On 1 November 2019 the General Synod took office in their new building in 158 Station Road, Lyttelton. This is about 10 km from the Pretoria CBD. The inauguration of the building was to take place on 26 March 2020 but was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sign was donated by VGK Rustenburg-Karlienpark. Mr Desmond Thys made the sign and came all the way from Rustenburg to put it up. Our offices are now very visible and many people from a variety of denominations have remarked that they have seen it, and congratulated us on it.

Looking forward and backward.

The year 2020 was a very difficult year for the church and society. In Belhar confession we confess that God in a special way is on the side of those who are in challenging situations. This God has been with us throughout 2020, and in the same breath He will carry us through the new year. He will bind us together with His loving mercy. It is our wish that God Almighty the father of Jesus Christ will be with each and every member of URCSA and the entire world in the new year. We wish you a well and healthy 2021 as the community of God.

Rev Prof L Modise
(Moderator: URCSA General Synod)
Tribute to Mary-Anne Elizabeth Plaatjies-Van Huffel
by prof Reggie Nel

While we all could appreciate and drink from the wells of MA, let us also for a moment be silent, light a candle perhaps and remember that she was also a wife to Rev Dawid van Huffel, a dear sister (queen), an auntie, godmother, a dear friend and yes, a child of God. Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel was a towering public intellectual and ecumenical leader outspoken about the key issues of her time. More importantly so, she was also drawing strength and direction from her deep faith in Jesus Christ, a pious spirituality that inspired witness and activism, but also her love for her family - in particular Dawid, her sisters and their children. They served God together, prayed together and worshipped together. There was no contradiction, for her, between her deep spirituality and the wide ecumenical embrace or committed activism. Her deep devotion was indeed the source of her life, of her growth, her commitment - may many follow this path.

Prof Reggie Nel
Sermon of Prof MA Plaatjies-Van Huffel
Scripture Reading: 2 Samuel 13:1-4 & v.36

Violence against women and children have become the new "normal" in South Africa. Approximately 49 000 sexual offences are carried out per year. One woman fell four times about the incident, she was having. I asked her the safe box and went to confront I was faced with a tragic incident, GBV victims and their perpetrators. Speaker, bridging the gap between lead by the word of God. I serve Christian who is governed and

Lebowakgomo Limpopo who is

I was transferred to Modimolle possession of a fire arm. I pleaded furthered my studies in Advanced with distinctions.

I went to court and requested DNA illegally with emotional intelligence, with my child. I was raised by both 

I felt and saw a way of showing remorse of 

I chose to walk away. 

I am no longer that man. I 

I ignored the plight of the most vulnerable in their households. David knew that Amnon deserved to be punished by law but as king, the protector of the law, he did nothing. Justice is impeded and Tamar remained "desolate" in her brother’s house (2 Samuel 13:20). "Desolate" means unmarried and childless, which was nothing else than a living death for a Jewish woman (cf. 2 Samuel 20:3). No other women are even recorded in this story as having a voice or a role in coming to Tamar’s aid. Every opportunity for her help became man’s business. Two years after, Absalom took the matter into his own hands. He invites all his brothers to a sheep shearing, and ordered his servants to kill Amnon, 2 Samuel 13:23-29. In the end, revenge is quite done apart from the victim. At the end, all power to act or even to speak is taken away from Tamar. The only time David wept was when he learned that Amnon, his fist born, was killed (verse 36).

Not in our name we should say today. Rape, sexual harassment, battering or the sexual abuse of any kind, is a crime. Rape, rape are not acts of passion, lust or terror but are nothing else than acts of power and aggression to the most vulnerable amongst us. The question is: What can WE do to break the silence against gender-based violence?

1. When families, spiritual families even the church, society at large are denying all forms of gender-based violence in their midst and enacting in a strict code of silence, God calls us to speak up. Speaking is no longer doing things to the things that is intolerable to God.

2. We should challenge both overt and covert forms of suppressing the discourse of gender-based violence. We should speak up!

3. We should bemoan the abuse of the Bible and culture and the way the abuse dehumanize both men and women.

4. Let as stand where God is standing (Belhar Confession Article 4) in solidarity with all people who bear the scars of violence and forward an end to gender-based violence.

Amen
In this article Rev Daniel Nico Smith opens our eyes for the South African context. My theological training was not adequate and therefore I continued my studies over the years until I received my doctorate in Church History and Church Polity at Stellenbosch. I have remained as student ever since because our context changes and so the challenges of the times. If you do not continue to study, you will not be able to contribute to the church. Since 2005 I moved to Practical Theology as my new field of interest and developed a Masters course in counselling law-offenders and victims of crime.

2. Which congregations did you serve and when? What do you remember most about these congregations?

My first congregation was DRC Koelhout, where I ministered for four and a half years, from January 1985 to June 1989. The congregation consists of farmers from the wine farms. They helped me to become a minister for those in need. It was with them that we voted in favour of the Belhar Confession in Sept 1986. From June 1989 to April 1994 (almost five years) I was a Lecturer at Stellenbosch University and an Assistant Minister in the congregation of DRC Stellenbosch. This congregation in town was very outspoken against Apartheid.

From May 1994 to May 2001 (7 years) I ministered in URCSA Rust-ter-Vaal while I was a Chaplain in the Department of Correctional Services in the Northern Free State. This was a Brown Afrikaans-speaking congregation within a Black and Sesotho speaking world. It was part of the Presbytery of Sharpville. For the first time I experienced the real South Africa within the church. The church unification was not without its challenges regarding culture and language.

3. Please give us some details about your engagement in the leadership of URCSA.

For many years I have been elected as a Scribe or Chairperson of the various Presbyteries where I served. Furthermore, from September 2006 to September 2010, I was the Assessor of the Free State and Lesotho Regional Synod URCSA. From November 2016, for 8 years, I was the Chairperson (and Scribe respectively) of the Curatorium of URCSA Free State and Lesotho Regional Synod. Also, for two terms, from October 2008 to October 2016, I was the Scribe of the General Synod of URCSA.

4. Do you think URCSA is on the right road with issues relating to sexism and racism?

We live in a patriarchal society and in spite of the changes in accepting females as ministers in the church, we still have a long way to go. We are afraid to address sexism because it is so part of our culture.

5. What do you think is the future of the URCSA?

URCSA’s future is in our own hands. We have good confessions, we have good synodical decisions, we have good ministers, we have many congregations, but we need good theologians and leaders to lead by example. Leaders who can read the context and give direction for the church. We need good communication within the church and towards society. We need to become a church for all who live in South Africa. We need to move beyond the NG Sendingkerk and the NG Kerk in Afrika in the way we are church. Hoping and praying that God will bring us into a place where we will experience the unity of all believers that Jesus prayed for in John 17. In the meantime we commit ourselves to work with one another where possible and pray and work towards Christian unity, to the glory of God and in our witness to the world.”

Help us save Dibukeng bookshop

Until recently, there were three Dibukeng bookshops in Pretoria. However, on 30 November 2020 the Dibukeng near the Pretoria Station – the mother shop – closed doors. And on 30 December 2020 the Dibukeng in Silverton also closed down. It is now only the Dibukeng next to the Melodi Tshwane church in Bosman Street that remains open.

In this article Rev Daniel Ramokgadi gives a passionate plea to all URCSA members to assist in securing this valuable asset.

One of the greatest gifts our church, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), has received from the NG Kerk, is the Dibukeng Bookshop, with its long and illustrious history.

Unfortunately, the bookshop is gradually sliding out of our grip, which I find very sad. But, with your help, we can save this treasure.

I am writing this article primarily to URCSA ministers and members to remind them of our responsibility as stewards of God’s gifts to us.

We can save the Dibukeng Bookshop from closing down and make it a viable enterprise that earns money to support the church in its mission on earth. But for this to happen, we must join forces.

Let me put the word Dibukeng in context. The name Dibukeng is derived from the Tswana word, which means a book. The prefix di refers to the plural form, which is dibuka, meaning books. The suffix kg means the change to the meaning to a place where books are sold.

For the church to name the bookshop Dibukeng so many years ago is quite significant.

The history of the bookshop goes as far back as 1946, the year in which it was established. I was not born yet, but my parents lived in that era – a year after the end of World War II. Being a Christian, it must have been very hard in those times. It still fascinates me that in that kind of extreme situation, installed a reading culture vital to the prosperity of this country.

Dibukeng is meant to spread the Word of God. URCSA congregations are getting their Bibles and church administration stationery from Dibukeng. Apart from selling Bibles, the second important book, the Hosanna, is sold through Dibukeng. The Hosanna has 450 hymns. We have not even learned all the hymns. Congregations, please continue encouraging families to possess a Bible and Hosanna despite the fact that many have the Bible on their cellphones. When the family reads from the Bible and sings from the Hosanna, it encourages children to develop a love for books. The culture of reading is still too low amongst us. Spreading hours on social media further damages the correct use of language. Will somebody please start looking into developing an app for the church. When Dibukeng has stabilized, it will look into electronic books to step up and move with the times.

There are religious books to buy and read which are very useful, for example, in guiding young couples towards marriage, and giving advice to the married on how to raise children.

The Youth can learn to sharpen their entrepreneurial and marketing skills by arranging with Dibukeng to collect books from there, and sell them.

Brothers and sisters, we can simply not allow further closures of Dibukeng. Let’s pick up the thread and run with it. Ye of little faith, come along and learn the ropes for you shall be the leader tomorrow.

We pray for God’s wisdom to prioritise Dibukeng as a vehicle to spread the Word of God. I appeal to you not to let it die in our lifetime.

Let’s take hands to take Dibukeng forward.
The history of studying theology at UWC has to be understood against the background of the “Theological School” established in Wellington by the former Dutch Reformed Mission Church for training pastors from its own ranks. This followed some initial training since 1929, its formal establishment in 1943, the first class in 1946 and the appointment of the first full-time lecturer in Prof CJ Kriel in 1957 (who in 1973 also was the acting UWC Rector).

Before the University College of the Western Cape was established in 1960, the DRMC’s Kuratorium approached its appointed rector in 1959 with a view to establish a Faculty of Theology at the institution. This suggestion was rejected by prime minister HF Verwoerd in 1961 on the grounds that one church cannot be advantaged over others (although there were three such faculties for the Dutch Reformed Church!). Nevertheless, already in 1961 a group of theology students registered at the UCWC for preparatory studies towards theological training. In June 1964 the university obtained land adjacent to the UCWC and moved its theological training from Wellington to Bellville in 1965 with 4 lecturers and 17 students. In 1969 a number of churches explored the possibility of an ecumenical faculty of theology but only the DRMC approved this proposal and was given a go ahead to establish a Faculty of Theology that came to fruition in 1973. It had five departments, namely in Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, Dogmatics and Practical Theology while a sixth in Missiology was added in 1975. The structure where a formative training in the Arts (including Greek and Hebrew) preceded a four year training in theology was replaced in 1981 with an integrated curriculum where a four year Bachelor of Theology was followed by a two year B.Th. Honours. The focus of later years was on doctrinal and practical subjects.

In 1971 “Biblical studies” was introduced as a “study direction” in Psychology by Kalie Heese, taught by various lecturers, also from the Theological School, until the Department of Biblical Studies was established in the Faculty of Arts in 1974 with Pieter Smith and Janie Malan as the first lecturers. It later included Ethics and Religious Studies in the curriculum and was renamed as the Department of Biblical and Religious Studies.

By 1985 a number of students from denominations other than the DRMC registered at UWC. Such students were dissatisfied with the six year training as their churches only required a three or four year training for ordination. A series of meetings were held to explore a four year training alongside the six year training for DRMC students and eventually the Apostolic Faith Mission and the United Congregation Church of Southern Africa signed contracts with the University. As a result, a four year curriculum (B) was introduced alongside the six year curriculum (A) in 1987. This led to considerable duplication in terms of teaching and also complaints among students regarding the perceived “inferiority” of Curriculum B. Nevertheless, the Faculty of Theology flourished in the 1980s – partly as a result of its role in the coming together being and subsequent reception of the Confession of Belhar.

The history of the study of religion and theology at UWC in jeopardy and with only a loose collection of students in theology from a wide variety of churches remaining, a few crucial decisions were taken in 1999 and implemented in 2000:

First, a Department of Religion and Theology was established in the Faculty of Arts. Second, a three year Bachelor of Theology was introduced while the four year B.Th. was phased out. Third, classes in Semitic Languages and Hellenistic Greek were terminated due to a lack of sufficient student interest. Fourth, service courses were introduced in Ethics and in Hermeneutics that became available to students registered for other degrees, including B.A., B.Psych. B.Comm. and LL.B. The student numbers in Ethics gradually increased, with at one stage around 1200 undergraduate students registered. The curriculum focused on what was named the “moral and religious foundations of society” and the formation of a human rights culture. Fifth, a contract was signed between UWC and the then United Church of Zambia Theological College in 2000 that enhanced the numbers in theology by around 50 to 60 undergraduate students. Sixth, an Honours programme was introduced that attracted a considerable number of students.

Although the Department was weak and vulnerable in 2000 and had only four permanent staff members by the end of 2003, following the retirements of Denice Ackermann (in 2000) and Daan Cloete (in 2003), it somehow survived and then began to flourish on the basis of these six decisions.

Further developments include the following:
First, the Department hosted a series of more or less annual conference, mainly aimed at pastors and faith-based organisations (FBOs) in the region. Second, the department registered four “research frameworks” in 2006 and expanded that to six in 2017 to coordinate and profile the research activities of staff, research fellows, alumni, and postgraduate students.
Third, the Department embraced its position in a Faculty of Arts although it could no longer exercise the same level of jurisdiction over finances.
Fourth, the Desmond Tutu Chair of Ecumenical Theology and Social Transformation was established in 2006 through the initiative mainly of Hans Engdahl who served as extraordinary professor in the department.
Fifth, the Desmond Tutu Centre for Spirituality and Society was established in 2014 to serve as a platform for the projects of the Desmond Tutu Chair. The Centre has subsequently been renamed as the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice.

The history of the study of religion and theology at UWC covers the full sixty years of its existence. Its future is now in the hands of this new generation of scholars.
On 28 January 2020 the GSE decided to recommend Prof TS Kgatla as Extra-Ordinary Professor for the Promotion of the Belhar Confession in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape. He resumed duties on 1 October 2020. The GSE furthermore gave Prof Kgatla a mandate to visit Regional Synods, Presbyteries, congregations, ecumenical partners and any other institution or person to promote the aims of this position.

Here Prof Kgatla explains the aims of the Professorship as well as the working of the Trust that has been established to sustain his work and position:

A Belhar Confession Trust has been established to serve the promotion of the legacy of the Belhar Confession. This goes hand in hand with the Extra-Ordinary Professor that has been created at the University of the Western Cape to promote studies in the tripod of the Belhar Confession: Unity, Reconciliation and Justice.

The focus of this Professorship will remain within its five-pronged purpose:

a) Research into and reflection on the call of the Belhar Confession to be a confessing church in a changing and challenging environment. Themes such as Church and racism, gender stereotypes, fascism, environmental degradation, neo-liberalism, neo-religious fundamentalism, the post-truth (‘fake news’) era, globalised consumerism, and the Church’s responses within the broad and overarching framework of the three pillars of Belhar Confession, unity, reconciliation and justice, are considered.

b) Archival collections
Archival material from academics both local and abroad, ministers of the Word and sacraments, member churches overseas for UWC;一本

ii. Community empowerment/enrichment for service and witness in the world through the URCSA leadership conferences; pastoral letters and press releases on a number of issues will be issued.

b) Archival collections
Archival material from academics both local and abroad, ministers of the Word and sacraments, member churches overseas for UWC; the Belhar Confession in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape.

Prof Thias Kgatla

We all know that the Belhar Confession was born during the 1980s out of injustices, a divided society, and the apartheid atrocities. I shall here take seriously the theological discourse of reconciliation as championed by this modern confession which was recently accepted in countries such as the United States, Belgium, and some Asian countries. Born from Africa, it was a gift from God indeed. It has now served us for more than three and half decades.

Reconciliation was and still is a familiar word for most people in South Africa and the world today, even in the midst of the pandemic (COVID-19). Also, it is absolutely central to URCSA in the mission to embark on the outstanding project to unite the churches within the DRC family; hence there is a gospel imperative to achieve reconciliation and peace. The achievement of reconciliation and attaining peace is visible through the call of the Belhar Confession during the healing process of the South African nation which was and still is wounded by the unpleasant past.

During the apartheid system faith was in crisis. This crisis lived some decades in the mind of the former DRMC, hence in the middle of the 1980s the Belhar Confession was born which bear the advocacy on reconciliation, unity and justice. That led to the unification of the DRMC to the former DRCA - and URCSA was born in 1994. URCSA is to acknowledge that the Belhar Confession is to embrace differences such as race, tribes, socio-economic groups, GIV, homophobia etc. In other words it pleads for the removal of impediments or stumbling blocks in the way to peaceful living in the DRC family.

The church of Jesus Christ - and URCSA in particular - must utilize the Confession of Belhar as the first connection in restoring the relation between God and His people. That as a point of departure will bring us to the realization of mutual relationships between people, especially believers in Christ. Reconciliation should be perceived as a new way of life for the world.

Therefore URCSA is challenged to examine its spiritual aspects and seek to restore harmonious relationships within its own ranks, that is, between churches of the DRC family. Rev L Raboshaga

Belhar Confession
Reconciliation in the DRC family

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Belhar@34years

On 27 September 2020 a Webinar was held under the guidance of the SMCPA to celebrate the 34th year of the acceptance of the Belhar Confession. Here follows a summary of the main paper by Prof Allan Boesak, and the main points of the response by Prof Leepo Modise:

“On tablets of the human heart” - Belhar and the Justice of God

(Rev. Prof. Allan Boesak)

My given task today is to highlight the Confession of Belhar in its call for justice, as it is expressed in Article 4. And as if already, and prophetic church, orating, and rising up against the policies of greed and corruption, of self-aggrandizement and self-centeredness that would become the post-1994 plagues visited upon our people, Belhar insists “that the church, as the possession of God, should stand where God stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged.”

This, and brothers, and the language of radical, prophetic discipleship. Belhar, more than any other confession in the Reformed tradition, speaks directly, unapologetically, and unashamedly of God as a God of indivisible, radical justice, indivisible, radical equality, and indivisible, radical inclusivity. In that, and in its place of origin, Africa, lies its uniqueness.

For our church, Belhar was a defining moment. But more than that, it remains a defining presence for us. By “defining presence” I mean firstly, that whatever the moment of history, Belhar, and hence the church, will always be defined by its rootedness in, and commitment to, unity, reconciliation and compassionate, radical justice. Secondly, that Belhar cannot and will not be confined to a single, static, moment in our history, as if itself defined by that moment. In other words, Belhar cannot and will not be seen as a response to racism only, and even more narrowly, to apartheid only. So just to be even clearer: to define Belhar as a product of apartheid is to confine Belhar to apartheid. But that would be a terrible misreading and a grave injustice. It would make Belhar no more than a resolution of Synod or a statement the church felt a need to express at a given moment, so that the church can respond responsibly to that particular moment. We had been, with increasing clarity of language, adopting such resolutions since the synod of 1978. Also, such resolutions or statements can be made at conferences of any kind. In a post-1994 South African society, Belhar continues to define still today what we are about, in the light of our understanding of the demands of the Scriptures, our response to the realities of the world we live in, our obedience to Christ in terms of the great global challenges facing the church today. All this to determine the presence of God, and our place, in the revolutions for justice, freedom, and dignity going on in the world today.

Hence Belhar’s insistence that we stand against all forms of injustice, wherever they may be found; and against all the powerful and privileged who in their greed and corruption, their arrogant sense of entitlement and destructive solipsism are maintaining our country’s scandalous status as the most unequal society on earth. Against all bigotry, baptism or otherwise, all patriarchy, sanctified or otherwise, against all homophobia and transphobia, defied or otherwise. And with Belhar, we reject every ideology that justifies these, every policy that legitimizes these, and every theology and every practice that sacralizes these.

I continue to contend that in the choice for justice and human flourishing in the 21st century, in the new struggles for ecological, socio-economic and cultural justice, and especially as it pertains to the matters that go beyond race and are confronting the church in the realities of gender justice and justice for sexually differently oriented persons, lies the true value and applicability of Belhar. In the issues beyond the challenges of apartheid-racism it is crucial that the church testifies to a confession that has indeed “outlived” apartheid, and show that it can face the consequences of its prophetic faithfulness in the world and within itself.

It is my further contention that in missing that understanding the synod of 2008, in its rejection of the wider validity of Belhar, had dramatically, perhaps fatal undermined the legitimacy of the church’s own claim on the Confession of Belhar as well as the integrity of its prophetic witness in South Africa today. So the question is, can we reclaim Belhar?

My answer is “yes”. It is also my plea. The church, Belhar proclaims, is “the possession of God.” Jesus is Lord. The words at the end of Belhar are the heart of the confession: “Jesus is Lord.” No matter what happens, Jesus is Lord. Come mockery, revilement and disdain, and shame; come trial, come tribulation; come imprisonment and torture; come threat and intimidation and death, this is true: Jesus is Lord.

Belhar is not just a confession on paper. It is a letter of Jesus Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of the human heart.

Response to the paper of Allan Boesak entitled: “On tablets of the human heart” - Belhar and the justice of God

By Rev Prof Dr Leepo Modise

For the past 34 years, the Belhar Confession has been a document to be studied and internalized, a resources tool to provide a vocabulary for prophetic statements. Dr AA Boesak reminds us that this confession was never intended to be domesticated within URCSA, but it was written for the whole world - hence the voice of Belhar Confession is heard in Palestine where Palestinians are oppressed and their status as the most unequal society on earth.

Boesak indicates that URCSA ought not to be a church with a confession whose value lies in the mindless repetitions of words, but ought to be a confessing church, on which rests the obligation to allow the Confession to become a way of life, utterly compelling in its call. We must say Yes to unity, reconciliation and justice as mentioned in Boesak’s paper, while we say “No” to everything that contradicts these three pillars of the Belhar Confession, as we say “Yes” to life in abundance and “No” to sin.

Boesak raises the historical facts that are still haunting Africans in general and Blacks in South Africa in particular. Land dispossession, which brought serious challenges for black people in South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic era. Where social distances are one of the remedies to curve the spread of COVID-19, people are living in one-roomed houses and 6-10 people living in a shack. There were forced removals to create space for the rich during COVID-19 in the Cape Town area, where Belhar Confession originated. I therefore chorus with Boesak when he says: “Belhar represents a condition of oppression, rejection, and alienation.”

This condition is still prevalent in democratic South Africa and has been seen in the 21st century during the peak of the pandemic. Structural genocide is still prevalent in the 21st century in the form of hard labour and living in houses roofed by asbestos while knowing the dangers of asbestos. There is a mass genocide of South African youth through the abuse of drugs. Most infamous during COVID-19 is femicide, the high rate of the killings of women and children, while the church of Belhar Confession is silent, forgetting its own Article 4.

Boesak concludes his presentation with a strong plead that URCSA and the entire South Africa must live the Belhar Confession. The words at the end of Belhar are the heart of the Confession: Jesus is Lord.

I would like to conclude in agreement with Boesak: the Belhar Confession does not separate faith and life, dogmatics and ethics, believing and obeying. Following Christ does not only include to confess the Confession that Jesus Christ is the Lord, but to live your life according to this Confession, to confess with your deeds that Jesus is Lord. URCSA does not “have a confession” only, but ought to become the confession.

Hence, Boesak reminds us that the Belhar Confession ought to be written on the tablets of the human heart, not on tablets of stone. It ought to be the URCSA lifestyle. Thank you Dr Boesak for reminding that we need to live Belhar instead of only confessing it.
University of the Western Cape turned 60 in 2020—
A place to grow for many URCSA ministers

Rev Daniël Kuys

In 1958 the apartheid government decided to establish the University College of the Western Cape. It later became the University of the Western Cape. Several municipalities, amongst them the Paarl, Wellington, and Worcester, competed to host the University. Wellington was the most obvious since the Theological School was already there. However, the final decision was Bellville in Cape Town.

The University of the Western Cape (UWC) was formally established in 1960 in line with the apartheid-racist policy of separate development. Within this policy the UWC was designated as a coloured (bruin) University. In 1975 the first Rector who was not white, was appointed in the person of the late Professor Richard van der Ross, a member of the then Dutch Reformed Mission Church, Congregation of Wynberg.

Under the leadership of its second brown Rector, appointed in 1987, the late Professor Jacques Gerwel, the University adopted a philosophy of the “University of the Left” and the green grass at the sides of this brick layered pathway became our rugby field in the winter. There was a lively atmosphere and we indeed gave colour and noise while playing cricket and rugby on the premises in between classes.

As class we had our own cricket team competing against others.

The URCSA students coming from UWC lived altogether at Concordia and House MacDonald. We kept the “tokkies” culture alive by socializing together, sharing stories and jokes but also struggled together through very difficult and challenging times. From there the “tokkies”/“maties” culture came to life - and hopefully it is still alive and well today at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch. All of us attended each other’s trial sermons and travelled together. Trial sermon weekends were coloured in with sports days (we had our own “tokkies” rugby team), “snakkende komsert” (concerts with students as actors and role-players), a “tokkies” choir and collecting of offerings during the trial sermons.

The URCSA News
15 January 2021

Looking back: Stellenbosch 20 years ago
Dr Jacques Beukes looks back 20 years when he became one of the first theological students of URCSA to train at Stellenbosch University. Today he is a Senior Lecturer in Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria.

I can’t believe it is 20 years already. In the year 2000 I started my theological studies at the University of Stellenbosch. This was the first year that URCSA theology students came from the University of the Western Cape to the University of Stellenbosch to study at the Faculty of Theology. The UWC Faculty of Theology was closed in 1999 and became a Department of Theology and Religion.

We were the first first-year students studying at Stellenbosch as a joined DRC/URCSA class after formal agreements were made between the two churches and their curatorial – thus we were baptised as the class of visual unity. Prior to this formal agreement, there were individual URCSA theology students that studied at the University of Stellenbosch, such as Reggie Nel, Peter Adams, Jan Hendriks, Freddie Swarts, etc. However, we would be the class starting together, playing together, studying together, arguing and debating together and socialising together to make the envisioned church unity possible.

We had big dreams as a class as all of us were in agreement of accepting the Confession of Belhar at the end of six years still dreaming that we will be one church someday.

While the other classes had to merge as one new one class, it was more of a challenge for us to amalgamate and find each other. Obviously, there were some challenges and hard words were shared amongst the two groups in their efforts in building a feeling that we all belong there. Although it was painful sometimes, honest and open dialogue was at the order of the day.

For the first time in the premises of the Faculty of Theology with a bottle-green short and a lime green t-shirt and there was no way that I would make it in time to appear with proper attire in front of the Curatorium. Luckily Chris Phillips, who was my senior at that time, came to my rescue and lend me some clothes as he lived close by. The only problem, Chris was almost a meter taller than I am, so you can just imagine how my second appearance in front of the Curatorium turned out to be. Nevertheless, I got through the process.

The brick layered pathway from the gate to the front doors of the Faculty became our cricket pitch during the summer and the training of ministers for the Dutch Reformed Synod of 1919 decided to start a theological training at the University of the Western Cape. In his Report of the Faculty of Theology. This and the academic staff. Among them were lecturers and the backbone of the University over the 20 years (2000-2020) and the diversity with regards to the students and lecturers changed tremendously; the agenda of Africanising and decolonising the curricula brought changes to the course and module content; and classes are lectured in both Afrikaans and English. Also, the front doors and side entrances are closed (due to crime).

As a class, we journeyed, grew and cried together as our stories and background were shared. We made it through the six years still dreaming that we will be one church someday.

Yet, we are still not one church although we studied the same theology, journeyed together and accepted the same confessions. Although we came a long way, there is still a long way to go. Now for the next 20 years...

Andries and P. Solomon.
Training in Wellington continued up until 1959/60. In 1960/1 the theological training was partially moved from Wellington to Bellville and in 1965 a piece of land next to UWC was developed to house the Theological School. In 1972 negotiations for the Theological School to become a Faculty of Theology at the University of the Western Cape were completed. On 12 February 1973, the Faculty of Theology was officially opened during the annual Theological School's Day. The theological training of the DRMC/URCSA would continue at UWC for 26 years to be discontinued in 1999. During this period hundreds of students of different denominations would pass through this Faculty. During this period theology students also made a valuable contribution to student life and academic activity at UWC. They were in the forefront of the struggle against the racist policies of apartheid and many theology students took up leadership positions at UWC. There were many examples of student activism. In 1976 students such as Peter Gelderbloem, Leonardo Appies, and others, were detained by the security police.

The URCSA Theological Training @ Stellenbosch:
20 years (2000-2020)

and the green grass at the sides of this brick layered pathway became our rugby field in the winter. There was a lively atmosphere and we indeed gave colour and noise while playing cricket and rugby on the premises in between classes.

As class we had our own cricket team competing against others.

The URCSA students coming from UWC lived altogether at Concordia and House MacDonald. We kept the “tokkies’’ culture alive by socializing together, sharing stories and jokes but also struggled together through very difficult and challenging times. From there the “tokkies’’/“maties’’ culture came to life - and hopefully it is still alive and well today at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch. All of us attended each other’s trial sermons and travelled together. Trial sermon weekends were coloured in with sports days (we had our own “tokkies’’ rugby team), “snakkende komsert’’ (concerts with students as actors and role-players), a “tokkies’’ choir and collecting of offerings during the trial sermons.

With regards to theology and classes at Stellenbosch, the curriculum still predominantly consists of European theology, and lectures were in Afrikaans. English speaking students were just told to read, but no culture or makeup for the discussion they lost out on class.

I also remember that all the front doors and side entrances of the Faculty building were always open. No security checks.

Today, looking back, so much have changed, thanks to the role of various lecturers, students and student bodies during and after our times. Today the Faculty is an ecumenical faculty; the photos of white forebears only on the walls are gone; the diversity with regards to the students and lecturers have changed tremendously; the agenda of Africanising and decolonising the curricula brought changes to the course and module content; and classes are lectured in both Afrikaans and English. Also, the front doors and side entrances are closed (due to crime).

As a class, we journeyed, grew and cried together as our stories and background were shared. We made it through the six years still dreaming that we will be one church someday.

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Peter Gelderbloem was arrested the evening before he was scheduled to deliver his Trial Sermon. The service went ahead with him in detention.

In the late 1990’s the University started with a process of laying-off a number of academic staff. Although we studied the Faculty of theology. This and the move of theological training from UWC to the Stellenbosch University remains a controversial topic in the Church and amongst many alumni, because of how the negotiations were handled by URCSA and the eventual move to Stellenbosch. In his autobiography, Professor emeritus of the Faculty, Professor Daan Cloete, discusses the controversy. As the UWC celebrates 60 years this year, many alumni of that Faculty, not only of the DRMC/URCSA, but also other denominations, look back at a shared history challenge, difficulty under apartheid, but with satisfaction, that they have overcome!
Oorsig oor die bediening van Ds. Jurie van Rooy 1968-2018 in die NGSK en VG Kerk

My geboortedag is 16 Augustus, ’n Rooy se Kerkfeest. In 1949 het ek by die Suid-Afrikaanse Skool vir Teologiese Wetenskappe en Kerkgeskiedenis tydens Agrie Universiteit te Potchefstroom ingekom. Ek het die vordering van ons lidmate gevoel, vanweë die groei van die Sendingkerk die seuns die apartheids beleid. Ek het gewoonlik ’n deel van die Sendinghoofdes fee-trakante op my eie veld vanwerk en in meerdere gemeentes op my eie akkrediete kerkraad voor. Die kerk was bedryfskundig in die omgewing waar die sakramente bedien moes word. So het Oudtshoorn bv. 17 buitewyke afwesig was.

My toetrede tot die bediening het geskied by twee tribale gelykstellinge in die proponent. Middelburg Kaap, Willowmore, Marydale en Oudthoorn.

In my bediening wat oor 50 jaar gestrek het, het ek die volgende gemeentes bedien: Carnavon (as proponent), Greens, Middelburg Kaap, Willowmore, Marydale en Oudthoorn.

So is oorsig oor die bediening van Ds. Jurie van Rooy 1968-2018 in die NGSK en VG Kerk.
Very interesting book also for the URCSA forthcoming


This history and future perspective between the years 1990 and 2030 covers the URCSA, the Ned Geref Church, the Ned Herv Church and the Geref Churches of SA. All the prominent historians of these Reformed churches partook in the project and contributions from URCSA scholars came from Prof Christina Landman and from the recently deceased Prof Mary-Anne Plantijes-Van Huffel.

Her essay in this book most probably was her very last academic writing project. She was up to the time of her passing also the co-editor of this book, together with Prof Hofdie Hofmeyr, Emeritus Professor from the Univ of Pretoria and Extraordinary Professor from the Univ of the Free State.

This very relevant publication will be published as a Supplement of the Stellenbosch Theological Journal. This implies that all the essays or articles have been peer reviewed and will be subsidised as well. Some of the topics covered in this book are an analysis of the postmodern times we live in, the responsible interpretation of Scripture, the changing worshipping patterns in these churches, the role of women in these churches, race relations and reconciliation, the church and poverty, and the church and the environment. As regards the future perspectives the focus is on possible, probable and preferable scenarios and on some practical matters related to the future of these churches.

The hope is expressed that this publication will not only provide a new perspective but also contribute to a rethink of the role of also the Reformed churches in South Africa during the recent past and the immediate future.

Obedience and Servant Leadership

The latest publication of Dr Eugene Baron and Prof Nico Botha
The book is an academic book that would be useful within the disciplines of church history and missiology. The e-book will be published at the end of January 2021, but the hard copies are available. Below is an excerpt of the academic contribution of the book.

The cost of the book is as follows and available at Sun Media distributors:

- R395 (printed)
- R316 (e-book)

Academic contribution of the Book:

Church history (URCSA)
The book also makes a contribution to the discipline of South African Reformed church history, in particular the history of URCSA. There are several previous academic contributions that come to mind. An important book in this regard is the project between scholars of the Dutch Reformed Church (DIRC) and the Uniting Reformed Church (URCSA) who documented various perspectives of the Reformed churches’ history between the period 1965-1990 in the publication Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Struggle for Justice (2013), edited by the late Mary-Anne Plantijes-Van Huffel and Robert H Vosloor. This excellent work captures the memories and the history for the said period. However, excellent as it might be, these modernist members whom the authors undertook to study do not feature prominently in terms of their actions, sacrifices, and intentional contributions to serve the church and society at large. Moreover, this book will also document beyond the demarcated scope (1990) of the edited volume, and build on the future of the reformed history specifically related to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA).

Missiology (Missional Leadership)
It makes a missiological contribution, which lies in the aspect that with this book it has been shown that the four modern reformed church members’ spirituality was grounded in the everyday realities, and their rootedness in the political, economic struggle of the majority of the people in South Africa. They were able to transform the church through imagining the church beyond its racial divisions (URCSA), and their active role in encouraging members of two black churches to promote greater unification (with DIRC) and facilitate the restructuring of their denomination but also the South African society. The book shows how these members brought the members in the church as well as society to a different understanding of church in society. It further shows that a ‘broken’ and wounded church can become God’s agent for reconciliation, unity and justice in the world.
Message of CYM Cape Region

Christian Youth Ministry, Youth of today, Leaders of our church, URCSA is us and we are URCSA.

We are facing a terrible pandemic COVID-19, which came to our church services anymore, nor other alternative gatherings which we have done in the past. The provinces in our Synod which more affected by Covid-19 is Western and Eastern Cape with the most infected cases. Yes we are trying hard to face reality about Covid-19, but not many people are educated on it. Challenges we are facing are similar to other provinces:

- Loss of jobs in the Provinces
- Unemployment rate is rising each day or by the second
- Lack of food parcels and empty promises from government
- Relieve grants of SASSA to relief some of the burden which have not materialize
- No proper medical treatment or care for our residents in none of the areas of our provinces
- Gender base Violence against Women and Children.

With this challenge it made our Ministry realize that we can’t host our Congress 2020, and we were out to plan to elect our Executive committee. This leaves our Steering committee to continue with the reign in our beloved CYM. Yes 7 members must guide our Ministry, but “is it enough” is the question to us as leaders.

During this pandemic times our Presbyteries are operating differently from one another in order to ease the pain of congregations with food or essential packs, so that they can survive. We do receive daily news on people suffering from this, without having proper meals, since the soup kitchens have stopped completely.

We plea with government, organizations, individual sponsors to help those in need, so that we can have the necessary support on easing the burden on our people. We do not look at color, nor race nor gender, but at families that need support throughout the region.

The main future plans of the Ministry is to engage with our Moderamen of Cape Synod to guide us: what is our way forward? We can plan all efforts to restore URCSA, but then it can fail as well, because we did not consult God first on the matter. But some of the plans on the table is to have Zoom meetings to teach our beloveds on the following:

- Covid-19: Best practice for Church safety
- Health and Wellness Series on Zoom

We have no plans yet because we should have held a Zoom meeting with the Moderamen of Cape Synod, but due to the loss of our beloved Prof. Mary-Ann Plaatje van Hulff, we couldn’t proceed with the meeting. So as we Ministries are waiting on how we can proceed with our activities for 2021.

What we as CYM can do, is to encourage our members that this time our faith is being tested how loyal are we to the rules of Christ over the rules of the World. We do suffer spiritually, emotionally and mentally. But never fear anything when God is on our side.

We give you to all Psalm 27 which is such an encouragement to many: “The Lord is my light and salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is my strength, whom shall I dread? For He only is our God we shall fear. This virus shall pass and we shall restore, reclaim our rightful place in the church again. Let us keep the faith, and never forsake our brothers and sisters.

Position on COVID-19

1. What are the challenges that the CYM in this region encountered during lockdown?
   • The biggest challenge is financial loss for the ministry and our members. Levies are not up to date and it is difficult to follow them up because of this pandemic.
   • Our progress congress was scheduled for July 2020 to deliberate on issues that affect the Youth of URCSA, crucial issues of our Operational Model, restructuring of the financial model adopted by the previous congress and all challenges addressed to our office by various sub-regions during their successful mid-term congresses.
   • Spiritual wellbeing is a challenge. Even with the new concept of on-line services there is still a big cry that members are not spiritually nurtured, it has been the culture of CYM to host Spiritual revivals regularly, from Branch Level to Regional Level.

2. How did the ministry operate in their respective sub-regions to overcome the lock-down and not be left behind?
   • Sub regions with the assistance of presbyteries hosted online revival and there is a continuous reminder for members to fulfill their financial obligations.
   • 3. What is the CYM planning for the future post Covid-19 pandemic?
      • Our table is full of outstanding matters, with the consultation of our extended council we are planning to have a camp to rearrange the church year and all activities that failed to take place.
      • The leadership of the church to assist with a workable model post the pandemic, a model that will accommodate all ministries and all congregations.

4. What is your message of encouragement for your members across the region?
   • We are all affected; we encourage our members to stay positive and have faith in the command council of Covid-19, to further adhere to all measures in place, mostly to maintain the correct social distancing and regularly wash their hands. We are much closer than we were before and CYM members are ready to assist each other in this trying times.

Hebrews 12:2 “Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus”

A congregational perspective on surviving the COVID-19 lockdown

Rev. Monethi Moshoaibhi
ministers in Hendrina/ Carolina in the Presbytery of Galina in the Northern Synod

Since March 2020 the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa severely affected the services of the church. As from the 26 March 2020 our doors were closed as the plea from the government was that everyone needed to stay at home to stop the spreading of the virus. The only activity of the church that was taking place was of course funerals but under strict lockdown regulations that only allowed 50 people.

This was and still is the most difficult position that URCSA had to face in its 25 years’ existence, as the communication of the church to the congregations was extremely difficult. This made us think about the question: What is the church? In his book, The Church (1978), Hans Kung argued that “the church is characterized by its essence and its form; the church’s essence is constant and unchangeable; its form, on the other hand is changing according to the needs and circumstances of the times”. Today the form of the church has changed drastically as now we have to do virtual services and send voice note sermons to the congregation. COVID-19 made me realize that the nature of the church is to be constantly present, wherever people may be, to give to them the good news in changing circumstances in changing form.

1. Challenges that the congregation encountered during the lockdown
   • The main challenge that the congregation encountered during the lockdown was distress over the worshipping. Congregations were forced to be church within the Fourth Industrial Revolution, since there were no physical but only virtual meetings. This drastically hit the congregations of semi-rural Hendrina and Carolina who are mostly elderly and not fond of technological equipment. The affordability of data, too, was a huge problem.
   • The other challenge that the congregation is facing, then, is financial. There are no Sunday offerings, and only a few congregants are able to contribute using the account of the church through EFT. Most congregants have taken a vacation from their financial obligation towards the church.

2. How the congregation operated during the lockdown
   • A new way of worship to be established, which was based on voice and a few congregants who were in congregations. However it was difficult for most of the congregants to receive the messages, as most do not have WhatsApp, but eventually the youth were able to connect their parents. As soon as lockdown regulations allowed, the minister was able to visit a few of the members who are not able to receive the recorded sermon. He was also able to touch ground with a few members for pastoral counselling.

   • The church is currently trying to use the new form of congregating, as currently it is still premature to come and form a Koinonia. The future plans of the church post-Covid-19 is to establish new way to reach people that are not technologically equipped. We are even planning to invite an communication specialist to assist us in planning for the future.

4. A message of encouragement for the members of the congregation and the URCSA family at large
   • We live in the world in which many, if not most, people are overwhelmed with fear and anxiety because of this pandemic. They fear death and job losses, to begin with. It is like facing the giant Goliath. The question then is, how does God want us to respond to anxiety and fear in this pandemic? Well, like all the great questions of life, Scripture affords us an answer. This time it comes from the life of David. As we know David says, by way of example, in Psalm 23 that there is a constructive, God honouring way to respond to anxiety and fear in our lives and the problem of Covid 19. David says that we should trust God as the good and faithful shepherd. This simply means that God will provide us with the confidence to deal with this pandemic.
   • This pandemic is said to be like roaring lion which roams around seeking whom he might devour - but the Psalmist says the Good Shepherd is walking in shadows with us.
   • A crisis is not permanent but seasonal, all things come to past, all things come to end this too shall pass, this too shall be a thing of the past.
   • I wish God to comfort us, and provide us with the bread of life and a well of water that never runs dry.
Young people do not complain?

There is an interesting response in Afrikaans when being asked “how are you”, that goes like this: Jongemense kla nie! (Young people do not complain). With this response someone means to say that a young person has no reason to complain. For some people youth means physical strength and little responsibility. According to the World Health Organisation approximately half of all mental illness and substance-related problems start at the age of 14 years. The South African Child Gauge, an annual publication of the Children’s Institute from The University of Cape Town indicates that mental health conditions are more prevalent in the 15-25 age group across the course of life. The South African Gauge use the term mental health conditions to describe conditions – like depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress – which severely impact on an individual’s capacity to function. Being young does not shield you from depression or anxiety. Young people are under extreme pressure from their parents who want them to succeed, from their friends who want them to fit in and from their school who judge their every move. However, mental health conditions are so stigmatized that some young people would rather suffer in silence than reach out for help. Some might even see it as being weak. But depression and anxiety does not discriminate, it can affect anyone.

So how can the church journey and stand alongside young people who are struggling through mental health conditions?

1. Break the Stigma
An important starting point to break the stigma attached to mental health is education and awareness. We need to make the most of Mental Health Awareness month which is in the month of October. We should preach about it and stand up against harmful rhetoric and damaging stereotypes. Because mental health is not a curse.

2. Focus on listening, not lecturing
The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) emphasise that the urge to criticize and pass judgement once a young person opens up should be resisted. What is important is that the young person is communicating. We do not need to have the answers for everything. In many instances its our hearts and ears that are needed and not our words.

3. Be gentle but persistent
Do not give up on someone when you are being shut out at first, says the SADAG. To talk about depression can be exceedingly difficult for anyone. But do not stop to care.

4. Be Accessible
The church can become a very busy place. Young people should know who they can talk to in the church. The hierarchy of church life can make it increasingly difficult for young people to reach out. Young people need to know that someone will be always listening.

If you are going through a difficult time and you need someone to talk to, contact your local minister or call the toll-free Mental Health line at 0800 4567 789. You can also add the Mental Health WhatsApp number as a contact on 076 88 22 775.

The South African Federation for Mental Health have a special publication of the Children’s Institute from The University of Cape Town that is specifically created for young people. Visit the website http://my-nh.org/

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Tips For Recording Sermons

1. Focus on sound quality. Find an absolutely quiet place for recording. No background noises i.e. dogs barking, kids playing.

2. If possible find a background relevant to the topic. Create the right atmosphere.

3. Wear different attire for each recording. This will prevent people from confusing your latest recording with previous video clips.

4. Ensure that all phones in the room are on silent in order to mute incoming calls/messages.

5. Place the camera on the same height as the person being recorded (eye level) to avoid looking up and down to the camera.

6. Use objects if and when possible to illustrate points i.e. clay pots, shoes, cross. This will make the recording visually more interesting.

7. Don’t post once a week only. Regular posts help to grow the facebook page of your congregation and the views of your own recordings.

8. Post as early as possible on Sunday mornings.

9. The video can rather be too short than too long. Be data sensitive.

10. Once loaded the video should be horizontal,

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Week of Prayer 2021

This series of meditations for the Week of Prayer 2021 has been prepared by Dr Eddie Orsmond of Wellington. In these meditations Dr Orsmond reflects on what Scripture tells us about prayer in our innermost room (closet); he touches on the essential elements of a blessed prayer life. It will be good if individual believers, congregations in the DRC Family, but hopefully also from other denominations, will consider to enter 2021 by reflection on and practice in the intimacy of prayer in our inner-room. From that point of departure, we may then take up the challenges of 2021, comforted, strengthened, guided and secured within an intimate relationship with our God.

During 2021 and 2022 we will be recommending the arrival, 200 years ago, of a group of Scottish ministers to South Africa – one of them who was Rev Andrew Murray senior. This group of ministers and their descendants made an invaluable contribution to the growth of the DRC, the planting of several new churches and the enhancement of an evangelical piety in which the emphasis is very much on a persistent prayer life. Dr Andrew Murray jr. wrote extensively on various facets of prayer, but his own personal life was also the embodiment of a powerful and incessant prayer discipline; exactly because of his prayer life he could achieve so much in building the Kingdom. This series of meditations are therefore closely linked to and it builds on the work of Andrew Murray.

The Week of Prayer series can be downloaded from the CLF Website https://clf.co.za/resource/toolkit/

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Ouma Rosie in diens van die Here

Ouma Rosie De Koe, gebore 25 Junie 1924 in die Rehoboth distrik in Namibië, het hierdie jaar haar 96ste verjaarsdag gevier. Ouma Rosie het gedurende haar leefstreek in die kerk se verhoog en eers, sy is lid van die kerk se gemeente-lewe.

Ons eer die Here vir hierdie mekwaardige vroeë boodskap. Ouma Rosie het gedurende haar leefstreek almal in diens van die nasionale volk gediend. Hy het elke week in die kerk opgebaaie en die kinders in die kerk se verhoog. Hy het ook elke week verhoog gehad in die kerk se verhoog. Hy het almal in die kerk se verhoog gediend en gepraat.

Hy het elke week in die kerk se verhoog gehad en almal in die kerk se verhoog gediend.

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Prayer in our innermost room

Dr Eddie Orsmond

Topics for seven days

Day 1 – Preparation for prayer: The Innermost Room
Day 2 – Preparation for prayer: The Morning Hour
Day 3 – When we do not know what to pray
Day 4 – Circumstances teach us what to pray for
Day 5 – Keep on praying shamelessly
Day 6 – The gift from the hand of the Heavenly Father
Day 7 – We pray that God our Father’s kingdom will come

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