

Dutch Reformed Church

Presentation on Ecumenism to the General Synod



South African
Council of Churches

Greetings and Introduction

- Greetings to: Moderator Lubber, all Moderators of synods, Dr Nioma Venter, your GS and my boss as the vice president of the SACC, all present in this important gathering of the DRC in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
- I bring greetings unto you from the SACC family as represented by the SACC Praesidium led by its president bishop Sipuka. On behalf of the SACC we wish this gathering all of God's grace and wisdom.
- It is my singular honor to participate with you in the conversations you are having in this meeting so as to deepened your witness of the transforming love of Christ in a world dominated by hate and death.

Basic admissions on the topic

- Today our conversation is about that basic pursuit of the unity of the church built on the love of Christ to give credibility and power to the transformation ministry of Christ, through the church, in the world. This we call Ecumenism.
- Ecumenism, the search for the maximisation of the unity of the body of Christ in ministry for the transformation of the world, is a call to the church to commit to its foundation on which to build its ministry.
- The search for authentic ecumenism is a reflection of the scandal of our division whilst an inspiration of what we can be at our best.

- Its God's call on the church to confess her sin of division and strive for unity in ministry and witness for God's Kingdom on earth.
- Its an invitation to see our differences and diversity as a strength rather than a weakness, as a gift for mutuality and solidarity rather than a curse or burden to endure.
- It's a call in some way, to recentre the Trinitarian understanding of the God-Identity as the core identity of the church.
- The commitment to the universality of the Christian faith

An assumed understanding

- Nicean and Chalcedon councils
- The 1910 Edinburgh conference and The Internal Missionary Conference 1921
- Faith and Order Conferences on church doctrine and polity, 1927 Lausanne, Stockholm conference of 1925, 1937 Oxford Conference
- 1948 WCC Amsterdam
- Pope John XXIII Secretariat for the promotion of Christian unity
- Second Vatican Council 1962-65.- Catholic Use of the term.

- **The Unity of the Church:** “ I pray that they will be one, just as you and I are one-as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. May they be in us so that the world may believe you sent me”. John 17:21-22
The credibility of our ministry and that of Christ is based on our Unity in the Triune God.
- **Unity in diversity:** “There is neither Jew or Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Jesus Christ” Gal 3:28-29. This unity reconcile all difference and calls for a new humanity and creation.

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- **Must always act for the benefit of the marginalised** “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you did it for me” Mathew 25:40. a church where the vulnerable, exploited, marginalised feel the power of God.

- **Witnessing with courage for Justice:** “What misery is mine! I am like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the yard; there is no cluster of grapes to eat, none of the early figs that I crave. The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains, all men lie in wait to shed blood, each hunts his brother with a net. Both hands are skilled in doing evil ; rulers demand gifts, judges accepts bribes, powerful dictate what they desire” Micah 7:1-3

- **Captured by and acting for the eschatological vision of God:**
“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy” Isaiah 65:17-18
creating new hope in the eschatological vision of God. Acting and inspired by what God is creating anew in our presence and the future.

A united in diversity community acting as a loving transformative presence in the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit, transforming the world for the benefit of the poor and marginalised, witnessing with courage in the presence of corruption, abuse of power by the powerful and forever working for the establishment of God's Kingdom and the renewal of the world.

This church will minister in a complicated world that is not ready for a clear moral vision and ethical behaviour, where power is unaccountable, highly fractured society devoid of true reconciliation and the people are mere pawns in the hands of the powerful and poverty in a midst of opulence defines the world

The SACC

- 1948 participation in the Ecumenical Movement
- Cottesloe conference
- 1968 Christian Council/SACC
- 1969 Message to the people
- SACC work in the fight against Apartheid in the late 70's until freedom
- Rustenburg Conference

SACC Mission and Vision

- ❑ SACC focuses on social & economic justice, eradication of poverty, national reconciliation, integrity of creation and the empowerment of those marginalised spiritually, socially and economically.
- ❑ The SACC for a United Christian Action for moral action in South Africa in Obedience to Christ.

❖ The Mission and Vision of the SACC is anchored on the South Africa we pray4:

“ A Just reconciled and equitable and sustainable society, free of racial, tribal xenophobic and gender prejudices, free of corruption and deprivation and with enough food and shelter for every citizen, and for each child born to grow to their God given potential

SACC Strategic Pillars

- Member Church Service
- Governance, Administration and Institutional strengthening
- United Christian Witness

Interventions

- Healing and Reconciliation
- Economic Transformation
- Anchoring Democracy
- Comprehensive Quality Education
- Ecological Justice

SACC Theory of Change

- SACC Change Theory says: If member churches resolve to commit consistently to the ecumenical formation in the SACC through structured engagements, there will be structured opportunity for churches to coordinate for coherence, their prayer and action for the values of God's Kingdom in South Africa; and a more prayerful togetherness in social analysis – reading “the signs of the times”, prayerful togetherness in action, from heads of churches, through synods and in congregational programming for the common good; resulting in a visible and agile body of Christian witness and healing ministry for South Africa; a living symbol of hope in witness to Him who said: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me; because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed! (Luke 4:18). For: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly!” (John 10:10)



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The Local Church – Light & Salt

- The church of Jesus Christ is and will always be a local reality, a source of social and spiritual edification of the people where we live and worship. It is called to be the light and salt where it exists.
- However, in many instances, the local church has become insular and focused on its internal projects – fundraising, this and that project for its business of being church for its members.
- The big elephant in the room is the question of the readiness of the SACC churches to commit to their congregations being capacitated to be the good news agency in their neighbourhood, to say “the time has come; the day is near.”
- To achieve that we are going to need a revolutionary drive to strengthen the capacity and infrastructure of the local church to be the “go-to” place for all kinds of things that make for the quality of life.

Local Ecumenical Networks

Objective: To do everything we can to enable congregations to be agents of the achievement of the Jesus value of “Life in abundance”; and support the communities in taking their responsibility to realise their vision of the Post-apartheid Promise.

Approach:

- Connect churches/congregations (a network of congregations), of different denominations, for the common purpose.
- Create space for the congregation/community to say what they want/need/envision.
- Ensure that at a min. of **10** congregations are committed to work together in the network of common purpose.
- Connect/network entities with resources, various skills, experience and expertise to offer to the common purpose.

- ❖ Partner with local public service structures and institutions.
- ❖ Ensure a consistent local coordinating structure that holds everything together.
- ❖ Ensure that national public witness campaigns touch down with practical local application

A glimpse in the DRC History

- Work done by the DRC in preparation for the 1947 Volkskongress
1947 work of Stad en Kerk

“The aim of the church is to bring about social justice. Justice must be done to the poor and oppressed, and if the present system does not serve this purpose , the public conscience must roused to demand another. If the church does not exert herself for justice in society, and together with the help she can offer....serve as champions of the cause of the poor... the poor have a right to ..live a life of human dignity”(Rev C Brink).

Conclusion

“It can be said that the search for unity of the Church and humankind is central to the concern of the SACC.....this concern for unity not something that was introduced by the Ecumenical movement.....No the scriptures declare that unity, the unity of the entire creation was God’s intention from the beginning....The SACC is thus caught up in divine mission; it is a fellow worker with none other than God Himself, an agent of divine mercy and compassion not just for the world and.....human beings, but for the whole creation” (Desmond Tutut: Ellof Commision)



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Thank you