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C O N T E N T S

UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA - TENTH ANNIVERSARY AND ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY SPECIAL.

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SECTION I

UCCSA CALLS FOR MORE ACTION

PACALTSODORP (George) - The United Congregational Church of South Africa's tenth anniversary and eleventh Assembly ended at the weekend with the urgent call for church action from its Church and Society Department ringing in the ears of the 450-odd delegates, visitors and observers.

The UCCSA conference was chaired by Rev B K Dlodla, the outgoing chairman who is to be succeeded by the Rev Bernard Spong. Rev Spong is also Director of Christian Education and will occupy this position until December 31, 1979.

The main thrust of the conference was the "oneness" of the church and much time was spent on the long-drawn-out negotiations on a merger between Presbyterians and Congregationalists.

However, this merger was not the dominant theme.

Instead, the topics covered the entire spectrum of South Africa's present ills from detentions without trial, conscientious objection, squatters, poverty, Bantu Education, unemployment, and Soweto.

In the following pages an analysis of the various aspects of the report by the Church and Society Department and others, is published.

/DETENTIONS WITHOUT TRIAL

DETENTIONS WITHOUT TRIAL

PACALTSDORP (George) - The death in detention of Steve Biko has brought into sharp focus the injustice, horror and inhumanity of a system which suspends the rule of law, makes persons subservient to policies and denies human rights. A judicial enquiry into the circumstances surrounding Steve Biko's death is essential, but such an enquiry would only deal with the symptoms of the security legislation which confers upon the police unlimited powers without adequate judicial controls, syas the UCCSA Church and Society Department.

The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa has protested repeatedly against the suspension of the rule of law; it does so again now. There is no justification for holding a person in detention indefinitely for the purpose of secret interrogation in circumstances which lay themselves open to allegations of intimidation and cruelty. If the police have any reason for suspecting a person of a crime, that person has a legal right to be charged and for the case to be heard in a competent court of law.

According to statistics kept by the Institute of Race Relations, forty-four persons, detained under security laws, have died in detention since 1963. It is part of the shameful record of apartheid.

Steve Biko believed in the dignity of "Blackness" and the inherent worth and human and political rights of every Black person. Black consciousness for Steve Biko was a refusal to be de-personalised by White attitudes and policies which reduce Black humanity and dignity to a minimum.

We thank God for the dedication of Steve Biko to the cause of his own people's self-awareness and to a South Africa in which the rights of every person will be recognised, for the benefit of all and the deprivation of none.

This Church assures the family and friends of Steve Biko of its love, sympathy and concern at this time when they mourn the passing of a son, a husband, a father and a friend who died in the struggle for a free South Africa.

This Church cannot acquiesce in a system which deprives millions of South Africans of basic human rights.

This Church deplores and rejects the security legislation which detains, deports and bans those who work for justice and peace in pur society, without recourse to a court of law.

This Church offers its full support to all who are being "persecuted in the cause of right". (Matt. 5:10)

/EX-UCCSA CHAIRMAN

EX-UCCSA CHAIRMAN REV B N B NGIDI STILL DETAINED

PACALTSODORP (George) - The Rev B N B Ngidi is the second former Chairman of the UCCSA to be detained for an indefinite period during the past twelve months. It would appear that those in whom the Church places the greatest confidence are under suspicion. We know the men concerned - they are respected and trusted leaders of our Church. It is true that they are concerned that justice and truth should prevail in South Africa and also that Black aspirations and hopes should be recognised and taken into account in the formulation of a future policy for South Africa, but such hopes and aspirations should be encouraged, not thwarted. Ministering to Black congregations, men like Ben Ngidi and Allan Hendrickse know the frustrations of an oppressed people and are seeking to remove them. They know from experience the intolerable burden which an apartheid system inflicts upon the Black people to whom they minister.

This department believes in Ben Ngidi's integrity as a man and as a minister. He is a Christian not a Communist; his concern is for the welfare of the people he is called to serve. He was ordained to proclaim a Gospel which redeems men and women and sets them free, and he has been stopped from doing this.

The detention of respected Black leaders will not, in our view, contribute to peaceful change in South Africa. It can only foster bitter resentment in the Black community and create further unrest in the country. We have, therefore, called upon the Minister of Justice to charge or release Ben Ngidi.

At the church service held in the old church in Oudtshoorn, a tableau was performed with a vacant chair over which intoned a reading from the scriptures symbolising the absence of Rev Ngidi from the altar and the church.

CHURCH MUST ACT TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER

PACALTSODORP (George) - Hunger is a world problem. In South Africa it is closely allied to unemployment and the lack of work opportunities in the Homelands.

There's hunger at Thornhill. And the UCCSA sent only R200 to help relieve it.

There's hunger in the Transkei.

There's hunger in urban townships.

Children die of malnutrition.

Mothers are too weak and under-nourished to feed their babies.

Fathers cannot obtain work and are not strong enough to do it if they can get it.

Handouts are helpful -

A packet of fortified soup can work wonders -
so can pro-nutro and milk powder.

But handouts can never be the answer to a problem of national and global magnitude.

/WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO?

WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO?

Very little about grinding poverty which makes it impossible for a man to support his family adequately. The Church exists in the hunger-stricken areas. Must it confine itself to offering only the Bread of Life to those whose stomachs are empty? Every Congregational Church in Southern Africa is either set within a community in which there is hunger or is adjacent to such a community.

HERE IS A FIELD FOR IMMEDIATE AND PRACTICAL SOCIAL ACTION

The Church can alleviate hunger by its charity. The Church can teach the proper use of food so that the maximum nourishment is obtained from the minimum quantity. The Church can encourage the growing of food and distribute seeds in rural communities. The Church can bring cases of dire need to the attention of the authorities and become a "pressure group" to combat hunger and malnutrition.

This Department commends the call issued by the Natal Regional Council of the UCCSA, at its Annual Meeting, inviting local churches to take concrete steps to assist the agencies established for the alleviation of hunger and unemployment by:

- (i) members making personal donations in cash and kind;
- (ii) by local churches making their communion offerings available every second month for the unemployed and the hungry;
- (iii) by local churches organising "hunger" meals and giving the proceeds to an appropriate fund;
- (iv) by church families contributing the cost of one meal per week for the alleviation of the hunger caused by unemployment.

Feeding the hungry is a field for Christian ACTION as well as discussion.

Many people in the UCCSA are overfed; and the Church helps to over-feed them at socials, tea parties and dinners.

A moderate diet of nourishing and plain food should be the rule for all Christians.

This would help to eliminate waste - increase the supplies of food available for all and encourage sharing.

/TO TAKE UP ARMS

TO TAKE UP ARMS OR OBJECT - DILEMMA OF UCCSA

PACALTSODORP (George) - Because the majority of the members of the United Congregational Church of South Africa are termed "Coloured" in South African law, they are likely to be conscripted in the future to join the South African defence Force.

At the moment recruiting drives for a Coloured Permanent Force are being mooted by the Government while several Coloured volunteers have enlisted in the Army and Navy.

At the UCCSA Assembly here delegates looked again at this vexing dilemma and consensus was that it was neither a matter for the individual nor the church to decide on this.

This debate continues in a tense national situation where military defence is seen by many people as essential to national survival and by many more as a barrier to racial unity and a shared society.

The Church and Society Department reiterated these salient points to the Assembly:

- * This Department has not said that military service is unChristian.
- * This Department has not said that we should not pray for or offer pastoral care to young men in the forces. We are enjoined to "pray for all men" and "to take care of the whole flock of God". This we endeavour to do.
- * This Department has said that there are some Christians who regard war as contrary to the teaching of Christ, or as a form of civil war in the Southern African context.
- * This Department has said that those who object to war on the grounds of Christian or moral principle should be entitled to fulfil their obligation to society in areas of national service outside the armed forces.

The views expressed above were endorsed by the Executive Committee. The Church cannot avoid an ambivalent attitude in regard to war in a world where there has not been one day of total peace since the Second World War. But the values of Christ must not be made subservient to the need for defence. The voice of conscience must not be silenced by the compulsion of Government edict or the clamour of popular demand.

The issue is an emotive one, and poses a dilemma for a multiracial Church. In this connection we can only support the stand of the Anglican Bishops when they issued the following statement:

"Many Black people find it virtually impossible to identify with the army. At the same time we recognise the pastoral responsibility to minister to all men. The Church must minister pastorally, both to men in the Defence Force and to those opposing them. This the Church is attempting to do".

/BLACK JOBLESS ON THE RISE

BLACK JOBLESS ON THE RISE - UCCSA REPORT

PACALTSORP (George) - No reliable figures exist for the unemployed in South Africa as a whole. It is estimated, however, that African unemployment will reach a peak of just over two million this year, unless the South African economy is stimulated.

- * Thousands of people are out of work, many of them members of our Churches.
- * Hunger is rife - children are fainting at school because they've had nothing to eat.
- * The Black community, lacking financial reserves, is the hardest hit, and frustration is on the increase.
- * Crime is also on the increase, as unemployed persons with nothing to do and no money for basic necessities, steal to live.

Dr Unez Smuts has embarked on an enormous campaign of making and selling Christmas puddings which will be sold and the proceeds used to provide more basic food for hungry children.

THERE IS SOME WAY IN WHICH EVERY LOCAL CHURCH IN THE UCCSA COULD DO SOMETHING NOW TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER AND THE HARSHER EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT.

JESUS PLACED A VERY HIGH PRIORITY ON FEEDING THE HUNGRY -
"I was hungry and you gave me food" - (Matt.25:35)

The Department endorses the resolution of the South African Council of Churches on UNEMPLOYMENT and proposes that the recommendations contained therein be adopted by this Assembly. (This was later adopted).

SECTION IV : FEATURES

THORNE AND SPONG - Portrait of Two Congregationalists - By OBED MUSI

The Rev John Thorne likes to tell this story against himself. Apparently, a lady congregant of his met a member of the church who was under the weather.

"I think you are drunk" said the lady indignantly, to which the man in the gutter replied "And I think you are ugly".

"My good man if you continue like this you will forever remain so. You'll never change..." to which the other reparteed: "Wrong, Madam. I'll have recovered in the morning from drunkenness : you will never recover from your ugliness..."

"Well, I'm like that lady" says John Thorne ruefully, "I'll never change from being a Congregationalist and a preacher".

And so he is. But then there is much more to him than that as was shown at the Pacaltsdorp Assembly each time he stood up to speak.

In that dulcet tone which I'm sure is the envy of many a fire-and-brimstone preacher (except that he never exhorts people) he would quietly but firmly pilot through a resolution to the executive and such is the man's drive that delegates found themselves sitting throughout the day in sessions that went on until midnight.

Little wonder, as Rev L Loemas pointed out, "That man has the stamina of ten elephants".

A unanimous tribute from the Assembly speaks for itself.

The preamble to it says: "Every Congregationalist views John Thorne's appointment as General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches with mixed feelings ... he holds a unique place in the life of the UCCSA.

"As a beloved pastor in Worcester and Paarl, as the first elected chairman of the UCCSA, as an able administrator and a courageous leader John has endeared himself to the whole constituency".

The preamble adds that his knowledge of the local churches and regional councils - an indication of the stickler for detail - have equipped him for the challenging ministry which has left a mark on the life of the UCCSA.

There is, however, a sad footnote to this eulogy: John Thorne resigned his SACC job for personal reasons last month.

His departure from Diakonia House, SACC headquarters in Johannesburg, left a pang of nostalgia for the pipe-smoking, soft-walking preacher with a permanently quizzical smile on his face.

(See Section Five for the full text of the Assembly recommendation which was made before he quit the SACC).

/Rev Bernard Spong

Rev Bernard Spong on the other hand, is a horse of a different kind. He is the kind of person who can disappear in a crowd and yet one can still feel his presence, said a colleague.

That is easy to understand. For he is at all times bent on that much-used 20th century thing called communications. His interest in folk and contemporary church music, art and photographic media make the new leader of some 200 000 Congregationalists a man for the people.

Bernard is a missionary. However, he is a far cry from the old Mfundisi (preacher) "walking through the village wearing a toupee, with a Bible in one hand and a walking stick in the other, out to civilise and convert the heathens".

He is a great individualist to start with, however he believes strongly in self-reliance and loves nothing better than to work in a given parish, establish guidelines for self-help schemes and as he so wryly puts it "work myself out of a job", by getting himself transferred elsewhere.

Indeed, one of his favourite stories is of a rural church under his care who displayed with great pride their newly furnished and redecorated buildings.

"I knew nothing about the project until it had been completed" he later said.

A brief outline of his background shows that he came here in 1963 having been sent out by the former London Missionary Society and worked in the Vryburg-Mafeking and later Zeerust areas, a sprawling arid part of the North Eastern Cape during which he forged strong links with the Tswana people who are the dominant tribe there.

In 1967 he accepted the post of secretary to the new Central Region of UCCSA, an office he held until December, 1976.

Incidentally, he has firm links with that turbulent township, Soweto, where he was instrumental in founding the Zola Community Centre via his work as vice-chairman of the Bridgeman Foundation. Until recently he was acting minister in Yeoville, Johannesburg.

His thirst for more expertise in communications was slaked when he spent five months abroad recently studying new developments in Christian Education and Media Resources.

Of such stuff then, are Congregationalists made.

SECTION V : DOCUMENTATIONFULL TEXT OF TRIBUTE TAKEN AT THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY AND ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF SA TO REV JOHN THORNE

An ambassador-at-large, John has made the voice of the UCCSA heard and heeded in ecumenical councils throughout the world. He has represented the Church at the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Council for World Mission, and has played a decisive role in the re-organisation of the latter body. He has travelled extensively in America, Asia, Europe and Africa interpreting the task of the Church in South Africa to Christians in other lands.

On the home front, John has made his mark as President of the Federal Theological Seminary, during the most difficult period in its history, and as President of the South African Council of Churches during a period when the Council has been called upon to exercise a prophetic role in a turbulent and rapidly changing South Africa. John's name has become a household word amongst Christians of all denominations and his utterances have inspired us with courage and hope.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the South African Council of Churches in appointing its first Black General Secretary should look in the direction of John Thorne. He has the knowledge and experience required for the job and a wide-range of ecumenical contacts at home and overseas.

Before accepting appointment as General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, John consulted the Structural Commission of the UCCSA. It was a moving moment for all of us when, without prolonged discussion, we gave John to the SACC as Allan Hendrickse offered prayer. It was one of those occasions when "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us".

John Thorne commenced his new duties as General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches on June 1, 1977, and we are glad and privileged to be able to release him for a wider ministry, whilst rejoicing in his continuing association with the UCCSA in important areas of its life and work. (He resigned on October 4 - Editor).

Recommendation:

The Assembly records its deep appreciation to the Rev J F Thorne for the high quality of his leadership, the breadth of his vision and the wise and understanding approach he has brought to the administration of this Church's affairs.

The Assembly assures Mr Thorne of the affectionate regard in which he is held by the UCCSA and of its prayers and support.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEEOFFICERS

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BOTSWANA:	The Rev M S Serema (Ministerial) Miss L Sekga (Finance)
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