

# PASTORAL LETTER TO MEMBERS OF MARANATHA REFORMED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND UNITING REFORMED CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA



Partners in Christ

## 1. Introduction

The executive committees (Moderamina) of both denominations met on 11 May 2022 to discuss the implementation of the memorandum of understanding (MOU) to have a partnership that leads to the unification of the two denominations. In that meeting, the executive committees decided to inform all the congregations, church councils, regional synods, ministers and every member of this partnership on how to implement the MOU. One biblical text out of many has motivated these two denominations to enter into this partnership, summarized by this phrase: "The church Jesus prayed for" John 17. This pastoral letter aims to take all church members on this joyous journey that must be travelled safely.

## 2. Mandates from the MOU to both denominations

In the preamble of MOU, we signed on your behalf of members of MRCC and URCSA; we commit ourselves in these words: "We as churches have decided to covenant together because we believe that the Lord, who graciously committed himself to us, requires this from us. We use the term covenanting because we want to bring ourselves and a partnership process that will lead to church unity in future under the authority of the word of God and the will of Christ. We, therefore, envisage a relationship that will encourage us to become one as our Lord has prayed in John 17, that we become missional, committed to the Biblical demands of love, reconciliation, and peace. We realize this process will present many challenges and issues, but we accept the challenges of being obedient to our Lord and His word. We are committed to accepting all the gifts brought by these churches to the reconciliation and unification process in the future." Therefore, we want to journey with every member in this union we envisage.

It is important to inform you of the functional relationship we will covenant to work together. The following are the concrete ways in which we covenant to work together to spread the gospel:

- Inviting people to live life in fullness in Christ;
- Promoting healing and wholeness for all of life;
- Engaging in prophetic dialogue with others on societal matters;
- Embodying, modelling and promoting moral values of Scripture together;
- Seeking and advocating justice for all and eco-justice;
- Achieving reconciliation, which is more than mere tolerance of one another;
- Opposing violence and abuse of power of all kinds in our society;
- Promoting and embracing human dignity and gender equity.

The above are the concrete ways that the executives of both denominations call their members, ministers, congregations and Church councils to implement together as a sign of partnership that leads to unity so that the world may believe that Christ died for us to reconcile and unite.

We are pleased to inform you that we also agreed on the functional relationship in worship, instruction (teaching and learning), service, care and witness. Therefore, MRCC and URCSA commit themselves to the following functional relationship:

- Based on the historical theological training in one institution (Turfloop), we commit to recognizing the theological training of both churches as adequate to serve the congregation of God. Where there is lacking behind on theological education, we commit ourselves to Christian Scholarship (life-long learning) to support and guide colleagues to further their studies under a joint ministerial formation task team (curatorium);
- To recognize the licensing and ordination of partner churches to serve in both denominations;
- We commit to the cross calling of ministers to and from partner churches;
- To share services from both denominations where there is no minister in one location from one and other has, the one with a minister will provide its minister for both churches. Both church council meetings will have to decide in their separate meetings on that regard under the supervision of both General Synods (Actuarii of Both denominations have to play a vital role in advising);
- We commit to pulpit exchange and joint services for both denominations;
- We commit to accept and recognize the holy communion of the partner church and to serve and receive Holy communion from ministers of the partner church as an equal partners in the Lord;
- We commit to inviting each other to our church meetings at all levels of the church (Presbytery/circuit, regional synod and General Synod/General Assembly).

We encourage congregations, church councils and ministers to implement these functional relationships cautiously and patiently so that the functional relationship should not harm the process of partnership and journey to unity.

Firstly, congregations are encouraged to use ministers from both denominations to assist where there are vacancies in the presbytery through the permission of the presbytery concern. Secondly, congregations are encouraged to implement cross calling of ministers. Thirdly, we encourage congregations, presbyteries, synods and ministries to invite each other whenever there are church events and make this

partnership visible through participation in programs. Fourthly, Church meetings (Presbytery, regional synod and General synod) are encouraged to invite each other to such meetings.

We request our members to be patient in terms of cross-calling ministers as a task team is established to draft the guidelines that will assist congregations in calling without any church orderly challenges. The good part of this journey is that both policymaking synods are convening this year in October, where the guideline will be presented for approval in both denominations.

We strongly discourage breakaways from any denominations from joining the other denomination. Instead, we intend to journey together toward unification of solid as we are, as the Church of God.

We conclude with the words of Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:14-16 that: "14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace. 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."

We call upon all members of these denominations to pray for this journey and the General/ national synods that will take place in October 2022 to take wise decisions in the light of Jesus' prayer for his Church in John 17. Therefore, we envisage one united Reformed Church, guided by Africanism and Reformation principles, out of this partnership. Finally, we agree that to get the Church to be entirely one and united is a process and that we will ask of us to journey and grow together. We do this in obedience and dependence on Jesus Christ, the head of the Church.

From Executive of both denominations:

<b>MRCC</b>		<b>URCSA</b>	
Moderator	Rev Z.O Madlala	Moderator	Rev Prof L Modise
Deputy Moderator	Mrs M.F Mosoeu	Assessor	Rev MG Betha
Scribe	Mr M.J Masenya	Scribe	Rev AA Du Plessis
Deputy Scribe	Rev P.T Duma	Actuarius	Rev E Vinqi
Training & Dev	Mr M.H Mdhluhi	Rep	Rev SJ Majola
Administrator	Rev J.M Motloba	Rep	Rev L Fokase
		Rep	Rev Dr EM Monhla
		General Secretary	Ms DE Brown

