland connected me with my late father's home city of Edinburgh. Finally, retirement came at the beginning of 2012. Celia and I moved down into east Yorkshire, to Knaresborough, which puts us closer to the families of our two adult children, Colin Murray and Robyn Heath. Robyn and her family are in Bath and Colin and his family are in Knapton, near York. We have a lovely home with a large gardens to the north and south which keeps us busy. In terms of local churches we attend both the Methodist and United Reformed Churches with an occasional visit to the Anglican Church too. We are grateful to the Lord for all the experiences, people, colleagues and friends and family we have related to through the years. We also like to hear from colleagues and friends in South Africa and others too who are scattered across the world. Above all, we give thanks to the Lord, for the grace and love which He pours out upon us and for the wonderful family, friends and colleagues we have known through all these fifty years and more.

Blessings and good wishes to you all -  
Duncan and Celia Murray.





THE UNITING  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
IN SOUTHERN  
AFRICA

## STATEMENT ON THE 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM CAMPAIGN 2020 THEME: LOVE LIKE JESUS

*“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*  
(1 Corinthians 13:4-13)

### Preamble

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a sin. It is an affront to human dignity. It is an antithesis to the sacrosanctity of life. It is caused by and contributes to brokenness in our societies, which includes the brokenness of women's bodies, the brokenness of family life, the breaking of the future of the children, the breaking of unity and cohesion at the workplace, and the breaking of the resolve of the church to foster peace, unity, justice and love. GBV repudiates the value of love that is core to the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence, the UPCSAs join all in the world in condemning GBV in all its manifestations and participate in the campaign known as 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children Campaign.

The 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children Campaign (16 Days Campaign) is a United Nations (UN) campaign which takes place annually from 25 November (International Day of No Violence against Women) to 10 December (International Human Rights Day). Other key commemorative days during this period include World Aids Day on the 1 December and the International Day for Persons with Disabilities, on 3 December of every year. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres has shown his support for the initiatives that strive to end violence against women. For 2020, he has introduced the **2020 UNiTE Campaign** with the theme: **"Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect!"** and he "calls for global actions to increase awareness, galvanize advocacy efforts, and share knowledge and innovations." (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take->

[action/16-days-of-activism\)](#)

The Countries in which the UPCSAs exist and operate, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe have put measures to curb GBV.

- The RSA government is implementing the Emergency Response Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, which was announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa in September 2019. <https://pmg.org.za/committeemeeting/29203/>
- The Zambian Government has undertaken a mixed "a mixed method, theory-based evaluation of the programme, reviewing systematic efforts invested towards reducing GBV across each stage of the programme." <https://www.opml.co.uk/blog/combatinggender-based-violence-in-zambia>
- In Zimbabwe, it has been acknowledged that the "establishment of victim friendly units in police stations for reporting of abuse has assisted in addressing gender-based violence." <http://www.hrforumzim.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Gender-based-violence-in-Zim-WT20497.pdf>

This year - 2020, the observation of the 16 Days Campaign takes place in the context of COVID-19, a context in which the levels of violence against women and children have been exacerbated. In order to curb the spread of the COVID-19, some governments introduced lockdown measures. As a result of the lockdown, people retreated to the confines of their homes and reports show that levels of intolerance grew and resulted in the escalation of the incidents of GBV. The UPCSAs should be counted among those denominations and organisations that condemn and work to eradicate GBV.

### Theological Foundations for the UPCSAs' Approach against GBV

Article 1 of the Confession of Faith that is contained in Chapter Two of the UPCSAs Manual of Faith and Order explains human predicament and uses the following phrases:

1.1 Human beings were created in the

image of God, as creatures little lower than the *angels*. ...the tragic paradox is that humankind has from the beginning yielded to temptation and turned away from God. ... In pride we have aspired to be like God, self-sufficient and autonomous, choosing our own moral laws...

1.2 It is God's grace and holiness in Jesus Christ that reveal what sinners we are and how empty before God every human claim to be righteous is. Christ claims the whole of life for God and so reveals how far short of grateful and loving obedience to God we have fallen. That he needed to die for our sins shows how grave sin is.

1.3 Human society is capable of degrees of justice, and human beings of great altruism, heroism and self-sacrifice. Yet both societies and individuals are also capable also of appalling brutality and degradation. The most just society is radically flawed with injustice, and our noblest deeds and highest virtues with individual or group egoism, pride and self-interest. Group and individual interests distort even how we judge between right and wrong.

1.4 Sin is a corruption of our very nature; it infects and dominates the whole of human life. In our private and our public lives we fall under the power of evil. We sin individually and collectively. We are proud, self-centred, resentful, lustful, greedy, corrupt; we hurt, exploit, discriminate against and oppress others; we neglect the needy; we sin by commission and by omission. ...

1.5 Sin darkens our minds and perverts our very wills. ...

1.6 Sin empties life of meaning and issues in despair. It makes us enemies of God, of one another, of our natural environment and even of ourselves. It grievously offends God, brings us all under God's righteous wrath and just judgement, and threatens final alienation from God.

**To address the predicament, the UPCSА has a vision and mission as follows:**

*Vision: "To be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ."*

*Mission: We will proclaim our Triune God in Southern Africa through:*

*Bearing witness to the saving love of Jesus Christ*

*Building vital, reforming congregations for worship, ministry and discipleship  
Visibly proclaiming the Kingdom of God through unity, justice, peace and love.*

The UPCSА adopted a definition of a missional church which reads as follows:

*A Missional Church is a **sent** Church, which understands its primary work as **witnessing** to Christ and **servi**ng God in the **world**.*

*A Missional Church is **shaped** by God **for** the community into which God has placed it. It is **focused** on those who don't yet know Jesus and on working **with** God in bringing **fullness of life** (involving justice, healing, wholeness and reconciliation) to **all the people** of the world.*

Patriarchy and GBV are antitheses to a reconciled community of Christians. In the context of the three countries, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe and springing from the UPCSА's vision, mission and definition of missional church, the UPCSА observes the 16 Days Campaign. We focus on **love**, which is in the first part of the UPCSА mission and is one of the values of the UPCSА. Hence, the theme is "**Love like Jesus**"

**Love as one of the Values of the UPCSА** The favourite hymn of the first moderator of the UPCSА, the Rev Clifford Leeuw was 184 in the Xhosa hymnal: **Singabazwana, lusapho lweNkosi enkulu. Singe sithandana, awukho umona phezulu** (We are brothers and sisters, family of the Great Lord. May we love another, there is no envy/jealous in heaven). The greatest thing that Clifford bequeathed to us is the gift of **LOVE**.

**LOVE** is listed as the first of the six UPCSА values. We requested that all of us in the UPCSА should, in the month of February, expose the value – **LOVE**.





“GOD CREATED US IN SUCH A WAY THAT WE CAN LEAVE THE PAST BEHIND AND START NEW AND FRESH ANY TIME WE CHOOSE.”

**2021** →



**From the desk of  
the Rev. Dr. Peter  
Langerman,  
Moderator of  
General Assembly**



Dear Friends

Thank you to all of you who participated in the UPCSA's Day of Prayer and Fasting on 11th January 2021. It seems that we have crossed the high point of the second wave and the numbers of infections, hospitalisations and people in ICU are dropping steadily. We thank God for this answer to our prayers and we note that it is interesting that 11th January was something of a turning point in this second wave, particularly in South Africa, and it looks like that trend is also being seen in the other countries in which the UPCSA is active as well.

In this month's letter, I want to focus on the issue of vaccines. While each country in which the UPCSA has congregations will have a different vaccine roll out strategy, I want to address the issue of vaccines in principle. The SACC put out a very helpful document which was compiled by an ecumenical task team entitled, "SACC Position Statement on the Church and the COVID-19 Vaccine". In this document the SACC deals with some of the misconceptions about the COVID-19 vaccine, including, COVID-19 vaccine and 'mark of the beast'; 5G and its implications on COVID-19; Coronavirus was made in a lab; Vaccine and population control; Vaccine and DNA and Vaccines are made from aborted foetus. I would suggest that people access that document if they are interested in these

various topics.

Many members of the UPCSA might have concerns about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines. We must realize that the various pharmaceutical companies that have developed vaccines have done extensive research and conducted large-scale trials to determine the safety and efficacy of the vaccine. Some people are concerned about the speed at which these vaccines were developed. What we must note is that most vaccines are not financially viable to produce and the development of a vaccine is usually not financially supported by governments. So, the development of new vaccines is not a top priority for most diseases. However, in the case of COVID-19, because of the extremely disruptive nature of recurring lockdowns on the economy, many countries have financially contributed to the development of the vaccine and committed themselves to paying for the vaccine once developed. This has enabled the vaccine to be developed in record time, but no corners were cut with regards to safety and testing. Millions of people have received these vaccines across the world and very few have had an adverse reaction.

We must note that certain side effects have been reported, such as fever, nausea, vomiting, muscle aches, fatigue and headaches. Most of these side effects occur

within the first two or three days after vaccination and last only one to two days. These adverse side effects are, in the most part, the body's immune response to the vaccine. All the vaccines are safe and effective in dealing with the virus and the side effects are worth the effort to save lives.

We have lost too many lives and livelihoods because of this pandemic. COVID affects the dignity of human life, forcing people to be admitted to hospital and to suffer alone. Those who succumb to the virus are condemned to die alone; their loved ones are unable to be with them in their time of death or after. Funerals are stark and sterile affairs, marked by limited numbers, social distancing and restricted time. Many have lost their income or their employment and are struggling to find alternative sources of income or new work opportunities.

If we are to save lives and livelihoods, we must take the responsibility to create an environment in which we treat one another with love, and we need to demonstrate that love and compassion by making sure that we take the vaccine and encourage others to do so as well. As the SACC document points out, "Getting vaccinated against the Coronavirus ought to be understood as an act of charity towards other members of our community." Jesus said: 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' (John 13:34-35). Thus, being vaccinated should be considered an act of love of our neighbour; for it ensures that we shall not be the cause of the infection and suffering of your loved ones. Thus, it is part of our moral responsibility for the common good. Protecting the health of the community takes precedence over individual ideologies. The guiding principle should be the Jesus cause 'that they may have life'; saying, 'I will take the vaccine not only for what I hope will be the good of my own health, but for others as well.'"

We need to create the space for everyone who wants to receive the vaccine to be able to do so. While the vaccine is going to be rolled out in a phased approach, there is a real concern, arising from the patterns of service delivery in South Africa, that people in the townships, the unemployed, the poor and those in the rural areas will be right at the back at the queue. We need to ensure that every single person should be able to access the vaccine within a

reasonable time. With that in mind, I would plead with congregations to make their buildings available to the health departments as vaccination centres.



Ministers and elders have a crucial role to play in advocating for the vaccine and in getting people to agree to receive the vaccine. We need to be saying, publicly and prominently that we support the vaccine and when our people see us leading the way, they will surely follow and public trust in the vaccine will grow. Ministers and elders in local congregations should volunteer to have the vaccine as early as possible and make it clear that they have done so in public and on social media.

There are two inter-connected means of curtailing the spread of this virus. The first are the so-called non-pharmaceutical interventions and precautions such as wearing masks, sanitizing, maintaining physical distancing, adequate ventilation when inside and socialising outside in the open air whenever possible. The second, the more enduring solution that will allow us to begin to function again more normally, entails the vaccination of enough (about 67%) of the population to stop the virus spreading due to population immunity. If we are to return to some form of worshipping community, we need to encourage our congregants and their loved ones to take the vaccine. We need to help people who may have misconceptions and misgivings about the vaccine to address their fears and overcome them. When that happens, we can shift attitudes from suspicion to confidence.

God's richest blessings for this what lies ahead, May the Lord Christ bring healing, hope, peace, joy, and love to you, your congregation, your community, and the whole earth.

Your partner in the gospel  
Peter

---

## From the desks of the General Secretary and Clerk of General Assembly

---

### OVERVIEW OF THE STATE OF THE UPCSA DURING COVID-19 TIMES

#### Introduction

The outbreak and the rapid spread of COVID-19 brought about a shift in the understanding of the ways of being and doing church. In a fast move, the plans that the organisations and the institutions pursued were proven inadequate. The foundations of being have been shaken. Organisations have had to adapt to new ways of doing things. It is called “new normal”. The fault lines that had already existed in many of human communities have been laid bare.

The church has not been spared. The lockdown measures that were put in place by the respective governments under the Disaster Management Act, in the case of South Africa rendered it impossible for the churches to continue with the implementation of some of their plans. Ministry was adversely affected in many ways. Pastoral visitations and counselling could not be done on a physical one-on-one basis. Loneliness caused anxiety and depression on many people. Many suffered severe loss of family members through death and they remained with no deserved pastoral and/or psychosocial support. Many families broke down because of tensions, conflicts and misunderstandings, and there was no pastoral support given to those families. Ministers, as human beings were also devastated and overwhelmed by the fast pace of change and the dynamics of a changing environment.

In this article, we give a brief overview of the state of the UPCSA in COVID-19 times. We discuss the impact of COVID-19 to the life and work of the UPCSA whose ministers and members have been infected and affected by the pandemic and whose congregations' viability has been shaken to the foundation. We call for reflections and engagements towards a solution.

#### Infections and Deaths of Ministers and Members

COVID-19 is a reality. Many of the ministers, ministers' spouses, and members of the UPCSA either got infected with or lost their lives to the pandemic. Indeed, some died of other causes not related to COVID-19. We regret that our members who went through the various

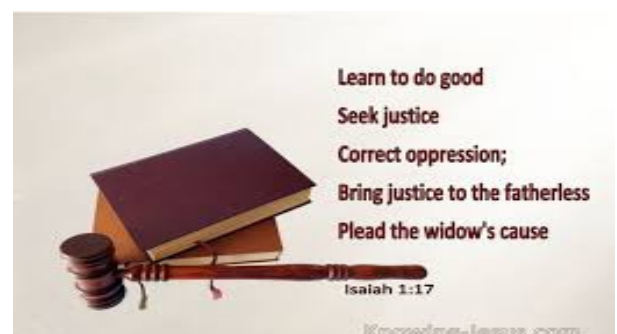
ordeals could not get the full and usual support, as it was not possible to visit or even attend the funeral services. We thank God for the recoveries, as God healed many of our brothers and sisters. We convey our deepest condolences to the members who lost family members and loved ones to the virus. We pray for the souls of all the departed to rest in eternal peace.



We continue to commend their families to God in prayer, so that they may be comforted and find closure. At a time like this, we are called to close ranks and be ready to support each other.

#### Life and Work of the Congregations

Congregations remain the basic unit through which the life and work of the church get manifested. People congregate, primarily, to worship and serve God and in turn get touched in various ways to become whole. Through worship and fellowship (as in groups or one-on-one consultations), people find themselves, find one another and strengthen their relationship with God, their Creator. COVID-19 took that away from the congregants. We learned new concepts and practices, like social distance, self-isolation, self-quarantine, put your mask on (and people cannot see your facial expression fully), do not shake hands, do not hug and kiss, e-services, e-sermons, etc. All these are anti-social and do not assist in the promotion of fellowship. That people do not get such moments of worship and fellowship may be a contributor to mental illness, breakdown in family life, gender-based violence and femicide, and excessive use of addictive substances.



The loss of jobs and income has also affected the financial viability of many congregations. Some cannot meet their financial obligations to the ministers, Presbyteries, and Central Office. Some congregations have even raised intentions to be downgraded, so that they would be exonerated from those obligations.

### **Welfare of Ministers and their Families**

The welfare of many ministers and families has been at stake. With isolations and quarantine and social distancing, some ministers have suffered much stress and loneliness. They are expected to be available for people who go through the difficulties of COVID-19, including infections, sickness, and bereavements. They expose themselves to adverse conditions, which cost their health and their lives. With the loss of income for the congregations, many ministers go without the stated emoluments. This surely adds much stress and tension in any family. The ministers' families are not an exception to this. The situation is overwhelming.

### **Provision of Spiritual and Psychosocial Support**

Doing ministry in an environment of COVID-19 has proven to be a daunting task. Indeed, no denomination could have envisaged this and even factored it in the formation and preparation of their members for ministry. The UPCSAs leadership has, therefore, deemed it necessary to put in place interventions that are aimed at providing spiritual and psychosocial support to the UPCSAs ministers. This may be achieved by ensuring that the leadership in each Presbytery is well equipped to provide *pastor pastorum* services and by arranging professional therapy for the worst affected ministers. It is envisaged that such services, when/if well-rendered, may impact positively on the spirituality of the members and the denomination at large.

### **The Response of the UPCSAs Leadership**

The UPCSAs leadership has started processes of engagements and reflections to determine appropriate response(s) to these challenges. The main issues in the engagements and reflections include, but not limited to the following:

1. How the ministry of the UPCSAs is (should be) prepared, empowered, equipped, supported, sustained, and executed in these times and beyond.
2. How is ministry provided to the UPCSAs in

general, but also looking at the specifics of rural, township, and suburban/city churches? Are our methods still relevant and sustainable? Who is participating in the ministry of the local church?

3. Is the UPCSAs there throughout the entire ministry of a UPCSAs minister – considering different stages of call discernment, formation, placement/appointment/call, performance, remuneration, retirement?

4. How is oversight provided to the congregations? How are congregations built/to be built to be vital and reforming for worship, ministry, and discipleship? How are the relationships between congregations and Presbyteries, and Presbyteries and the General Assembly Office? Are there any accounting mechanisms in place? If so, are they adhered to?

5. Do we need to re-invent the UPCSAs? What turn-around strategies ought to be considered?



### **Conclusion**

Institutions strive for success by improvising methods and mechanisms of abating the effects of COVID-19. The UPCSAs cannot leave its fate to chance but should engage critically to determine where it should be in these times and beyond. We need to face the ghosts we have always been scared to confront and re-engineer our processes for success. This can be achieved when all the members and structures of the UPCSAs work together towards a dispensation of “unity, justice, peace and love”, in line with the mission of the UPCSAs.

## IMPACT OF COVID 19 LOCKDOWN ON THE FINANCES OF OUR CONGREGATIONS

Contribution: Benny Boshielo

The declaration of lockdowns in our countries have exposed the extent to which our congregations remain unprepared for emergency and/or disaster situations. While the severity of the lockdowns' restrictions differed from country to country where our denomination has a presence, the effects were/are almost similar. This scenario is brought by the fact that in our planning, most of us have never envisioned a situation where worship services and church activities could be restrained as well.

The baseline is that for the traditional church revenue is collected mainly when worship services are active. This is mainly motivated by the fact that revenue in the church is mainly a cash business. Our failure and inability to adapt to the changing electronic banking environment is a case in point, in that during lockdown, even if cash was collected, the ability to get it into the banking system was not possible as people movement was drastically curtailed. Coupled with the fear of infection and transmission, and the call by our government leaders for limited contact amongst people, it had become extremely difficult to keep our cash flows in our congregations healthy.

The other important issue is our stark exposure to the demographic economics of our congregants, and the endemic poverty that sits amongst them. The fact that most live from hand to mouth, including on support for the ministry, also meant that once their incomes were cut off as a result of the lockdown, they instantly turned into indigents which require support from themselves. In South Africa, many joined the queue to collect the special R350 grant, which was only enough to feed families for a few days. This consequently had an impact on our revenue as well.

Clearly for most congregations, cash flows were negatively affected, and we saw them being unable to support their Ministers, service municipal rates (water and electricity) and of course generally servicing church bills. As if this was not enough,

church buildings were broken into, partly due to darkness caused by cut off of electricity, especially those using prepaid systems. But again, our inability to embrace technology reared its head, as prepaid electricity could easily be purchased online. There are therefore some few lessons to learn from this experience. The first and most critical of this is our inability to plan for unexpected situations, such as disasters like the Covid 19. Most of us navigate through instant survival, without planning for situations unplanned. For example, in a normal planning environment, the congregation's paymaster general account, which is used to pay salaries for church employees, including the Minister's stipend, must always have reserves for a period not less than three months, with a provision for a gradual reduction in the account of about thirty percent should the situation continue, with no prospect of any revenue. Which means provision can be made for payment of seventy percent in the fourth month, fifty percent in the fifth month and thirty percent in the sixth month. This is just an example of what can be put in the plan. The same should apply in the other areas of expenditure. This is to ensure that the congregation does not fall into a financial crisis first day of the disaster.

The second learning, relates to what our Manual of Faith and Order requires us to do which is "... relief for the poor and the needy...". Covid 19 has exposed the level to which we fail to walk the talk when it comes to this aspect. Thank you to some congregations, which we saw on social media positively responding to this cause by providing shelter, food parcels and clothing to the poor. In most instances, and we have seen this, even some members of our Denomination queueing for relief in some churches. Clearly this speaks to planning as well, and we have been found wanting in this regard.

The third is the point we raised about how we collect our revenue, which is mainly cash business. This is not only dangerous, but it completely fails to understand the

situation which we are in this 21st century. As one of our members Bro Malibongwe Gwele always says, *“this calls for us to do church differently but with the same purpose..”*.



Our declining revenue/income is not a result of members now suddenly unwilling to support the Ministry because of Covid 19, far from that, but more our inability to adapt to change. But again, we need to examine this more intensely. It cannot be disputed that Covid has forced us into doing things we never did before. I am sure that some of us have never listened to the Word of God with the type of regularity that we did during the hard lockdown. There are situations where we could listen to over five sermons/teachings in a day, from our own Ministers. For some, the trend continues, and we still listen to Bible studies everyday of our lives. It is therefore possible to change the above into our everyday management and administration of the church, including how we run our finances.

No aspect of church life can remain like it is a century or even a decade ago. Covid 19 presented us with an opportunity, not only to reach far and wide in preaching and spreading the Gospel, it has most importantly propelled us to change our way of doing church for the better, better still the improvement of our income, our financial planning and our embrace of technology to do the work of the Lord.

May the Lord Bless you all who shared in this piece of writing

## THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

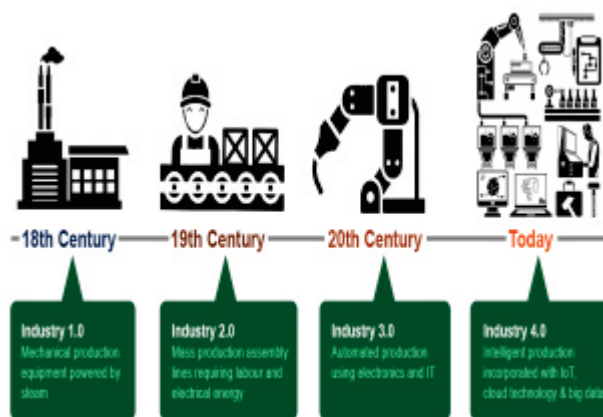
Contribution: Ian Wilson

Humans are highly social.

From Adam’s time, families cooperated to make sure that food was available, children were reared and those who were not able to care for themselves were cared for. To be able to do this they needed to communicate with each other. This created a sense of belonging. Communication became part of our being.

When Covid hit us we were suddenly forced apart which left many people feeling disconnected.

This is where Information Technology came to our help. Smart phones had become part of our lives to connect us, to talk with and see each other on video. This is where information Technology operates. It keeps a record of every cell phone and to which cell tower it is connected. It makes sure that the correct phones are connected for a call and stay connected even though the cell phones move away and connect with other towers.



Information Technology is used when we browse over the internet. It knows where to find information. Where a web page is stored, or a document or video, anywhere in the world.

Without Information Technology we would be in a very lonely place..

## MINISTRY IN TIMES OF COVID 19

Contribution: Rev. Zwai Mtyhobile

Some call it new normal, some call it difficult times, some a holiday as they do not know what to do. Have the Ministers been prepared for this new way of doing things? How many of the clergy have the resources to do ministry online? How many congregations have capabilities to do ministry online? Are congregations and Ministers resourced enough to do their ministry effectively? What challenges do ministers and congregations face during this time?

I had one of my colleagues lamenting that Ministers were never trained, prepared, and empowered for times like these. It is ill-fated that congregations expect that ministers can change stones to bread. This change of stones to bread is expected even to those without any resources for breaking these stones that are lined in-front of them. Should we not join hands as we learn together ways of bringing ministry to the congregants, ways of bringing revenue to the congregations?

Within the UPCSA, Covid-19 has exposed the frailty of our Presbyterian system. Now we know that there is a very thin line between Congregationalism and Presbyterianism. This has become very evident in how ministers are treated by congregations during this period. So many ministers, my colleagues, go to bed with no food, congregations cannot maintain them any longer. Some have lost their jobs, no stipend at the end of the month. Congregations are in control of the lives of the Ministers. Are Presbyteries not the ones who should be responsible for the severance of the pastoral tie between the Minister and the congregation? Where is the Presbytery that technically is the employer of the minister - a Presbytery that has asked the congregation to collect the stipend on behalf of it? The Presbytery that requires ministers to account to it as they are under the care and discipline of it?

If the congregations cannot afford anymore to maintain the Minister, as we all know what Covid-19 lockdowns have done to the country, what is the responsibility of the Presbytery to Ministers?



Covid-19 has badly exposed the inequalities in our denomination. Some Ministers in townships and rural areas have lost their income since the beginning of the lockdowns compared to Ministers in urban and suburban areas. These ministers from the suburbs cities and towns can continue to do their ministry online and effectively, but for those who are from rural and township areas lack the resources and this makes it very impossible to continue doing their ministry effectively.

Lastly, the levels of exposure to Covid-19 causes lots of panic to Ministers and their families. The reality is that Ministers are frontline workers (essential workers), therefore exposed to the disease. Congregants expect Ministers to be strong for them, to do counseling when their loved ones depart, to do funerals as if all is well. Ministers wear masks daily, in an effort to please the congregants while putting their loved ones, their families and themselves at risk. Ministers were never trained nor prepared for this type of ministry.

Congregants need to know that Ministers are theologically trained and not technically trained, for all these new ways of doing ministry. It will be nice if Ministers were empowered by their presbyteries in conjunction with Session for this new normal.

Let us all be reasonable and stop expecting miracles from Ministers. This is not time for show off but time to journey together, time to support each other, time to understand each other and to love one another.



## MY EXPERIENCE AS A CONGREGANT MEMBER IN THE COVID-19 LOCK DOWN

Contribution: Geoff Jooste

Covid-19 has played havoc in the world and no less than affecting our worship and activities in the Church of Jesus Christ and in our congregations. One of the first things we experienced at the end of March 2020 was the prohibition of church services and activities. At first, we accepted it as it was anticipated that it would be for a limited period and, as is, was accepted in the spirit of cooperation and understanding. Our perceptions and understanding changed quite rapidly when restrictions were extended, and church attendance stopped for an extended period. Our family for one, prior to lockdown never missed a Sunday service and now we faced the prospect of no Sunday services. Fortunately for us and many other congregations, the ability to do online services immediately kicked in and we were able to enjoy online fellowship which, while not the same as face to face, we were able to worship and hear the word.



The reality of a “new world” became the norm and for the rest of the 2020 year except for Christmas morning, we never saw the inside of the church save online services projected via You Tube. Very strange for someone that had attended the same church for 69 years.

As things developed, we were introduced to communion online and this was a blessing to be able to participate online in the sacrament. This meant preparing the bread and wine (juice) on Sundays when we had communion. Rev Ruth Armstrong our minister made all the adjustments required and church was still at the same time but was attended by our family in our lounge watching on our TV which had internet capabilities. Offerings were made via internet banking and it was critical for the congregation to adapt to ensure the sustainability of our church. Ruth adapted the service to allow children to participate and

they could with folks help, respond via WhatsApp. Sadly, we missed the face-to-face contact, but the new norm took some getting used to.

One positive that came out of lockdown was online cell group meetings. Because we could not travel, we used the team’s computer app to meet once a week and we used this platform not only to share the word but to support each other with the challenges we were all experiencing in this abnormal lifestyle. As the virus spread to our families and friends, it then became a real issue as we had to face isolation. Thankfully, none of us passed away but sadly we were losing friends and family. This was our next challenge because within a year we “attended” online memorial services. Quite cold but necessary to contain the spread of COVID-19. All our cell group members are unanimous that because of the intimacy of our relationships in Christ, we were able to weather the worst of our storms through the support for each other.

Due to the worsening of the economic environment, church outreach was a necessity. Many lost their jobs, income or part of income and required assistance to survive. The pandemic really sparked a new commitment to our fellow beings and reignited the purpose of our faith and we were able to sustain these folks during the trying times. I personally believe the church needed this shock to refocus on the most important aspects of our ministry and faith.



Fortunately, with restrictions being relaxed, we have started attending services albeit inline with regulations. All precautions are adhered to and for those who are still unable to attend, online services are still an option. We pray that, over the coming months, there will be a reduction in this threat and that normality will return even though prospect seems still a long way off.



## HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD AS A CHURCH AS THE PANDEMIC CONTINUES?

During the various Covid-19 levels many social and fellowship gatherings were removed, then given back, then taken away and so it continued. Perhaps most alarming, Covid-19 took away Sunday Church services.

Paul told the believers in Colossae, “*Devote yourselves to prayer*” (Colossians 4:2). Prayer is one of the most important tasks we can undertake. It shapes us, making us more effective and fruitful for the kingdom, and it’s an opportunity to intercede for others: “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

Now that many of the activities of the world and the church have grinded to a near-halt,

we have an opportunity to fill our lives with prayer, to “*pray continually*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). No special technology is needed. Social distancing rules have no effect. Just set aside time to pray—for yourself, your family, your Minister, your congregation, and the world. Then invite all your friends and family to do the same.

*“Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 3:13-14

**The past is behind us, learn from it.  
The future is ahead, prepare for it.  
The present is here, live it.**

### Disclaimer

The views or opinions presented in the Presbyterian Link may not necessarily represent the official position of the UPCSA.

### Submissions

We welcome submissions from anyone. Please submit photos as well. The editors of the Presbyterian Link reserve the right to edit/adapt or decline articles submitted to it.

Submissions can be emailed to [upcsacommunications@outlook.com](mailto:upcsacommunications@outlook.com)

### Feedback

We would love to hear from our readers regarding any article.

Executive Editor: The General Secretary.

Editorial: Glenys Kelly.

Email them at: [upcsacommunications@outlook.com](mailto:upcsacommunications@outlook.com)

A publication of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa.