

TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNION OF THE UNITING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA (UPCSA)

The History of the UPCSA

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Through the Word and the Spirit God calls the Church into being and sustains it as a people gathered into fellowship in Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is the King and Head of the Church. Her purpose and function is to bear witness to his saving gospel to all the world, to build up in faith, hope and love those who believe in him, to proclaim his sovereignty over all of life, and to work for his will in the world.

ORIGINS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Presbyterian family of churches, like all Christian churches, traces its roots back to the apostolic Church in the New Testament.. It stands in the tradition of the Church fathers of the first century.

But we are also rooted in the 16th century Reformers like Martin Luther , Huldreich Zwingli and John Calvin, who called the Church to return to the gospel. The Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa belongs to the Reformed family of Churches, which stems from Zwingli's reformation in Zurich and Calvin's in Geneva.

John Calvin was born in France in 1509. He studied Latin, logic, philosophy, theology, law and classical literature at several universities in France. While still a young man he became convinced of the truth of the Reformation. As a result he was forced to flee from France and eventually found refuge in Switzerland.

Calvin became the leader of the Protestants in the city of Geneva, which became the centre of the Reformation in Europe. Calvin's particular legacy is in his teaching *on the authority of Scripture, the sovereignty and glory of God, the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit and salvation by grace alone through faith alone.*

His ethical and political ideas shaped the modern democratic society and particularly Western thought.

From Zurich and Geneva Presbyterianism spread to Germany, Scotland, mainly through John Knox who studied under Calvin, and to England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Hungary, America and eventually other parts of the world, including the Dutch and British colonies.

Some 50 million men, women and children throughout the world belong to 'Reformed' or 'Presbyterian' Churches. The name Reformed comes from Calvin's intention to establish a Church reformed according to the Word of God. The name Presbyterian comes from the Reformed form of church government with 'presbyters' (Elders).

THE BEGINNINGS OF PRESBYTERIANISM IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

From 1795 to 1803 Britain occupied the Cape. Some of the occupying troops were Scottish, and W. Reid, a missionary of the London Missionary Society, inspired them to form a 'Calvinist Society'. They met every week for prayer, Bible study and public worship and invited any passing missionaries to preach.

In 1812 George Thom arrived at the Cape. He was a Presbyterian minister on his way to India as a missionary. A meeting with the Calvinist Society led him to stay at the Cape and establish the first Presbyterian Church in 1813.

By 1824 a growing number of Presbyterians established a strong congregation. In 1827-29, with help from the British Government and from the Dutch Reformed Church, they built a church building in what is now the centre of Cape Town. First called 'The Scottish Kirk' and later 'St Andrew's', this is 'the Mother Church' of Presbyterianism in Southern Africa. In 1827 Dr John Adamson arrived from Scotland and served as minister until 1841 and helped to found the University of Cape Town, which he served as its only professor for some time.

MISSION WORK IN THE EASTERN CAPE

In 1821 the Glasgow Missionary Society (GMS) sent its first two missionaries to work on the eastern frontier: John Bennie and William Thomson. Others soon followed. In 1824 they established a mission station at Incehra named Lovedale after Dr John Love, former secretary of both the GMS and the LMS. In later years, under the leadership of Dr James Stewart, Lovedale became the most famous Presbyterian institution in South Africa.

As early as 1823 a Presbytery was formed and churches spread rapidly throughout the whole Eastern Cape frontier. Within a few years this work developed into three Presbyteries.

Meanwhile the 1820 British Settlers had also arrived in the eastern part of the country. They erected the first Presbyterian church building actually completed in South Africa, at Glen Lynden in 1828, and gradually spread through the eastern Cape.

IN NATAL AND IN THE INTERIOR

The beginnings of Presbyterianism in Natal go back to missionary work. Organised Presbyterianism began in 1850, when Presbyterians met in the Congregational Chapel and resolved to form what they called 'The Presbyterian Church of Natal'. William Campbell, a minister of the Free Church in Scotland, accepted a call to become the first minister of this young congregation the next year.

The growth of the Presbyterian Church in other parts of South Africa followed in the wake of the Great Trek that began in 1830, the discovery of diamonds in the Northern Cape in 1870 and the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886.

IN ZIMBABWE AND ZAMBIA

In 1896 the first Presbyterian congregation in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was formed at Bulawayo, and in 1903 another at Salisbury (now Harare). Others soon followed. Several important educational institutions such as David Livingstone Secondary School, Gloag Ranch and Mondoro Secondary School were also started.

The first Presbyterian congregation in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) was established in 1926 at Livingstone and named after this famous Presbyterian as the David Livingstone Memorial Presbyterian Church.

FORMATION OF THE PCSA AND THE BPC

Meanwhile back in 1882 St Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Cape Town initiated a move to unite all Presbyterians (of all colours) in South Africa. This led to the meeting and constitution of the first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of South Africa in Durban in 1897. By the end of the next year this had brought together congregations and mission stations scattered all over the Cape (west, east and north), Natal and the Transvaal and also the congregation in Bulawayo.

Some missionaries and leaders feared white domination in a united Church, however, and felt that the Scottish missions should stay out of the union unless the PCSA adopted a rule that white and black majorities separately had to approve all important decisions. Tragically the negotiating committee did not accept this, and so the majority of the Presbyterian Church mission stations and black congregations eventually stayed out of the union. The intention nevertheless was that all the groups would one day unite. In 1923 all the mission stations and congregations that had stayed out of the PCSA united to form the Bantu Presbyterian Church. In 1979 it renamed itself the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (RPC).

Meanwhile in 1958, the PCSA, because its work in the countries north of South Africa had now expanded, also changed its name, to the Presbyterian Church of *Southern* Africa.

THE UNITING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA (UPCSA)

Several attempts to unite the two denominations were pursued during the 20th century. All failed until, with the coming of democracy in South Africa, the RPC in 1994 initiated a new attempt. This culminated in the formation of the *Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA)* on 27 September 1999.

This is the Union that we celebrate during 2009!