

United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

Newsletter: March 2013



"My dream is that each person in the UCCSA should examine his or herself and ask the question 'Am I contributing to the growth of the church?'"

A Conversation with Rev Sam Arends

On March 2, 2013 while at the Officers Roadshow in the Algoa Region the Communications & Justice Advocacy Officer, Ayana McCalman, sat down to interview and chat with Rev Samuel Arends, a retired Minister and former General Secretary of the UCCSA about his ministry and leadership in the UCCSA. Rev Arends has been an ordained Minister of the UCCSA for 58 years! Here is a snapshot of our conversation.

AM: Tell us about yourself?

SA: I've been very fortunate in that I grew up in a Christian home and I have been always encouraged by my parents to participate in the ministry of the church. I grew up and I became a Sunday School teacher and assistant choir master. And at the age of 17, I was appointed as lay preacher. I also joined the Men's Group and we received some training in preaching from some of the senior members. They would appoint one of the younger members with a senior person to conduct a prayer meeting and then the younger person had to meet the senior person to do the preparations. It had always been my desire to be a Minister of Religion. My mother had told me that at age 3 we had a huge tree in the yard, we were sitting under the tree and my grandfather and his brother-in-law had come to meet the Minister. And because we stayed opposite the church I saw the Minister and these senior gentlemen entering the church building. And that is when I said to my mother I would also like to become a minister and that thought remained with me.

AM: When did you train to become a Minister?

SA: I trained in 1951 to 1953 and I was ordained in 1955. I started off in one small congregation.

AM: How old were you when you started Ministry?

I was 24. I enjoyed the experience that I gained because it was a rural setting where I had to be on the road almost every weekend visiting the different congregations. There were 5 of them and at the same time I was appointed Acting Minister. I did a spell of teaching thereafter and then I started in Port Elizabeth in 1964. And I was glad that I was invited by a church to serve in PE because we had some of the senior ministers of the denomination, people who were really was involved in the life of the church and I gained experience under their leadership. I served in what was then known as the Christian Education Committee. That was where the foundation was laid. I served as Chairperson and Moderator of the Region. I never aspired to become a leader in the UCCSA; I never saw myself as a Chairperson or General Secretary. But people saw that I was fit to do the work and so they approached me and nominated me.



AM: What would you say were your best moments of your service in those roles?

SA: The best moments were the opportunity that I had to meet with churches mostly in rural areas. You know I remember one incident –I was visiting this church in Transkei and I don't think there were more than 20 people present mostly women, and young girls and a few men were deacons in the church. At the end of the service they took up a collection and they were wanting to make it to me. And I said to myself these are poor people you cannot take this money away from them. And I thanked them and I said I want to donate this money back to you. And with one voice they said No this is a gift from us to you. And from that time I decided no matter how poor the people are if they feel that they want to give a gift I have to accept that gift because God has been working through them. I liked when I've been meeting with the council of churches you know just to listen to the debates and to share with people and to learn about the programmes in their churches. Because I feel we can make progress if we examine our programmes. Unfortunately we still have some of our elderly people who believe we must still cling to the past. You know we keep on using the word move forward, we must forward. I definitely agree we have to move forward because the church must be next to the people. The church has to comfort; the church has to encourage; the church must rejoice with those who rejoice; the church must weep with those who are weeping. And we must look at programmes that will appeal so if you take for instance your youth fellowship that you appeal to them.

AM: What do you think of the UCCSA today?

SA: You see when you start something, create something, say a person goes into business- he hopes that his children will follow him. He has to lay a foundation and others have to build upon that. And we cannot just discard the things that we were thought by our forebears. Others lay the foundation. Do not discard the ideas of the generation of our forebearers. We've got to examine those; we've got to build on those because there are generations that will be following us.

AM: Do you have any dreams for UCCSA?

SA: You know I was a bit hesitant when I came to this meeting especially when they spoke about the central fund but I am glad I came because now I understand why, what it's all about. Because in the past whenever the word central fund was mentioned we would think of the other denominations where they would have to pay a minister to serve a church, you know there is this central fund from which the money comes. But now I have a better understanding; it's not just a matter of wanting to pay a minister but we definitely need funding. We need funding to keep the church moving forward. My dream is that each person in the UCCSA should examine himself or herself and ask the question "Am I contributing towards the growth of the church?"

AM: What words of wisdom would give based on your experience?

SA: I would advise that all our ministers, and not only ministers, but the young people who are preparing for church membership, those who are in the youth fellowship, if they could get hold of the "The Harvest and The Hope" and just study that book. Then they'll get an idea, you heard Prince (Dibeela) talking about James Read and there are churches named after those people. You know we've got a rich history. If only that green book would be reprinted- the CUSA book could be reprinted- and "The Harvest and The Hope" that people would just be made aware of it. And as he spoke about the congregations, Bethelsdorp is just a short distance from here and that's where it all started.

AM: Do you have any words of wisdom for the current leadership?

SA: Pray, learn to listen to what God is saying to you. Because you know we are always in a hurry to do things and we forget that we are under the guidance of God; and as long as we put our trust in Him we will not go wrong.

AM: Uncle Sam thank you so much for talking to us.

SA: Thank you it was a pleasure. I love my UCCSA.



THE BETHELSDORP CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The Bethelsdorp Congregational Church in Port Elizabeth is a significant signpost in the UCCSA mission story and its value as a living symbol of history ought not to be undervalued.

The missionary story of the UCCSA in Southern Africa begins with the arrival of four missionaries in 1799 and the establishment of the Bethelsdorp church.

On the 31st March, 1799 the ship *Hillsborough* arrived in South Africa carrying aboard four missionaries: Dr. Johannes Theodorus van der Kemp and Johannes Jacobus Kercher from the Netherlands; and John Edmonds and Williams Edwards, who it was said were probably artisan missionaries.

The missionaries were sent by the London Missionary Society which was founded in 1795. After their arrival in the Cape in South Africa, which at that time was a British colony, the missionaries made plans for their missionary work. Van der Kemp organised 'the Southern African Society for Promoting the Spread of Christ's Kingdom'.

After much travel through the villages of the Cape, Dr. van der Kemp arrived at Bethelsdorp in May, 1801 where he eventually settled. Dr. van der Kemp set about his plans to establish an institution that would among other things be an institution for agriculture and farming trades. In a few years the institution was established. The book the "The Harvest and the Hope The Story of Congregationalism in Southern Africa" (1971) by D. Roy Briggs and Rev Joe Wing gives this summary of Bethelsdorp at that time: "When he visited Bethelsdorp in 1813, John Campbell was able to record that no less than eighteen trades were being carried on, while downstream from the institution he found two miles of cultivated ground on both banks of the Little Zwartkops River –the largest piece as much as the Moravians worked at Genadendal. Further afield was a salt-pan, which the people tended at considerable profit."

The Bethelsdorp church today stands at the same spot it was erected. On a visit to the church on Sunday March 2, 2013 the elders and members of the church council met to sing and pray before the worship service in the manse that was once home to Dr. van der Kemp. The worship and music was vibrant and beautiful and everywhere there were signs of the living history of the humble beginnings of the UCCSA mission story.

We celebrate **31st March, 1799** as the humble beginnings of the legacy and heritage bequeath to UCCSA. The Bethelsdorp Congregational Church in Port Elizabeth stands as one of the living symbols of that heritage.

The history at Bethelsdorp can offer us a vivid opportunity to ignite conversations about the UCCSA story. It can also spark a renewed zeal for worship and service to God's people in every community; especially those communities where the UCCSA churches stand as symbols of a continuing heritage of worship to God and service to all God's people.



After Sunday worship at Bethelsdorp March, 2013



Wall plaque at Bethelsdorp church





Roots by Rev Bernard Spong

Roots are important in plant life and solid foundations important in buildings. The same applies to people. We need to know where we come from, what is our heritage and the foundation of our being.

I was reminded of this during a recent visit to the Moffat Mission. It helped me reclaim and be reclaimed by my Congregational Mission roots. It is fifty years this year since I was posted by the London Missionary Society to South Africa. I was placed first in Vryburg/Huhudi and then in Mafikeng/Mmabato before being called in late 1966 by the Joint Committee of the still to be formed United Congregational Church of Southern Africa to be the first General Secretary of the Central Region. At that time it covered the present Central, Teemane, North West and Free State Regions! This calling brought me to live in Johannesburg where I remain to this day.

I am now a member of that group called ministers emeritus which applies, according to the dictionary, to those who are retired from full time work but able to retain their title. My visit to Moffat Mission reminded me that I may be retired from full time ministry but there is no retirement from being a Christian or from proclaiming that faith in word and deed. And it also reminded me that our word and practice holds a long history of involvement in the life and work of Christianity in Southern Africa.

We have an incredible heritage of active Christianity that sought not only to call people to embrace the Christian faith but also to change the environment and possibilities of life for the people of our nations. The London Mission emphasised education and health, the American Board the social well-being of the people. That is a sweeping statement but those matters were basic to the underlying demand for justice and equal opportunity that is not a new message of the Church but part of our initial heritage.

We hear much about David Livingstone and his travels. His first journey into what was unknown territory for him was to explore for places where the Church could establish safe and accessible schools.

When I came here in 1963 I was automatically the manager of 40 schools in villages throughout the Northern Cape. These were in the process of being taken over by the Apartheid Government but that taken for granted fact about my work as a missionary is an example of where that Mission Church was invested and involved. In Johannesburg there is no social care activity, including health and education, for African and mixed-race people that did not originate from the work of our Congregational forefathers and mothers. When a young Winnie Mandela came from the rural Eastern Cape to this city she, like many such vulnerable young women, was met by two Congregational American Board missionaries, housed in a Congregational mission hostel and trained in social work at a Congregationally founded Social Studies institution.

Being aware of this heritage, I was all the more inspired by the social concern activities and educational opportunities based at the Moffat Mission. I hope to learn more about them when I return to the Mission for another more planned visit in April. I look forward to spending time and conversations with those who are training for ministry at that Centre as much as I look forward to meeting up with old colleagues from the Churches of the Northern Cape and Teeman Regions.

I need to say that the major purpose of my visit, along with my colleague and friend – and President of the UCCSA – Basil Manning and my son Peter, was to show Peter where his brother David's ashes are buried in the Mission cemetery. David died when he was only 18 in 1978 but, for various reasons, Peter had not yet been to stand by his grave. It was a special moment for father and son to be in that place which houses so many memories of the past including the grave of Peter's Uncle Joe, the Rev Joseph Wing, my dear friend and mentor. Peter took seeds that had fallen from the tree above his brother's grave to plant in his own garden where he now lives to have his own 'David tree.' He showed me those seeds in the palm of his hand as we left the cemetery and he reminded in that place of the dead of the call to new life and the continuing possibilities of growth.



That is where we always stand no matter what our age: at a place where the possibilities of life to the full need to be expressed in both word and action. This is how we deal with heritage. We take what those who walked before us have created and left in our hands to develop further according to the needs of the times, our times. Our Congregational forebears cried and worked for justice for all; that is the treasure they have placed in our hands. ***What shall be our heritage for those to come?***

Thank you Moffat Mission staff and personnel for giving me a sense of new life rather than of dusty dark deadness during my short time with you. Bless you and your activities in proclaiming in word and deed the call to justice under the God of all righteousness.

Rev Bernard Spong is completing 50 years of ministry to the UCCSA since his arrival in South Africa as a London Missionary Society (LMS) missionary in 1963. During his 50 years of ministry he served the UCCSA as Secretary of the Central Region; he served as Director of the ecumenical communication and media project- Interchurch Media Programme (IMP)- for many years; and was also Head of Communications for the South African Council of Churches (SACC) during 1991-1997. Rev Spong is author of the renowned book "Sticking Around An Autobiography" (2006). On the 14th April, 2013 a service of commemoration will be held in his honour at AJ Wookey Memorial Church in Vryburg.

UCCSA Executive Committee Message to the Churches

The UCCSA Executive Committee met at Serowe village (town), Lesoso Region of the Botswana Synod. The meeting was hosted by the Serowe Congregational Church also known as the "Cathedral of the Congregational Church". This nickname originates from its gothic architectural structure similar to many cathedrals around the world. The Serowe town was founded about a century ago by Kgosi (iNKosi) Kgama III who was also a grandfather to the late Sir Seretse Kgama. Sir Kgama was the first president of the Republic of Botswana.

Prior to the opening of the Executive Committee meeting the UCCSA Officers arrived on Friday to conduct a pastoral visit. They went to the Lephoi Center for the visually impaired in Francistown. They also visited Tlhatlaganyane where they met with the elders of the church, two of whom are more than 100 years old. On Sunday they preached at different churches such as Palapye, Mahalapye and Serowe.

The meeting commenced with the General Secretary's address, which was also attended by the local churches and community members from Serowe and surrounding areas. The opening service was blessed with the presence of the senior ministers of our church such as Rev Felix Mokobi and government officials including the former vice-president of the Republic of Botswana, Mr. Mompoti Merafhe. The Serowe church choir sang very upliftingly.

The preacher was none other than the President of the UCCSA, Rev Basil Manning. The President delivered a very powerful message about loving each other. Reflecting on the story of the Good Samaritan the president reminded us that we have been called by Christ not to hate each other but to love one another as brothers and sisters irrespective of our ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Rev Manning urged the church not only to move away from racist and xenophobic tendencies but also to challenge such injustices whenever and wherever they manifest themselves in our societies. He cautioned that we won't be able to love each other until we have begun to love ourselves, dealt with our identities and at peace with ourselves. He also encouraged the church to work towards unity of one church in five countries (synods).

Each day began with a Bible Study to prepare members of the executive for the meetings. The bible studies were facilitated by Rev. Dr Loletta Barrett, a Global Ministries missionary from our ecumenical partner United Church of Christ (UCC) in the USA. The bible studies emphasized the importance of understanding our *calling, participating* in people's struggle and *walking* with those who suffer.



UCCSA Executive Committee Message to the Churches (Cont'd)

Members of the UCCSA Executive engaged with the issues affecting the church and wrestled with the challenges facing our societies in the five synods of our church. These issues ranged from ministerial to finances and social justice issues. The message that came clear from the discussions was that the church needs to re-look at its calling as ordained ministers and lay leaders. Focus should be on serving people in the times of loss and suffering and to give spiritual and ministerial direction.

In the matters of financial resources the church is operating under very challenging circumstances. The finances have decelerated over the years and we as the church need to speedily come up with creative ways of fundraising and supporting our ministry. This year 2013 has begun on a good note. The finances of the church are showing huge signs of improvement but more needs to be done. We cannot afford to be complacent.

The message that came across strongly during the meeting and among the Executive members was a message of hope to a brighter and better future. The General Secretary reminded us that we as the church need to focus on church growth, unity and vision for our church. He also encouraged Executive members and churches to be faithful to God's calling to participate in suffering and struggles. The church needs to be prophetic, pastoral and professional in how the respective ministries are conducted.

The UCCSA will be holding its **37th Assembly on 18th -24th of September, 2013** in Mahikeng (Northwest Region), South Africa Synod. This Assembly will be an elective assembly and will bid farewell to our General Secretary and outgoing President. The Rev Dr. Prince Dibeela's second term of office is coming to an end this year and new general secretary should be elected. The UCCSA's 37th Assembly will also be bidding farewell to our outgoing President, Rev Basil Manning. Rev Phillip Strydom will be assuming the leadership of the church as the new UCCSA president.

The Executive members spent time praying and seeking God's guidance as they deliberated on the best ways that can be used to ensure transparency and fairness. The new guidelines were proposed and it is hoped that they will eventually become appropriate procedures for the processes for nominations and elections/appointments of the UCCSA officers.

All UCCSA members are beseeched to participate in this process through prayer and by nominating suitable candidates who can lead our UCCSA.

Executive Committee
Serowe, Botswana
March 21, 2013

*The UCCSA Executive Committee met at Serowe Congregational Church in Botswana during March 18-22, 2013 under the theme **"Christ is Calling Us: Participating in Suffering and Struggle"**. The Executive Committee is the highest decision making body after the Assembly. The Executive Committee meeting was presided over by the President, Rev Basil Manning and the General Secretary Rev Dr. Moiserale Prince Dibeela. Forty-two members were present including Synod Secretaries and representatives from the 5 synod throughout Southern Africa: Botswana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa.*



UCCSA Youth Ministry: The Church of today and the leadership of tomorrow by Ntsikelelo J. Ntintishe

I greet the UCCSA family in the wonderful name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Amen. There is a buzz, a great feeling, a new understanding that is rising amongst the young people in the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa. There is a new found belief that the youth is the church of today and the leadership of tomorrow.

South Africa is a country that is said to be “Alive with possibilities” and amongst those possibilities is the ever increasing reality of the young people leading both this nation and church. We have seen a number of young people such as Malusi Gigaba, Fikile Mbalula, Lindiwe Mazibuko, Lebogang Maile, Anele Mda and Julius Malema make a meaningful contribution and creating strong political statements in government and in the same vein we have seen the likes of our Malusi Makalima, Rev. Cyril Hartland, Abbie Lekalakala, Njabulo Ngwane, Rev. Allister Arends, Rev. Dr. Prince Dibeela, Mazwi Mbambo, Rev Dumisani Nxumalo, Wellington Sibanda and Charlene Cupido and many other persons who arose as youth leaders in our church exhibiting the potential to lead the church and many of the abovementioned have actually graduated to lead the church in the different areas of ministry.

Many young people have their own unique and sometimes interesting stories of how they remained in church. My grandfather made a deal with me when I was 9 years old. I read the Bible for him and he in turn taught me how to interpret the clock. He could not read and write because he had never been to school. His name was Joel Nomkala.

Are youth the church of today and the leadership of tomorrow? The Apostle Paul writes to Timothy, “Let no one look down on you because of your youth...” We are at a stage whereby the youth particularly in the Central region is picking up from where it had left off. In the recent past, it was not clear if we would have a vibrant youth ministry in the South Africa Synod in ten years to come. I remember the time when the young people were at loggerheads with the church fighting for recognition in the administration of the church.

Unfortunately that was the period when the young people from the black dominated townships were not united in worship with the youth groups from the colored townships. This consciousness was recently awakened by the utterances of Rev. Dr. Gasonewe at the Central region Youth conference in Mamelodi recently. The youth conference clearly showed and reassured all that the racial and tribal divide that might have existed amongst the youth groups of our church is a thing of the past. The UCCSA has always been a united church on paper and in all administrative and in special services of regional significance, but we were always found wanting when placed in the scale of united worship. The young people of Central region have broken the stereotype.

With the picture looking as bright as it is, we are seeing the youth lacking interest in the traditional reformed liturgies of which our church subscribes to in many areas of the SA Synod. We see the young people adopting the more charismatic approach to worship. We are more likely to hear our youth sing a “Hill Song” rather than “Guide me O thou Great Jehovah”. I honestly believe that there is nothing fundamentally incorrect with adopting the worship style of the day. But we need to be very careful as church that we do not lose ourselves in all that.

“...I am not expecting to see leaders out-of-nowhere...I expect to see all of you leading the church tomorrow” –Rev Dr. O I Gasonewe. These are the statements that should be engraved in the hearts of the young people and that should echo in the ears of the upcoming generations. Now is the time that the youth, raise their hands to be counted. It is now the time for the youth to knock on the doors of church administration until the elders open.



Some of us have studied and learnt about the missionary trail out of the United Kingdom into Africa. We were told about the American Board of Missionaries planting churches in the eastern seaboard up to Natal; the October 1967 special assembly that united the LMS, CUSA and the Bantu Congregational Church; the incorporation of the Disciples of Christ- Transvaal in 1972. Some have seen the youth of the church take a stand against the apartheid regime. And now we can say we have seen the UCCSA worship and commune together in harmony. And once again the youth have become the pioneers of the new era of the UCCSA. This will be a watershed moment in the history of our church.

We are now truly a United Congregational Church of Southern Africa and the youth is ready to take office when the opportunities arise. Now is the time. Most of all, I wish all young people could be as passionate and knowledgeable about our church.

I would like to request that the UCCSA formulate a collaborative project by the Mission Council, the Youth Ministry and the Leadership academy and develop a more user friendly and contemporary version of **“The Harvest and the Hope”**; That the church considers using the history and administration of the UCCSA as part of the UCCSA syllabus to members wishing to join our church; That the church encourages youth participation in the business of the church by ensuring that a young person in every local church is encouraged to become a deacon and that young people join the delegation to Regional Council and Administration meetings.

I thank you all for the opportunity to communicate my ideas and feelings about the youth and the greater UCCSA.

Humbly submitted

Ntsikelelo J. Ntintishe

Trinity UCCSA- Yeoville, Johannesburg



A Perfect Place for a Perfect Opportunity- House of Formation, Moffat Mission, Kuruman by Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett

Where else to learn about the history and to discuss the future of Mission, Missionaries and the Church than Moffat Mission, Kuruman, South Africa?! I had the distinct pleasure of being present with the seminary students in the UCCSA House of Formation during the first week of March, 2013.

I journeyed to the source, “where Christianity entered the interior of Africa,” Moffat Mission. There I met with 17 students (6 women and 11 men in years 1 to 3 of their correspondence school programs, hailing from our South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe Synods. What an amazing group of people! (Thito, Ivan, Sanele, Mighty, Johanna, Sboniso, Michael, Rolter, Emma, Sthobuhle, Lorato, Siphilangenkosi, Matlhogonolo, Nteo, Lotes, Tsepo, Leon).

The House of Formation offers the students a time of sharing with guest speakers. In my case, we talked about the history and future of mission, missionaries, and the church.



A Perfect Place for a Perfect Opportunity (Cont'd)

My journey began on a comfortable eight hour double decker bus ride from Johannesburg to Kuruman. I stayed with the students in one of the houses on campus, eating meals together, both cooked by the students and by the Moffat Mission chef Morgan, and staff.



In class we worked individually, in dyads, in small groups and as a large group exploring the history of the Moffat Mission and other stories of missionaries, modern day mission trips to various parts of the world, and churches engaged in mission. One student (Lorato from South Africa) shared about his mission trip as an Ecumenical Accompaniment Partner in Israel and Palestine. We discussed the models of mission and missionary styles of Jesus' first disciples and the Apostle Paul, as well as God's call on the Israelites to be God's people and an example to the other peoples, drawing them to God.

We reflected on how ministers, the UCCSA, and all our churches are called to build the Beloved Community of God, by being mission driven, outward focused, justice seeking, and serving God by working with and empowering others. We explored the call to "preach the Gospel at all times [through our lives and actions and], when necessary use words."

We focused on walking with people and modeling servant leadership as missionary ministers; encouraging and empowering the self-determination of communities and congregations in developing solutions that work in their context.

We also worked directly on a mission project in the Mary Moffat Garden each weekday clearing the fields of weeds so vegetables can be planted to feed others in the community. The students wrote mini-sermons on the hard physical work and the humility required to "get our hands dirty" in service to others.

I was greeted by Rev Johannes Stuurman, Chairperson of the Moffat Mission Board, and was able to have dinner with the Honorable Mayor and UCCSA Executive Board Member Esther Molete as well. On the final Sunday I was privileged to attend the 15th Anniversary meeting of the Tawane Region Soldiers of Christ, as well as return to the Wrenchville Congregational Church for worship with the Rev. Kuzani Ndbele.

On the doorstep of the Kalahari and the road to interior of Africa, the afternoons were hot, with an occasional refreshing breeze, and one day a lightning and thunderstorm that briefly cooled things down. The day skies were big and bright blue with puffy clouds. The night skies were big and black with billions of stars. And under the canopy of God's sky and trees, surrounded by God's wonders, it was a perfect place for the perfect opportunity to reflect with your UCCSA students in ministerial formation on God's call to all of us to become co-creators of the Beloved Community for all of God's people. I give thanks to God and the UCCSA for this amazing journey. And to the students of the House of Formation I say: kea leboha, dankie, kea leboga, obrigado, enkosi, ngiyabonga and kgotso, vrede, kagiso, paz, xolo, ukuthula until we meet again, soon!

Rev Dr Loletta Barrett is a Global Ministries Missionary from the UCCSA ecumenical partner church United Church of Christ (UCC) in the USA.



My Story by Stephanie Healy

I have always known that God is there, I don't believe my story could begin or end because God is always working with me and always challenging me. However, my story includes a lot of pain and struggle.

God has always been in my life. However, I was never really the girl to want to go to church or read the Bible, but I knew He was there. In 2009 I had been struggling a lot with life and I felt my world was too much. I couldn't do everything and cope with everything I needed to, so I made a decision and took an overdose of tablets coming very close to ending my life on earth, leaving behind all I love and all that loves me. When I woke up in ICU I felt God's presence. It was not a huge moment, instead it was a moment of realisation. I knew that at that time I had bad relationships with literally everyone around me and I strongly believe strongly believe that God had given me a second chance, a chance to correct those mistakes; to get bad people out of my life, a chance to have a future!

In 2010 I went astray again and got involved in all the wrong things and bad things happened to me. I guess I stopped making time for God. I was in worship band and loved it and connected with Him but I lost Him, and that was because I decided to do what so many people tend to do, I blamed everything I went through on Him. I would pray obsessively "God if you love me then why do you put me through this?" I asked so many people for help and advice but still I didn't understand why. The things that happened to me are things that no one should even know about yet I went through it all and I felt like it didn't stop and every time it happened I would get so angry at God shouting at Him, crying out to Him and begging Him to make it stop!!

But you know what I realised? I got myself into those situations by being friends with dodgy people, by lying to my parents and most of all, by lying to myself. November 2010, I got raped for the second time in my life by someone I thought I loved but was actually a drug dealer and everything that goes with it. I did not tell anyone but I did realise that those people and those things were not for me and I walked away broken, bruised, scarred and a mess.

2011 has been my third chance at a life. I moved away from it all. I started trying harder with God. I started telling my family everything that had happened in order to open a new solid trusting relationship; I worked hard at college; I worked on myself and my relationships; I worked on finding God.

This year has been a huge test on my family and we have become very close to each other and God. We lost 2 people very close to us but we let it bring us closer.

I can't tell you my relationship with God is perfect or that I haven't done thing or been around things that I shouldn't have, and I can't end this story telling you that I'm this perfect person. But to be honest I'm glad, because I don't want to be perfect. I want to be me and I don't want to hide my scars or my tattoo or my story. Those things don't mean I'm not a Christian. They mean that I have been challenged more so than I ever had imagined and I stand tall now saying to you that God is real. He is here and he loves me! God touches us in so many ways that we can't hide it and although our relationship is not perfect, it is something I am so proud of; it is something that has struggled for years and the path is finally so strong and solid that we can carry on our journey together. My daddy has been present, he has never closed his eyes on me and he has promised never to turn a blind eye.

*Stephanie Healy is 18 years old and lives in Johannesburg, South Africa. She is a motivated young person who shares her story with passion and heart. Stephanie has founded the **I Foot Forward Campaign** to raise awareness on rape and abuse. Support the I Foot Forward Campaign on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/pages/I-Foot-Forward-Campaign*



“NOT A MUMBLING WORD” by Rev Robina Winbush

Judges 19

I am an African American woman who is privileged by virtue of education and occupation but at the same time I stand as one who is part of a community still defined by race and skin color in the United States; who despite having elected one who both is and identifies as an African American to the highest office in the country, African American communities continue to have a disproportionate number of our men incarcerated, a disproportionate number of our children uneducated and a disproportionate number of our community bearing the burden of this “current economic crisis.” I hear the words of my sister, Dr. Jean Sindab screaming at me to remind folks of the struggles of those who are not privileged by virtue of education and occupation and whose reality is so often overlooked.

I stand always mindful of a woman with whom I had worked prior to entering the staff of the national church over 20 years ago. She was a woman whose life was marked by racism, poverty, abuse and marginalization. She had lived her life in and out of mental institutions. She literally came to me in a vision during my first national meeting and asked the question “How is what you’re doing going to make my life any better?” It is to her, that I dedicate this bible study.

Would you join me in prayer?

Prayer: Speak to our hearts Holy Spirit. Give us the words that will bring new life- words on the wing of a morning to drive all the nights of doubt away. Speak to our hearts Holy Spirit. As you speak, when we grow uncomfortable, remind us that you are pruning the parts of us that need to be removed. When we feel some joy, remind us that you are refreshing and empowering us for the work of ministry. Holy One, receive the glory and grant us your blessing. In the name of the One who is the Living Word, Jesus the Christ, we dare to pray. Amen

I invite you to listen now to a story of an unnamed Bethlehemite woman as told in the book of Judges.

Silent Reflection. Pause to read Judges 19: 1-30. Write your image reaction –words, pictures, etc.

It is important that we not run past the horror of these stories. That we allow ourselves to listen, to react, to own what it does to us to hear these stories of women, of men, of children, created in the image of God, claimed by God as God’s own and so brutally attacked and their lives destroyed. No wonder, Professor Phyllis Tribble identified the story of the unnamed woman from Bethlehem as a Text of Terror. It is important that we allow ourselves to be horrified, frightened, angry beyond acceptable words, grieved in the depths of our spirits. Too often we are quick to turn the page, to look for a new story not quite so horrific, something that will make us forget. But the stories do not go away. They remain from generation to generation, demanding our attention; until we stop, listen, see the horror and seek a more faithful response.



The brutal gang rape and torture of this daughter of God in the public square is appalling. It is not a brief horrible encounter--- it is a prolonged and tortuous event that happened over hours... all night long... in the public square. **Throughout this horrible ordeal, we are told that the Levite slept comfortably in the old man's home and there wasn't a mumbling word from that house... not a word of concern, not a word of prayerful supplication, not a mumbling word.** Throughout this atrocious attack in the public square there is not a mumbling word from any of the townspeople. Surely, somebody knew what was going on? Where were the family members of these crazy men? Where were the community busy-bodies? Where were those charged with the responsibility of keeping order? **There is a collusion of powers that allow such an attack to occur and we don't hear a mumbling word.**

After being raped and tortured all night long, this unnamed daughter of God drags herself back to the house that should have been a source of protection and collapses on the doorstep. We can only imagine her lying there, beaten, raped and brutalized, but **consistent with the rest of this story, we do not hear even a whimper of a cry.** From the beginning to the end in this awful saga, there is this awful deafening silence that troubles my soul.... There is silence even from God! From the beginning to the end, God says not a mumbling word!

Let us pause for a moment. I would like for you to discuss the question of "what fuels silence?"

What becomes the more faithful response? I hear the words of my slave ancestors who took Jeremiah's question "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" and flipped it with the answer as they began to sing: "There is a Balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul. There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole. You may not preach like Peter, you may not pray like Paul, but you can show the power of Jesus who came to free us all... There is balm in Gilead..."

Resistance is the balm in Gilead! Resistance! Resistance! Resistance!

Silence has its place... but never in the collusion of oppression, always in the service of liberation!

We must resist the temptation to protect our positions of privilege (as little as it might be) and participate in the collusion of silence. We must resist silencing God and then demanding allegiance to such a god in the face of unspeakable horror.

I believe that for the church one of our first acts of resistance must be to break the silence, to remember the victims of violence, to call forth their names, to tell their stories, to lament for their families, and the whole community's loss of their potential.

Acts of Remembrance, Confession and Lament: The community is invited to remember, name and lament the victims of violence.

Resistance involves committing ourselves to confronting and dismantling hierarchical systems that allow for the destruction of sons and daughters of the Most High God. Resistance means committing ourselves to work for and building communities and systems that values and honours each human being as one in whom divine potential exists. Resistance means committing ourselves to work for a world in which every living being is respected as part of God's created order. Resistance is seeking out those who have been defiled, dismembered, discarded on the dung heaps of this world and daring to speak words of life, restoring to them all that has been destroyed! Resistance is believing in the power of the resurrection today, right now in the face of death and destruction!

*Rev Robina Winbush is an associated stated clerk for the Presbyterian Church (USA). She serves as the Director of Ecumenical and Agency Relations in the Office of the General Assembly. This Bible study "Not a mumbling word" is extracted from the book **"Righting Her-Story: Caribbean Women Encounter the Bible Story"** (April, 2011, WCRC) and reprinted with permission of its author and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).*



NEWS BRIEFS

UCCSA and the United Church of Christ (UCC) Central Atlantic Conference (CAC) Partnership Visit February 11-22, 2013. Rev Moiseralee Dibeela, General Secretary and Rev Thulani Ndlazi South Africa Synod Secretary, formed a UCCSA delegation that visited the Central Atlantic Conference, UCC in Washington DC. The primary purpose of the visit to the CAC-UCC and the Howard University School of Divinity was to strengthen the two-way partnership between the UCCSA and the CAC- UCC in the USA. The UCCSA and CAC-UCC have agreed to explore further proposals for education and knowledge sharing, cross cultural experiences including *Women@ the Well* and other partnerships with the Howard University School of Divinity and UCC Global Ministries.



Rev Dibeela and Rev Thulani visited the White House's West Wing for a meeting with Paul Montiero – Associate Director, President Obama's Office of Public liaison. Paul Montero is in the centre. Rev Thulani Ndzani is to Paul's right and Rev Prince Dibeela is to Paul's left. Also in the picture from left to right are Rev. Adora Iris Lee, ACM Kwame Osei Reed, Sis Barbara Kamara and Howard University Professor Jean Bailey.

Officers Roadshow in Algoa Region March 1-3, 2013. The Officers and Executive Members of UCCSA were in the Algoa Region of the UCCSA in Port Elizabeth during March 1-3, 2013 for the second in a series of planned Roadshows. The Roadshows are intended to facilitate and share in conversations about the vision, ministry and mission of the UCCSA. During the Roadshow the My UCCSA Plan was launched and Officers and Executive Members made presentations regarding the Ministry and Mission Fund. On Friday evening (March 1) Rev Prince Dibeela, General Secretary along with Chairperson of the Algoa Region Rev Adam Birkett facilitated a conversation with Ministers of the Algoa Region. He encouraged the minister to recognise their common journey of ministry and to develop a vocation of prayer for the church and their colleagues in the ministry. On Sunday Officers, Executive Members and the Roadshow team worshipped and preached at Local Churches in the Algoa Region including Bethelsdorp; Edwards Memorial; Caledon Street and Booyesen Park.

In Loving Memory of Rev Derek Jones (1927-2013)



*Rev Derek Jones
first Mayor of Gaborone, Botswana*

Rev Derek Jones arrived in Botswana in 1954 to serve as district superintendent of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in Maun. He served a minister of the UCCSA and later became the first mayor of Gaborone, Botswana in 1966. Rev Jones is also remembered fondly for his distinguished service as manager of the Botswana Book Centre from 1972 to 1993. Council for World Mission (CWM), the successor of the LMS, on its website remembered Rev Derek Jones as "a gracious gentleman with a large heart and a wise mind. His sojourn on Earth has been a gift to creation and a blessing to all those who encountered him in one way or the other." Rev Jones passed away in England at age 86. A memorial service for Rev Derek Jones was held at Trinity Church, Gaborone at 9 o'clock on Saturday 9th March, 2013. Rest in peace Moruti Derek Jones.



Women with disabilities take a stand against violence

08 March 2013 Micheline Kamba speaking at the EDAN conference. © Moses Sembo

“Women with disabilities are often excluded from the society, and are no longer seen as recipients of the gift of God,” said the Rev. Micheline K. Kamba at a recent World Council of Churches (WCC) conference. It is important, she said, to pray for action amidst the alarming situation of violence against women with disabilities. Kamba, herself a person with a disability from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and member of the WCC Central Committee, works as a volunteer coordinator for French-speaking Africa for the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN), a project of the WCC. It was at a recent EDAN conference which took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 27 February to 2 March, that Kamba spoke about the marginalization of women with disabilities, encouraging churches to be more proactive in protecting their rights. The EDAN conference invoked these reflections on “violence against women with disabilities” focusing on the prayer “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”, the theme of the WCC’s upcoming 10th Assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea. The conference gathered around thirty international participants, including women with disabilities from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Burundi, Kenya, South Africa, Togo and the United States. The event was hosted by “The Haven”, a shelter in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa which provides protection to victims of domestic violence and abuse.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is a worldwide fellowship of churches seeking unity, a common witness and Christian service. The WCC brings together 349 churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 560 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches. www.oikoumene.

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THANKS YOU!

Welcome to the **Covenanting for Change** movement and thank you for the contribution you have made to this fundraising campaign! Through this programme we are all invited to join hands and build a church that celebrates and rewards those who serve us as Ministers. As a justice church we are committed to rewarding our Ministers to have a just wage hence the decision to start a Central Fund. Further, through this programme we hope to diversify our Ministry to include other areas beyond pastoral ministry.

Once again, we thank you for your contribution. We will continue to update you on developments regarding this programme.

With love and blessings,

Rev. Dr. Prince Dibeela
General Secretary

If you would like to support Covenant for Change and make a contribution do contact the Central Office on 1 837 9997 for a Debit Payment instructions form to make your contribution of R100 or any amount.



PRAY WITH US

"Oh Lord, giver of life and source of our freedom, we are reminded that Yours is "the earth in its fullness; the world and those who dwell in it."

We know that it is from your hand that we have received all we have and are and will be.

Gracious and loving God, we understand that you call us to be the stewards of Your abundance, the caretakers of all you have entrusted to us.

Help us always to use your gifts wisely and teach us to share them generously. May our faithful stewardship bear witness to the love of Christ in our lives. We pray this with grateful hearts in Jesus' name. Amen."

Remember to pray for:

- Prosperity and economic stability in Zimbabwe; and give thanks for the vote at the March 16, 2013 referendum which approved a new Constitution.
- The people of Maputo and Gaza provinces in Mozambique, especially the children who suffered severely during the floods in Mozambique; many of whom are still homeless and living in tents and centres provided for by the Government
- The Covenanting for Change fundraising campaign; and for increase in the finances of the UCCSA.

If you would like to submit a prayer request for publication please write to us at UCCSA

P.O. Box 96014, Brixton, 2019, Johannesburg, South Africa or send us an e-mail at tellus.uccsa@gmail.com.

"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" James 5:16.

Prayer changes things!



UCCSA AWARDS

UCCSA is inviting members of the UCCSA to make nominations for the **Congregational Justice & Peace Award** and the **Community Empowerment Award**.

The UCCSA spans five countries of Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. It is a church whose history in Southern Africa dates back more than 200 years. UCCSA has an unequivocal stance as church with and for the poor, standing on the side of the oppressed. Over this long history of ministry and witness UCCSA has stood up as an advocate for peace and justice.

The **Congregational Justice & Peace Award** is intended to recognise and honour men, women and institutions who have distinguished themselves in the promotion of justice and peace in their societies.

The **Community Empowerment Award** seeks to recognise and honour those members of the UCCSA who are involved in the development, empowerment and improvement of the social- economic conditions of their communities.

Nominations for this award should be forwarded to the office of the General Secretary by **31st May, 2013** and be accompanied by a brief motivation (reason) for identifying the nominee for the award. Selected awardees will be presented at the Assembly of the UCCSA in September, 2013.



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"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Hebrews 12:1-2.

**EVENTS To Remember and Pray For:**

- 3-7 April** ATMC Block Release (Kurruman)
- 9-12 April** Interns Workshop
- 19-21 April** "Christ is Calling Us" Roadshow (KZN)
- 24-28 April** Botswana Synod Conference
- 2-5 May** "Christ is Calling Us" Roadshow (Zimbabwe)
- 14-19 May** "Christ is Callings Us" Roadshow (Peninsula)
- 14-19 May** Justice & Transformation Training

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We remember and celebrate the women and men who have walked before us creating the mission story of the church that is the UCCSA. We remember Johannes van der Kemp, Mbulasi Makanya, James Read, Mary K. Edwards, T. Shishyo Moyo, Mary Moffat, Albert Luthuli, Derek Jones and all those others named and unnamed who gave their lives to God, joining the great cloud of witnesses in sharing the good news of the gospel.

And especially at this time we remember the One who gave his life as the ultimate sacrifice- the risen one Jesus Messiah, the Christ. He is risen! He lives!

We pray you remember Jesus at the Passover; we pray you remember how he endured the cross; how he was buried and rose again on the third day. We pray the spirit of the risen Christ inspire you in your continued walk of faith and work for justice and peace in your home, your church, your community and our world. Enjoy the Easter weekend. Peace & Blessings! Christ is Risen!

"Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

"To him who sits on the throne
and to the Lamb
be praise and honor
and glory and power,
for ever and ever!"

Revelation 5:13

