

Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

Regional Synod Cape – ISinodi-phondo – LaseKapa

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To all URCSA Congregations and members in the Cape Region

Dear Sisters and Brothers

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM THE MODERAMEN

Immanuel, God with us

Matthew 1:22-23 “All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ (which means ‘God with us’).”

What does it mean that ‘God is with us’ within our context, where so many of our members actually experience unconcealed *non-presence*, where the social reality of too many South Africans is characterised by marginalisation, of being voiceless and ‘invisible’?

The message that God has not abandoned God’s people, that God has indeed drawn closer to the people in an unprecedented way, is strongly emphasised by Matthew. Jesus is the very presence of God coming to live among the people. Matthew’s gospel ends with an Immanuel promise in Matthew 28:20: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Throughout the gospel story we meet Jesus among the people, with the people, choosing not to spend his time in the circle of the privileged and elite of society, but rather with so-called common people in their struggles. This resulted in Jesus being called a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners (11:19; cf. Proverbs 23:20). But Jesus was focused more on his divine mission than on his societal or religious position. For Him, obedience to God was more important than allegiance to power groups. He clearly did not come to curry favour with self-centred leaders, but came to remain faithful to the One who sent him.

Jesus’ birth, life and death send out a clear message that the kingdom of God calls on His church and followers to continuously and critically re-examine their calling and commitment in this world. Sadly, the history of Christianity and the church has not always borne testimony to being “Immanuel people”, to following in the footsteps of our Lord and Master.

May our Christmas message reflect a deeper understanding of the Immanuel message, in word and in deed. Let us be reminded of the words in the Confession of Belhar: “that as

God's possession the Church must stand where God stands, namely against injustice and with those who suffer injustice; and that the Church as made up of those who follow Christ must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and rule over others to their disadvantage."

Let us ask the Spirit of God to open our eyes and ears, to see and to hear those who experience non-presence in our midst, and to reach out to them in concrete acts of love and compassion. We can no longer ignore the pain of exclusion and marginalisation of sisters and brothers in the church and in society.

The theme of our synod earlier this year was "A compassionate church transforming the world". Let us move from comfort in our benches to discomfort in the trenches, from sloganeering to volunteering, from seeking favour with people to faithfully following our Saviour.

It is during this festive period that we tend to be caught up in and sucked into the superficiality of worldly pleasures. It is easy to rationalise the pursuit of our own self-centred interests, and to neglect our vocation as disciples of Jesus Christ. Let us truly be "Immanuel" people.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Immanuel, thank you for the promise of your everlasting presence in our lives. May we be witnesses to your loving and compassionate presence among all those whose lived reality is one of non-presence, exclusion and marginalisation. Fill us with the power and courage of the Holy Spirit to boldly confess and faithfully follow you. For your Name's sake. Amen

God bless you all.



Rev. Dr LLM MacMaster
Moderator of Uniting Reformed Church, Cape Synod
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