

# A History of Gender Insensitivity in URCSA

**Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5356-7065>

University of Stellenbosch

mapvanhuffel@sun.ac.za

## Abstract

This article utilises autoethnographical methodology to dissect the history of gender insensitivity in the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). According to Carolyn Ellis (2010), autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to “describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).” Ellis (2004) states that autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. This paper utilises self-reflection to explore anecdotal personal experience and to connect this autobiographical story to wider understanding of gender in URCSA. Sandars (2009) defines reflection as a “metacognitive process that occurs before, during and after situations with the purpose of developing greater understanding of both the self and the situation ...” This article concentrates on research grounded in personal experience. It aims to sensitise readers to issues of identity politics in URCSA. It will highlight experiences shrouded in silence within URCSA, and deepen knowledge about the struggles that women in ordained positions within URCSA have had to endure. Foucault (1982) describes three types of struggles: either against forms of domination; against forms of exploitation; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others. The article deconstructs the relationship between text and theory, praxis and context, and presents an alternative interpretation. It highlights central themes regarding women in ordained positions within URCSA, but focuses more on the sub themes: from ordination to academia; ordained women in leadership positions, the gender equity policy of URCSA; a milestone never embraced 1994–2005; inclusive language and the draft worship book of URCSA; women as delegates to ecumenical gatherings.

**Keywords:** autoethnography; counter-history; covert and overt; Foucault; gender; gender justice; gender sensitivity; patriarchy; post-structural feminism; slating



Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae  
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SHE/index>  
 Volume 45 | Number 3 | 2019 | #6250 | 22 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/6250>  
 ISSN 2412-4265 (Online)  
 © The Author(s) 2019



Published by the Church History Society of Southern Africa and Unisa Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

## Introduction

This article is a first attempt of the author to embark on reflective writing. It concentrates on research grounded in personal experience, hopeful that this research would sensitise readers to issues of identity politics in URCSA, enlighten readers to experiences shrouded in silence in URCSA, and would deepen knowledge about the struggles women in ordained positions in URCSA have had to endure. According to Carolyn Ellis et al. (2010, 1) autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to “describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).” Ellis furthermore states that *autoethnography* refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. “It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (Ellis 2004, 37). I am, therefore, using self-reflection in this paper in order to explore anecdotal and personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider meanings and understanding of gender in URCSA. Sandars (2009, 685) defines reflection as a “metacognitive process that occurs before, during and after situations with the purpose of developing a greater understanding of both the self and the situation so that future encounters with the situation are informed from previous encounters.” I will attend to different forms of struggle in this article, as described by Foucault (1982, 782), namely that there are “three types of struggles: either against forms of domination (ethnic, social, and religious); against forms of exploitation which separate individuals from what they produce; or against that which ties the individual to himself and submits him to others in this way (struggles against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission).”

## From Ordination to the Academia

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (hereafter URCSA) hails that women are being ordained in URCSA, are taking up leadership positions in the church, are representing URCSA in the ecumenical world, and are lecturing at prestigious universities. This view of history can be described as showing partiality towards the conquerors. Prof. Hannes Adonis, a professor in Church History at the University of Stellenbosch, critiques in his inaugural lecture an understanding of history that privileges the vindicator (Adonis 2000, 11). Adonis accentuates the importance of historiography based on oral sources. Adonis (2000, 11) also underscores history from below as analogous with the African proverb that says: “Until the lions have their historians, tales of history will always glorify the hunter.” He highlights that history should be written from previously hidden experiences of people and social groups whose stories have not been incorporated into historical documents, for example oppressed groups, women, and the poor. Likewise, Vosloo calls attention to the importance that “history should be written from the view of the survivors of the hunt and not from the view of the hunters” (Vosloo 2017, 46). According to Medina (2011, 14), “official histories create and maintain the unity and continuity of a political body by imposing an interpretation on a shared past and, at the same time, by silencing alternative interpretations of historical experiences. Counter-histories try to undo these

silences and to undermine the unity and continuity that official histories produce.” As Vosloo (2017, 46) so eloquently states, “to archive otherwise, to read and write otherwise, is to challenge the story of the victor and the way it has been successfully transmitted.” Foucault (2003, 69) expounds: “The history of some is not the history of others ... It will be learned that one man’s victory is another man’s defeat.” A counter-history is, therefore, not the history of victories, but is rather the history of defeats. This article emphasises an alternative interpretation of historical experiences.

The 25th year of URCSA’s existence gives it an opportune time to reflect deeply on the road travelled; on where we are currently, and to consider the future ahead of us. We are obliged for our mere existence as a church—which challenged others regarding their wrongful interpretation of Scripture and overt or covert justification of apartheid—to take account of the embedded patriarchy camouflaged as cultural identity and the hegemony of male power in our church (Plaatjies-Van Huffel 2017, 8–24). Patriarchy is essentially androcentric and hierarchical by nature. As Reuther says: “By patriarchy, we mean not only the subordination of females to males, but the whole structure of Father-ruled society: aristocracy over serfs, masters over slaves, kings over subjects, racial overlords over colonised people” (Reuther 1983, 61). The ordination of women in URCSA only brought about a few modifications of the image of the status of the minister of the Word, but essentially, nothing has changed in the patriarchal anthropology of URCSA.

The author contends that the issue of gender sensitivity is an existential issue. Gender is a social, cultural and religious construct. The concept “gender” describes the differences between women and men which are based on socially defined ideas and beliefs of what it means to be a woman and a man (or a girl and a boy) (*Created in God’s Image* 2003, 15). Gender refers to the social roles allocated respectively to women and to men in particular societies and at particular times. Gender is distinguished from sex which is biologically determined; “sex” refers to a person’s biological makeup, while “gender” describes their social definition—that is, the values and roles society assigns them (*Created in God’s Image* 2003, 17). The relationships between women and men intersect with other forms of social identification, such as race, age, ethnicity, class, caste, religion and geographic location (urban/rural, north/south).

As the first ordained woman, feminist scholar in URCSA, the author has felt on more than one occasion the full brunt of overt and covert forms of gender insensitivity in URCSA. Covert forms of gender insensitivity are not openly being practised in URCSA. It refers to how the church exercises its power to mainstream certain agendas or programmes. It refers to the power to control, to dominate or impose conformity. Overt forms of gender insensitivity are open and observable, for example, regulating what gets included or excluded for consideration or debate at synod; preventing agendas regarding gender from being implemented; limiting or denying women access to resources; or manipulating processes of election or appointment. Some examples include: “censuring; silencing those who challenge patriarchal forms, practices and structures” (Ryan 2007,

9). I claim that URCSA is not a safe space for ordained women. URCSA pays no heed to the personal sacrifices that most of these pioneering women in URCSA have endured in order to retain the status as ordained women.

Since this article upholds an autoethnographical research approach, it is fitting to formulate the personal experiences of the author. I was ordained on 26 November 1992 in Robertson, 10 years after the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) decided to open ordained positions for women. As the first ordained woman, I struggled against subjection, against forms of subjectivity and submission. It was a lonely road. It became my task to deconstruct the imaginary that only a male is fit to lead a congregation. It was customary for congregants to use the same honorific utilised to address the minister's wife or missionary's wife, namely "Juffrou" (*mamfundizi*) to address me. During the past 25 years I have had to correct countless times members of URCSA as well as male colleagues to address me with the same honorific as my male counterparts, namely "Dominee" (Reverend). For me, addressing me as "Juffrou" was nothing else than an attempt to constitute me in a role ordinarily assigned in the Reformed mission churches to the minister's wife, meaning to play a supporting role in the ministry towards her husband. I refused to embrace the role of submissiveness. My premise is that roles allocated respectively to women and to men in URCSA and in society at large are constituted by language, and that this construction should be deconstructed. Graff describes language as a "system by which one's sense of reality and subjectivity" is being construed (Graff 1995, 16).

For 17 years I served in URCSA Roberson-East, a congregation approximately 150 kilometres away from where my husband, Reverend Dawid Johannes Van Huffel, was ministering in URCSA Scottsdene in Kraaifontein. I had to balance my marriage, my role as minister's wife and the daunting task of being a pioneer. Soon it became clear to me that that URCSA was not ready to accept women in ordained positions and that no support structures existed in the male-dominated environment. Since the DRMC Synod's decision in 1982 to open the ordained position to women, nothing has been done to deconstruct patriarchy based on the century-old theological understanding that women should be silent in church (*Acta Nederduits Gereformeerde Sendingkerk* 1982, 640). I was expected to work in an environment where the *Form for Ordination*, which was used to ordain me as a minister of the Word, was still printed in exclusive masculine pronouns, where the Belhar Pension Fund regulations refer to "the widow" as one of the beneficiaries of the pension benefits, and where all the tasks of the minister of the Word in the stipulations and regulations in the Church Order were referred to in masculine pronouns (*Kerkorde Streeksinode Kaapland* 1994; *Kerkorde Streeksinode Kaapland* 1998). I challenged the androcentric categories in the official documentation of URCSA. In a patronising way, male colleagues tried to console me as follows: "Don't worry Mary. If you passed on, we will make sure that Dawid van Huffel, your husband, would receive your pension benefits." Ultimately, the task was laid on my shoulders to disrupt the embeddedness of patriarchy in URCSA. As Kamla Bhasin states: "Patriarchy manifests itself in subtle discrimination, bias or non-acceptance of women in leadership

positions” (Bhasin 1993, 3). I concur with the notion of Bhasin (1993, 2) that patriarchy refers to “male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterise a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways.”

My ingenuous presumption at the beginning of my ministry was that the androcentric nature of URCSA could be changed through amending of the Church Order of URCSA. I therefore submitted during 2002 numerous church judicial amendments, which attended to gender inclusivity, for example to write out both pronoun options as “she or he” or “she/he” and “her/his,” or “her/him” (*Skema van Werksaamhede VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland* 2002, 297–298). At the Synod some of the delegates suggested that masculine pronouns (he, his, him) should be used as the default in situations where the person or thing to which you’re referring could be either male or female and that a disclaimer should be printed in the introduction to explain the usage of the masculine pronouns. I strongly objected to the usage of androcentric language in the official documentation of URCSA. In the end, the Regional Synod Cape 2002 approved all my recommendations. I was elected at the Regional Synod Cape 2002 as the church law expert (actuaris), the first women to fill this position on the Executive of a Regional Synod of URCSA. At the Regional Synod Cape 2006, I was re-elected in this position. From 2002 until 2010 it became my task as church law expert to ensure that inclusive language would be used in the official documentation of the Regional Synod Cape (*Kerkorde VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland* 2004–2010). During that time, the General Synod embarked on a process to align the Regional Synods’ Church Orders of URCSA (2004–2016). I realised with dismay that androcentric language was still prevalent in all the Church Orders of the Regional Synods of URCSA. The alignment process was concluded at the General Synod 2016. From then on it was expected that all Regional Synods of URCSA should utilise the approved gender-inclusive stipulations and regulations in their Church Orders.

During 1993–1994, 10 months after my ordination, a schism occurred because 120 congregants, mostly women, refused to accept the leadership of a women minister and opted to take up membership in a male colleague’s congregation in another part of the town. This schism was reported on extensively in the Afrikaans newspaper, *Die Burger*, on 23 April 1994 (Flaendorp 2014, 55–56). My husband, Dawid Van Huffel, my colleagues in the Presbytery of Zuurbraak and the few congregants who accepted my leadership, as well as the church council of Robertson-East congregation, pastorally accompanied me through the whole ordeal. The schism had a negative financial impact on an impoverished congregation, consisting primarily of farmworkers, domestic workers, factory workers and seasonal workers.

For months after the schism I had to fulfil my ministerial duties without the hope that the congregation would be in a position to pay my salary. The Presbytery of Zuurbraak approved my application to change my full-time position as minister of the Word to tent-making (Stipulation 22.4 *Kerkorde Streeksinode Kaapland* 1994). In all this, the church was nowhere to be found to assist, not even pastorally, the first woman minister

in URCSA. It was left to her to build up a legacy that women are able to take up ordained positions or either to resign or survive. I opted to survive.

The rest of this story of the first ordained woman in URCSA portrays nothing else than strategies to survive in an environment which was and still is not a safe space for pioneering women. There was and is no programme in URCSA to monitor the challenges and struggles of ordained women in URCSA. I believe that refusal to put our hands in our own bosom is detrimental to URCSA's image as children of the *Belhar Confession*.

At the beginning of my ministry, one of the congregants refused to allow me to baptise his child. During the administration of the baptism rite he marched out of the church building with his child in his arms, while shouting aloud: "You are not a male dominee? Christ is a male. I will not allow you to baptise my child." Standing there with my hand in the baptismal font, the realisation struck me that the church had failed to deconstruct the theological anthropology which silenced women for centuries. I therefore embarked on research for my first PhD, namely about *Women in the Theological Anthropology of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (Vroue in die Teologiese Antropologie binne die Afrikaanse Gereformeerde Tradisie)*. This was a post-structural study. After completion of this PhD in 2004, the awareness hit me that I was a desolate voice in the desert. No one in URCSA was interested in the discourse about structuralism, post-structuralism, post-modernism, or the deconstruction of the embedded patriarchy in the church. It became clear to me that the way URCSA was attending to church judicial matters was still framed in the church judicial discourse of the Reformed churches during the nineteenth century in Europe. I therefore embarked on a research study on *Doleantie Church Polity in the Reformed Mission Churches in South Africa (Doleansiekerkreg in die Afrikaanse Gereformeerde Sendingkerke)*.

During the course of time I applied for numerous synodical positions in the Regional Synod Cape or positions in vacant congregations as minister of the Word in the Cape Peninsula, but even as a holder of two doctorates, recognition of the Western Cape Province for my involvement in the social empowerment of the community of Robertson, I was never appointed in any of these. I applied with no avail to four different universities in South Africa for academic positions. Despondent in the church at large, I devoted myself to my ministry and in the executive positions on both the Regional Synod Cape and the General Synod, respectively, as church law expert, assessor and moderator.

At last, by what I see as God's graceful intervention, I was appointed in 2010 at the University of Stellenbosch as a senior lecturer in ecclesiology and church polity. Since 2008 I have published 17 articles in accredited theological journals, 15 chapters in academic books and I have edited three books. I published primarily in church law,

ecumenical church law, law and religion.<sup>1</sup> I have thrived in this environment, where everyone was subscribing to the ethos of the university regarding equity and equality, and where I was receiving local and global recognition for my scholarly outputs.

## Ordained Women in Leadership Positions

Since 1992 more than 30 women have been ordained. Most of the ordained women are serving as tent-making ministers. Less than 1 per cent of these have been taken up in the leadership positions of the church. Women in executive positions of URCSA include, amongst others, Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel, church law expert of the Regional Synod Cape (2002–2010), assessor of the General Synod of URCSA (2008–2012), moderator of the General Synod of URCSA (2012–2016); Christina Landman (church law expert of the Northern Synod (2008–), church law expert of the General Synod of URCSA 2018–); and Catherine Carolissen, church law expert of Phororo Synod (2012). At the writing of this article I am not aware of any other women in executive positions in URCSA. My presumption is that the presence of women in the

---

1 Selection of publications (Plaatjies-Van Huffel):

- i) *Violation of the Doctrine of Separation of Powers Imposed through Proposed Regulation of Religion in South Africa*.
- ii) "The Quest for Religious Pluralism in Post-Apartheid South Africa," in *Religion, Pluralism, and Reconciling Difference*, edited by W. Cole Durham, Jr. (Brigham Young University) and Donlu Thayer (Brigham Young University), 2019.
- iii) "Natural Law in the Reformed Tradition," in *Christianity and Natural Law: An Introduction*, edited by Norman Doe, Cambridge University Press: University of Cambridge, 2017.
- iv) "The Relevance of Reformed Church Polity Principles: Revisiting the Concept," in *Protestant Church Polity in Changing Contexts 1*, edited by Leo Koffeman and Allan Janssen, LIT Verlag, 2014.
- v) "Freedom of Religion in South Africa," in *Many Modernities: Freedom of Religion in Different Settings*, edited by Elizabeth Gerle and Dion Foster, Forthcoming 2019.
- vi) "A Critical Reflection of the Role of 'Context' in Discernment, Decision-Making, and Reception," in *Leaning into the Spirit: Discernment, Decision-Making and Reception for the Ecumenical Church*, edited by Gerard Mannion and Mark Chapman, Palgrave MacMillan, forthcoming early 2019.
- vii) "From Conciliar Ecumenism to Transformative Receptive Ecumenism," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73 (3): a4353; September 2017.
- viii) "From Justifying War to Justifying Peace: A Historical Overview of the Discourse in Ecumenical Circles (1905–2014)." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 2016.
- ix) "URCSA's Engagement on Legal Matters in South Africa," *NGTT* Deel 54 Supplementum 4.
- x) "Die Stryd om die Aard en Omvang van die Tugreg by die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk (1881–1994)." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 68(1), 2012.
- xi) "Die Reis met Kerkeenwording tussen die Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk in Suider Afrika en die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika. "Control, Secede, Vested Rights and Ecclesiastical Property," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* Vol. 37 (2), September 2011.
- xii) Die Kerkreg en Kerkregering van die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Sendingkerk (1881–1915), *NGTT* 2011.

decision-making structures of the church did not necessarily help to transform the androgynous nature of theological anthropology of URCSA.

During the past years, “slating” has surfaced as another form of patriarchal control in URCSA. Under slating is understood the drawing up of a list of possible candidates to be elected in positions of power within URCSA. At the Regional Synod Cape 2018 a slate—drafted by males, with only male candidates on—was forwarded to women delegates in order to assist them to vote males into a position of power. It was a disheartening experience to note that some women at the Regional Synod 2018 uncritically embraced gender bias by favouring men; they partook in voting their female counterparts out. The practice of slating is juxtaposing to church judicial principle embedded in the Church Order of URCSA, which states clearly that a closed ballot system should be followed in the election of persons, namely the vote is done by secret ballot (*General Synod Church Order 2016: Regulation 1 Procedure of Meetings*, 1.17–1.18). Apparently the partnership of men and women as image-bearers is being acknowledged in URCSA, but discursive practices show that the opposite is true. For example, woman ministers of the Word are still, 37 years after the decision to open the ordained positions to women, not easily being voted into positions of power. A slate with only names of male nominees as possible candidates for leadership or representatives of delegations to ecumenical gatherings, results in women being excluded in leadership positions in URCSA, or even as delegates to ecumenical gatherings.

My presumption is that URCSA should address the issue of women in leadership from a gender-sensitive perspective. Such an approach will assess critically the gender-biased power relations in church and society and will emphasise the importance to create just and equitable relations between men and women. As a confessional church we should dispute it if woman delegates are in a clandestine way being forced to step down from leadership positions in any of the regional synods. Due to a called 50-50 principle, that is operative in the Regional Synod Cape 2018, and which is nothing else than a procedure to safeguard positions of power for a certain cultural group, in a covert manner I was forced to step down. The 50/50 decision emanates from a discussion before the election of the executive at the Cape Regional Synod 2002. The decision reads as follows: “In the spirit of unity in the Church, we request that the election of the executive should exemplify unity through the election of two IsiXhosa-speaking and two Afrikaans speakers” (*Acta VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland 2002*, 147–148). This request was approved at the 2002 Synod, but was not regulated in the Church Order of the Regional Synod. Two male IsiXhosa-speaking delegates, Rev. L. Plaatjie (assessor) and Rev. T. Nyatowa (scribe) and two Afrikaans-speaking delegates, Rev. P. Grove (moderator) and Rev. M.A. Plaatjies-Van Huffel (actuary) were elected in 2002 on the executive of the Regional Synod Cape. The principle of gender inclusivity was embraced by the Regional Synod 2002. James Buys stated the following in his moderator’s address at the 2002 Regional Synod, with regard to inclusivity and diversity:



The unification of the DRCA and the DRMC has brought the issues of race and class into sharp focus. This is true of the lack of progress in uniting the church, not merely in a structural way, but in an organic sense. Whilst we may allude to the impact of the legacy of apartheid in the racial identity of congregations and presbyteries, we find no comfort or pride in the extent of continued division in the church ... We must direct our attention and energy at our strategic goal of promoting internal unity beyond denominational conformity but by effectively facing the challenges related to race, language, and culture and class distinction as identifying characteristics of URCSA. (*Acta VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland 2002*, 258)

At the beginning of the 2006 Cape Regional Synod, an amendment of stipulation 59.1 was approved without any objections. In doing so, the executive of the Cape Regional Synod was extended with four additional members. The 50/50 principle was not included in the amended stipulation. In order to implement the amended stipulation with immediate effect at the Synod 2006, the executive of the Regional Synod signed the amended Church Order stipulation. The amended Church Order stipulation 59.1 was hence eligible to be executed (*Acta VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland 2006*, 128). The synod elected Dr AA Boesak as moderator, Rev. L Plaatjie as assessor, and Rev. A Rust as scribe. Before the election of the actuary (church law expert) a plea was raised to take diversity regarding gender and culture into account (*Acta VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland 2006*, 133). Dr MA Plaatjies-Van Huffel was elected in this position. No objections were tabled upon her election. The four additional members were elected, consisting of two IsiXhosa-speaking delegates and two Afrikaans-speaking delegates. At the 2006 Synod Rev. BF Mbenenge addressed the issue of reconciliation. He emphatically stated the following regarding reconciliation and the *Belhar Confession*:

Belhar arose out of non-reconciliation ... Belhar concludes with a call to put confession into action, no matter if there is resistance ... Belhar does not see reconciliation in society unless there is visible unity in the church ... Belhar does not believe in cheap reconciliation without justice, in fact injustices in society are signs of non-reconciliation ... the agenda for justice includes: the divides between rich and poor, gender divides, divide between nations, on a global scale, HIV-divisions in our country, terrible violence and white-collar crimes that injure our nations. (*Acta VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland 2006*, 462)

During the 2018 Regional Synod Cape, the author was duly elected through a secret ballot in the position as church law expert of the Regional Synod. Immediately after this election a lengthy discussion regarding the 50/50 principle of the Regional Synod Cape erupted (*Acta VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland 2002*). During the polarising deliberations at the Synod, arguments regarding the importance of IsiXhosa-speaking representation on the executive were juxtaposed to the importance of expertise needed in the position, the expertise of the elected candidate, gender equity, gender justice, the principles of the *Belhar Confession*, the church judicial eligibility to open a discussion after an election was declared fair. It was clear that the two opposing groups at the Synod couldn't find any middle ground. It seemed that the only way to resolve a tense situation,

where delegates gathered in opposing camps, was to step down from the position as a church law expert. I therefore resigned in writing from the position. “The resignation was accepted with great sadness” (*Minutes Regional Synod Cape 2018*, 6). The vacant position of church law expert was filled, after a closed ballot where 362 voted, 47 spoilt ballots were received and 82 abstained, with a male IsiXhosa-speaking candidate. Some of the delegates indicated that they would not participate in the election for the actuaries, namely Elder D Steer, Elder IB Wevers, Rev. J Frans, Rev. B Coraizen, Rev. R Noemdoe, Dr SV Burrows and Prof. RW Nel. The following proposal, drafted jointly by a Xhosa-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking minister of the Word, was tabled and approved:

Synod proposes that a space should be created where we as members of Synod speak about the serious issue of racial tension with special regard to the internal unity of URCSA. The Synod laments the fact that the issues of racial mistrust and uncertainty about the 50/50 ruling are causing growing frustrations within the Synod. Please advise the Synod on how we must deal with the unacknowledged racial tension that we are not dealing with. We trust on your leadership in these matters. Proposed: Rev. J Coetzee, Seconded: Rev. X Mhobo. (*Minutes Regional Synod Cape 2018*)

For the first time, the Regional Synod Cape acknowledged racial tension and how it affected diversity in unity. I was hailed at the Synod for saving the Regional Synod from a possible schism.

The deliberations on the 50/50 principle at the Regional Synod Cape 2018 opened up *Inxeba* (The Wound) of URCSA for everyone to see, namely the inability to address diversity adequately. In their scuffle to secure the 50/50 representation of IsiXhosa-speaking delegates on the executive of the Regional Synod, the delegates at the Synod disregarded that according to the *Belhar Confession* they should embrace the “variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the diversity of languages and cultures, which are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God” (Article 2 *Belhar Confession 1986*). Furthermore, the *Belhar Confession* states categorically that any doctrine which “absolutises either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutisation hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church” should be rejected (Article 2 *Belhar Confession 1986*). At the Regional Synod Cape 2018 a preoccupation with cultural identity and or identity politics won over the principles embedded in the confessional basis of URCSA, as well as in the *Gender Equity Policy* of the General Synod. In the end it was all about securing male power in the church, juxtaposing to inclusivity. As Foucault (1990, 95–96) states: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power ... Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations” (Foucault 1990, 95).

These points of resistance are present everywhere in URCSA. Although we should applaud it that women are being included in leadership positions within regional synods as well as on the executive of the General Synod, we should also ask ourselves: What differences do women bring to leadership positions, if any? In what way does the bodily presence of women influence the leadership and decision making in URCSA? Or is it business as usual? By concentrating only on the issue of access for women to ordained positions and leadership positions, there is the danger that other exclusionary mechanisms of race, culture, power structures which exist between women and men, are not being addressed. This may bring about that the agendas of women, for example in the Christian Women Ministry (CWM), may supersede the survival issues of ordained women in URCSA. Women in URCSA are divided in their support for women who belong to the women's organisations and ordained women, which may well be an obstacle in establishing solidarity among women around their common experiences of oppression in the church.

Due to the absence of women leaders, I have modelled my own leadership style on that of male leaders in URCSA, such as Allan Aubrey Boesak, James Buys, Hayman Russel Botman and Thias Kgatla. Especially Thias Kgatla played a pivotal role in the formation of my leadership style. He referred benevolently to me as "Ingonyama" (the lioness). My leadership style is nothing else than an assimilation of male leadership. I became in my leadership nothing else than a male clad in women clothes. One should take cognisance thereof that assimilation does not pay attention to the price that married women, or single parenting women, who enter ministry must pay in order to sustain their place in a church that has not revised its male, clerical culture.

## **The Gender Policy of URCSA: A Milestone never Embraced 1994–2005**

URCSA has a gender policy, but the church at large is in total oblivion that such a policy exists. Already at the conception of URCSA in 1994, a gender policy was adopted. This policy was the result of deep reflection during the 1980s in the DRMC on the World Alliance of Reformed Churches' (WARC) programme regarding the partnership between men and women. The DRMC gave prominence to this programme. Since its 11th General Council in 1921, the WARC took steps to address women's inequality and to work towards an inclusive community of God (women and men) in God's mission. Already in 1968, in Uppsala, the World Council of Churches (WCC) decided that women must be represented proportionally in the decision-making structures of the church. The *Decade in Solidarity of Women and Men* of the WCC aimed to accommodate women in the decision-making structures of the church. The WARC's 22nd General Council, 1989, in Seoul, Korea, affirmed the commitment of the Alliance to the inclusive community of women and men in church and society. The WARC promoted the full partnership of women and men in church and society, through its Programme to Affirm, Challenge and Transform: Women and Men in Partnership in Church and Society (PACT) and the Department of Partnership of Women and Men

(Réamonn 2003, 1). The DRMC, being a member church of the WARC, embraced the PACT programme and in 1994 the DRMC accepted a policy on the partnership between men and women as policy. That is where we come from. The DRMC wanted to be known as a non-sexist discipleship of believers. At the constituting synod, URCSA accepted the policy regarding the partnership between men and women, but regrettably it remains for the next years only a policy captured in black ink in the acts of the synod. Nothing has happened during the first decade of existence of URCSA to put these words into action. A policy without an action plan remains only words waiting to be enacted upon. The policy reads as follows:

The Synod decided to test her total theology, practice and all the other facets of the church, honestly and critically in order to identify every possible form of sexism. The Synod points to the following guidelines:

1. The dismantling of all partitions that still separate women and men within the church.
2. To listen afresh to the biblical evidence regarding the partnership of men and women.
3. The recognition of the competencies of women for the broader ecclesiastical service, and the consequent involvement of women in leadership positions and positions of authority on all levels of the church. (*Skema van Werksaamhede NGSK 1994, A15/4; Acta Nederduits Gereformeerde Sendingkerk 1990, 950*)

Already in 1997, the General Synod of URCSA decided in principle that all the stipulations and regulations in the Church Order would be submitted to a gender-sensitive test in future:

In order to ensure that the Church Ordinance and Regulations are gender sensitive, the Permanent Legal Commission proposed the following amendments: The General Synod decided that the amendments of the Church Ordinance and Regulations do not bring real changes to the Church Ordinance and Regulations. These amendments were accepted as language changes and will, after approval with a two-third majority, be endorsed without prior agreement of the Regional Synods. (*Acta General Synod URCSA 1997, 710; Skema van Werksaamhede, General Synod URCSA 1997, 85*)

From this point onwards, the General Synod URCSA 1997 focused on amending the Church Order stipulations and regulations in gender-sensitive language and in so doing, tried to deconstruct the dominant androcentric discourse in URCSA.

During the 2000s it was clear that the gender policy adopted at the constituting synod was not enacted upon. Therefore, the General Synodical Commission (GSC) of URCSA, 2004, approved a proposal that the executive of URCSA should arrange a gender justice workshop in order to develop a gender policy for the church (*Minutes General Synodical Commission 2004, 30*). The GSC 2004 also instructed the temporary Judicial Commission to prepare a framework for the discussion on gender and generation equity for the next synod. Rev. James Buys, the moderator of the General

Synod as well as Dineo Seloano, chairperson of the CWM, and Dr Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel, presented papers at the gender policy workshop of URCSA held at Mamelodi on 10–11 June 2005.

Rev. James Buys attended in his presentation to the conceptual framework which URCSA should consider in the drafting of its gender policy (Buys 2005, 1). He acknowledged the formative role the ecumenical movement, especially the WARC's Department of Partnership of Women and Men, played on the then DRMC when it defined its task as: "to listen anew to the biblical witness about community (koinonia) and partnership, to eradicate sexism in the theology and practice and promote gender awareness, to recognise the gifts and talents of women for ministry and leadership, and to work for the renewal and transformation of church and society as we strive to break down the barriers which still divide women and men" (*Acta Nederduits Gereformeerde Sendingkerk 1994*, 215).

Buys (2005, 1) stated that the breaking of chains of gender injustices within the church "requires viable partnerships of women and men at a transformational and at multiple levels ... We need to break through leadership patterns of the domination and subjugation model of power that finds uncritical support and legitimisation in religious and societal constructs." Amongst others, Buys referred to the difference in roles and relations of women and men and how this results in differences in "power relations, status, privileges and needs" (Buys 2005, 1). He emphasised emphatically the "need to build through our catechism and training, Bible study and Christian education the capacity of leaders to model patterns of ministry that foster partnership based on principles of justice and the promotion and advancement of woman" (Buys 2005, 1).

Dineo Seloana (2005, 1) stated in her address at General Synod's consultation on gender in Mamelodi, 13 August 2005, that women are often denied prominent roles in the church. The space that women occupy in the church is often perceived to be an extension of their home life. Women are generally responsible for the cleaning and decoration of church buildings, preparing and serving meals and snacks, teaching children in Sunday school, fundraising and charity. "Men are primarily occupied in mainstream ecclesiastical activities" (Seloana 2005, 1). She furthermore stated that "the church must be seen as the new creation, the very model of the reign of God set before all to see." She emphasised the equality of men and women based on Galatians 3:28 (Seloana 2005, 1). She deemed the following as visible signs of gender-related transformed within URCSA: "Ensuring women's participation in the church's structures of governance such as presbyteries and synods" (Seloana 2005, 2). She indicated that guidelines for a smooth inclusion of women ministers of the Word in the male-dominated environment are needed and that the General Synod as well as Regional Synods should review their Church Orders in order to attend to gender inclusivity (Seloana 2005, 3–4).

In order to strengthen the gender and generation balance of the General Synod 2005, the Commission of Order of URCSA therefore invited each presbytery to send either a

youth or a woman church council member, as well as the executive committees of the CWM and Christian Youth Movement (CYM) as observers to participate fully in the next General Synod, except for having voting rights (*Agenda General Synod of URCSA 2005, 2*).

URCSA's Gender Policy, approved in 1994 (and slightly amended in 2005 as the *Policy on Gender Equity*), indicates a significant shift to an egalitarian understanding of gender relations and toward the full participation of women in all the ministries and leadership positions of URCSA. Gender equity refers to the fair and just distribution of all means of opportunities and resources between women and men (*South Africa's National Policy 2000, xviii.*). Although URCSA's *Policy on Gender Equity 2005* is concerned with gender, its focus is largely on issues concerned with women and their empowerment. Women had been actively involved in the definition, design, development, implementation and evaluation of the said *Policy on Gender Equity*. The *Policy on Gender Equity* establishes guidelines for URCSA to take action to remedy gender inequality in church and society and attempts to ensure the process of achieving gender justice. In the vision statement of the *Policy on Gender Equity (2005)* URCSA acknowledges and embraces the equality of men and women as created by God, redeemed by Christ, and gifted by the Spirit, and affirms that they will continue to reject any teachings and practices which perpetuate gender inequalities (*Acts General Synod URCSA 2005,142*). The mission statement of the policy states that URCSA should develop biblically and theologically grounded gender practices and teachings which deal with gender justice and integrity. The objectives of the *Gender Equity Policy* of URCSA include the following:

- To strive towards a complete mind shift regarding gender relations and work towards the creation of a new community of believers and a new society.
- To uproot all instruments (e.g. sexist language, discriminatory tradition, sexist interpretation of the Bible) within the church that perpetuate inequalities between men and women; to provide education on gender justice.
- To redress the negative effects of gender injustices; to monitor the effects of our policy by putting in place systems for reporting and accountability.
- To develop a database of women ministers and theologians; to ensure that women be represented in all decision-making structures of our church; to develop and adopt an affirmative action strategy to address the gender imbalances.
- To prayerfully confess the sin of excluding women in the service of God, as such denying women their God-given right to participate as equals in the household of faith, and depriving the church [of] an opportunity of being enriched by the contribution of women in serving God and the world (*Acts General Synod URCSA 2005, 143*).

At the General Synod 2005 an *Open letter from the men of URCSA to the women of URCSA*, drafted by Dr Allan Aubrey Boesak, was approved. In the *Open Letter* the male delegates of the General Synod 2005 confessed as follows:

We confess that, instead of treating you as equal image bearers of the living God, we often pushed you into second-class citizenship in the household of God; We confess that, instead of treating you as equal fellow-disciplines of our Lord Jesus Christ, for a long time we went alone to study theology and to appoint church leaders; We confess that, instead of treating you as equal fellow-witnesses to Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we silenced you in Church and resisted the work of the Holy Spirit who has given you so many gifts for ministry to build up the temple of the Holy Spirit. (*Acts URCSA General Synod 2005*, 176)

The men confessed in the *Open Letter* that URCSA stands judged by the *Belhar Confession* for having discriminated against women in church and society; for having worked against reconciliation by alienating women from significant participation in leadership positions and ministerial formation; for having practised injustice against women in church and society (*Acts URCSA General Synod 2005*, 176–177). The *Open Letter* suggests an internalisation of gender sensitivity, at least within URCSA’s male leadership at the General Synod 2005.

The General Synod 2005 also approved recommendations regarding gender inclusivity with regard to the theological formation of URCSA, gender-segregated ministries and representation on ministries of URCSA. For example, a resolution was approved that the theological formation of URCSA is rooted in a uniting ethos that embraces a diversity of languages and cultures and strives to overcome inequalities in terms of “generation, race, class and gender” (*Agenda General Synod of URCSA 2005*, 267). Furthermore, the General Synod 2005 cautioned that the gender-segregated ministries of the church also carry with them the tension and danger of the various age and gender groups to exist and to function independently (*Agenda General Synod of URCSA 2005*, 368). The General Synod 2005 affirmed that members of the core and support ministries of URCSA should include the representatives of both gender and age groups which ordinarily were selected at the end of the Synod to represent URCSA in specific ministries during the recess (*Agenda General Synod of URCSA 2005*, 368). Already the General Synod Commission 2004 had decided that the Commission for Commissions in consultation with the Integration of Ministries Task team should search from the list of delegates for the best people to serve on commissions, taking into account skills, experience and continuity as well as gender and generation. Not much attention was given to the implementation of the above-mentioned decisions regarding gender inclusivity in URCSA. URCSA’s ignorance of the *Policy on Gender Equity* and of the implicit principles embedded in the *Belhar Confession*, ultimately led to an uncritical tolerance of power struggles between men and women and identity politics in URCSA.

## **Inclusive Language and the Draft Worship Book of URCSA**

At the GSC 2015 one of the General Synod's ministries, namely the Core Ministries for Proclamation and Worship, after three years of research, tabled a *Draft Worship Book* for usage in URCSA. This was hailed as a major achievement, seeing that translations were included in the *Draft Worship Book* of the *Belhar Confession* in the following languages: English, Afrikaans, North Sotho, IsiNdebele, XiTsonga, IsiZulu, South Sotho, SeTswana, IsiXhosa, SiSwati, TshiVenda, Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, Rukwangali, Lozi, French and Korean. However, the *Draft Worship Book* epitomised the covert forms of patriarchy embedded in URCSA. For example, in the *Form of Ordination of a Minister of the Word (Proponent)* and the *Form of Installation of a Minister of the Word*, a lack of the usage of inclusive language prevails:

*Form of Ordination of a Minister of the Word* [Proponent]: For some time you have known that [name] is to be ordained to the Ministry of the Word [or: installed in the ministry to which *he* has been called]. No one has alleged anything against *his* person or teaching. We shall therefore proceed, in the name of the Lord, to *his* ordination.

*From the Pulpit the Officiating Minister shall Address the Congregation*: Dear people of God and members of this church: Since this solemn act obligates you also, I ask you before God: Do you in the name of the Lord welcome this *brother* as your pastor? Do you promise to receive the Word of God proclaimed by *him* and to encourage *him* in the discharge of *his* duty? Will you pray that *he* may, in the power of the Spirit, equip you to build up the church, so that God's children may be saved and his kingdom advanced for the honour of Christ our Lord?

*Installing of a Minister from another Congregation*: We will now ordain [*install*] a minister of the Word in this congregation. We rejoice that in *his* faithful love the Lord Jesus has provided a minister to serve as pastor and teacher to these people, and also as their leader in the missionary calling of this church.

*Liturgist to the Congregation*: Dear people of God and members of this church, since this solemn act obligates you also, I ask you before God: Do you in the name of the Lord welcome *this brother* as your pastor? Do you promise to receive the Word of God proclaimed by *him* and to encourage *him* in the discharge of his duty? Will you pray that *he* may, in the power of the Spirit, equip you to build up the church, so that God's children may be saved and his kingdom advanced for the honour of Christ our Lord?

*The officiating minister shall then exhort the ordained minister and the congregation*: Beloved *brother* and fellow-servant in Christ, keep watch over yourself and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you an overseer.

And you, brothers and sisters, joyfully receive your minister in the Lord and honour *him*. Remember that through *him* God himself speaks to you. Receive the Word which *he*, according to the Scripture, shall preach to you, not as the word of human beings but, as it is in truth, the Word of God [My cursive] (*Draft Worship Book* 2015, 21–24).



The androcentric categories and vocabularies used in the *Draft Worship Book* portray the dominating force or superior norm in URCSA and showcase an ignorance of the approved gender policies of URCSA. Ironically, as moderator of the General Synod of URCSA, the author chaired the session where the *Draft Worship Book* was presented at the GSC meeting hosted in Mamelodi, 2015. I voiced my concern regarding the utilisation of androcentric language in the *Draft Worship Book*. The Core Ministries for Proclamation and Worship was requested to give attention to the gender-sensitive language before the publishing of the *Draft Worship Book*. My presumption is that according to Levi-Strauss, all human institutions and communication are expressions of language (Levi-Strauss in Polzin 1977, 14). Language is, according to Levi-Strauss, the carriers of values and ideas. Levi-Strauss's thesis is that the world and/or people are constituted by language (in Polzin 1977, 16). Language is never a neutral medium (Castelli 1992, 205). The language used in the *Draft Worship Book* reflects a patriarchal view on ordained ministry in URCSA, unequal power relations in URCSA, ignorance and inertia towards gender inclusivity.

## **Women as Delegates to Ecumenical Gatherings**

When Rev. James Buys was serving as moderator, the GSC 2004 decided to safeguard it that he, as outgoing moderator of URCSA, should be part of the delegation of URCSA consisting of male and female, laity and ministers of the Word, to the WCC General Assemble 2006 hosted in Porte Alegre, Brazil. For women leaders in URCSA it is all about the negotiation of spaces. URCSA has a long tradition of including women in the ecumenical delegation, but most of the time decisions about gender representation to ecumenical gatherings dwindled down to cherry-picking a few women, either from the CWM or CYM, to represent the women of URCSA at these occasions. "Cherry picking" refers to a "style of data analysis used when a researcher has inadequate data" (Morse 2010, 1). The question would be if this is the correct way to go about to elect people to represent URCSA as delegations to ecumenical gatherings? The question is: Would URCSA allow members without any theological training from the Christian Men Ministry or CYM to represent URCSA on ecumenical gatherings, which may attend to issues related to Baptism, Eucharist, the status of the minister of the Word, the Africanisation of theology, church reunification, the Israel-Palestine issue, et cetera? If the answer is no, then we should ask ourselves: Why? What should inform choices of delegations to ecumenical gatherings? For example, if the discussions at these ecumenical gatherings are about the struggles ordained women are encountering, if the discussions are about the push-back across the globe regarding women in ordained positions encountered, would it not be prudent to entrust women with theological training to represent URCSA? And after these wonderful encounters to rub shoulders with feminists and womanist scholars and African women theologians and gender activists across the globe, the question remains: In what way do these encounters impact the programmatic work of the ministries which these women represent? Or are these encounters only for self-enriching? What does URCSA gain with these encounters? The policy for participating in international ecumenical gatherings on behalf of URCSA

indicates that a person delegated by the executive of the General Synod to attend an international ecumenical gathering, should “present a clear and concise report to the General Synod Executive as soon as possible after the conference, identifying the key issues of interest and importance to URCSA and delivering a set of all the important conference documents to ensure continuity in URCSA’s ecumenical participation” (*Minutes General Synodical Commission 2004*, 30).

Despite the fact that there are more than 30 ordained women ministers in URCSA and it is evident that they are making significant contributions to the church at large, the executive of the General Synod of URCSA did not consider them eligible to represent URCSA at the last WCRC General Assembly, hosted in Leipzig, Germany (29 June to 7 July 2017) as delegates with full voting rights. Instead, four male members of the executive and four women representing the CWM and the CYM were elected to represent URCSA. In doing so, the executive, strictly speaking, adhered to the provisions of the Regulation of the WCRC article IX, which stipulates: “Where a church sends two or more delegates, no more than half shall be ordained ministers, and the delegation shall be gender-balanced.” However, the selection of delegates restricted ordained women of URCSA’s participation in an important discourse at the Women Pre Council of the WCRC (27–28 June 2017) regarding the challenges women across the globe in ordained position are encountering. Prof. Christina Landman, being a member of the executive of the General Synod of URCSA, was not officially delegated and attended the WCRC General Council as a guest, financing herself. I, who served as moderator from 2012–2016, attended the WCRC General Assembly as a consultant on the invitation of the WCRC. During 2013–2016 I served as a member of the Gender Task Team of the WCRC. The task team drafted the *Declaration of Women’s Ordination*, which was presented at Pre Women Council and which was approved at the WCRC General Council 2018. I was also part of the Procedures Task Team which drafted the *Rules of Procedure for the General Council: Guidelines for Discernment Procedures*, which was approved at the WCRC General Council 2018 (*WCRC General Council Workbook 2018*, R1–9; DF1–4). Although my expertise as church law expert and feminist scholar and academic was duly recognised by the WCRC, I, as immediate past moderator of URCSA, was not deemed fit by the executive to form part of the delegation to the WCRC General Council and therefore attended the General Council without voting rights.

It was communicated to me, in no uncertain terms, that the delegation to the General Council of the WCRC was the outcome of a democratic voting process conducted by the executive of the General Synod, the CYM and the CWM. I, however, see this selection as a missed opportunity for ordained women in URCSA to take part in the deliberations and decisions on the Declaration of Women’s Ordination, which was co-drafted by one of URCSA’s own members, and related gender issues at the Pre Women’s Council, as well as the WCRC General Council. The criteria for the appointments of delegations to international ecumenical gatherings of URCSA are clear, namely:

The GSC Executive, as the ecumenical commission of URCSA, is mandated to appoint delegates to ecumenical gatherings, as stipulated in the Church Order (*Minutes General Synodical Commission 2004, 30*).

Furthermore, the General Synodical Commission resolved that:

- Delegations should be inclusive of gender, age, ministries and regional synods.
- Special expertise and institutional responsibilities in URCSA should be taken into account when delegates are appointed to a specific conference.
- The need for continuity with regard to ecumenical relations should be recognised (*Minutes General Synodical Commission 2004, 30*).

The provisions regarding “special expertise,” “institutional responsibilities” and “continuity” were ignored in the appointment of the delegation to the WCRC General Council 2018. This marginalisation of ordained women in URCSA was not favourably judged by delegates to the General Council of the WCRC 2018, which put critical questions to me during the General Council with regard to the exclusion of ordained women in the delegation of URCSA to the WCRC General Council. There is, as far as I see, a disjunction with regard to the attendance of ecumenical gatherings and being influenced by ecumenical discourse, as it was done earlier.

The appointment of delegates to the WCRC General Council 2018 filled me, more than anything else which I endured during years of devoted service in the body of Christ, with a deep feeling of sadness. I was discouraged in URCSA’s ability to embrace gender sensitivity.

## **Conclusion**

URCSA’s decisions regarding gender justice during the past 25 years are characterised by ambivalence. On the one hand women have been accepted in leadership roles within URCSA, but on the other hand the role of women has been limited in practice. The dichotomy is embodied in the liturgical forms, church stipulations and regulations, elections, decisions on gender issues, the appointment of delegations, et cetera. We should ask ourselves if URCSA is not reinforcing and promoting deep-seated societal biases and misperceptions about the ability of women to take up leadership roles in church and society.

One would expect that a paradigm shift with regard to gendered objects should have taken place in URCSA after the acceptance of the *Policy on Gender Equity (2005)*. However, covert forms of patriarchy, notwithstanding all our policies and decisions on gender equality and gender equity, are still apparent in URCSA. The surface structures have been shifted at the General Synods but the dominant discourses that imprison women have remained the same. Essentially, nothing has changed. No major paradigm shifts with regard to gendered objects came to pass. Gender injustices remain a serious expression of structural injustice of our time. I believe that gender justice cannot be

redressed simply by the drafting and adopting of gender equity policies and beautifully crafted confessions like the *Open Letter from Men to the Women of URCSA*. Without attending to gender justice from a confessional perspective, URCSA will keep on attending in a haphazardly way to gender issues in URCSA. As a confessional church, URCSA should be an alternative community where everyone would embrace each other, notwithstanding race, culture, descent, background, language, sexual orientation, gender, class, et cetera. URCSA's Regional Synod Cape should take heed of the call of the *Belhar Confession*: "reject any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and colour and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ" (Article 2 *Belhar Confession 1986*). URCSA should embrace a theological anthropology in which the complete humanity of all people, regardless of race, culture, colour, origin, status or class will be confirmed, free from patriarchal bonds, and where people, men and women, are seen as co-workers of Christ.

In order to go forward, we should reflect on the acceptance of women not only in ordained positions, but also in leadership positions of the church. A gender-sensitive perspective would mean that URCSA should foster partnership based on principles of gender justice, and not on culture, race, ethnicity or sex. A gender-sensitive perspective calls for a fundamental shift in how we view leadership, delegations to ecumenical gatherings and how candidates for the executive are being elected in the position of power. Building strong partnerships between men and women requires that both should play critical roles in deconstructing the embedded patriarchy in URCSA. URCSA should move from clinging to power to reciprocity, from a gender-segregated approach to ministry to a multitude of forms of living and working together—from a fragmented approach to gender issues to a new culture of partnership between men and women.

## References

- Acta Nederduits Gereformeerde Sendingkerk. 1982.
- Acta Nederduits Gereformeerde Sendingkerk. 1990.
- Acta Nederduits Gereformeerde Sendingkerk. 1994.
- Acta VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland. 2002.
- Acta VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland. 2006.
- Acta General Synod URCSA. 1997.
- Acts General Synod URCSA. 2005.
- Adonis, J. A. 2006. *Historiography in South-Africa: A Critical Evaluation*. University of Stellenbosch.

Agenda General Synod of URCSA. 2005.

Belhar Confession 1986.

Bhasin, K. 1993. *What is Patriarchy?* Kali for Women: New Delhi.

<https://dullbonline.wordpress.com/2017/08/30/what-is-patriarchy-by-kali-for-women-1993-new-delhi-kamla-bhasin/>.

Buys, J. 2005. "Address of the Moderator of the General Synod to the Gender Policy Workshop of the URCSA held at Mamelodi on 10–11 June 2005.

Castelli, E. A. 1992. "Interpretation of power in 1 Corinthians." *Seimeia* Vol. 51.

Created in God's Image: From Hierarchy to Partnership. A Church Manual for Gender Awareness and Leadership Development. 2003. Imprimerie Corbaz SA: Geneva.

Draft Worship Book. 2015.

Ellis, C. 2004. *The Ethnographic I: The Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*. New York: Alta Mira Press.

Ellis, C., T. E. Adams, and A. P. Bochner. 2010. "Autoethnography: An Overview" [40 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12 (1), Art. 10, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1101108>.

Flaendorp, C. 2014. "The Life and Times of Professor Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel: A Transformative Church Leader in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 40 (August Supplement): 53–63.

Foucault, M. 1982. "The Subject and Power." In *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, edited by H. L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

Foucault, M. 1990. *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, An Introduction. New York: Vintage.

Foucault, M. 2003. *Society Must Be Defended*. New York: Picador.

General Synod Church Order 2016.

Graff, A. (Ed.). 1995. *In Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*. New York: Orbis Books.

Kerkorde VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland. 1994,

Kerkorde VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland. 1998.

Kerkorde VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland. 2004.

Kerkorde VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland. 2010.

Medina, J. 2011. "Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and Guerrilla Pluralism." *Foucault Studies* 12 (October): 9–35. <https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i12.3335>.

Minutes General Synodical Commission, Johannesburg, 10–12 November 2004.

Minutes Regional Synod Cape. 2018.

Morse, J. 2010. "'Cherry Picking': Writing From Thin Data." *Qualitative Health Research* 20 (1): 3. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732309354285>.

Plaatjies-Van Huffel, M. A. 2017. "Acceptance, Adoption, Advocacy, Reception and Protestation: A Chronology of the *Belhar Confession*." In *Belhar Confession: The Embracing Confession of Faith for Church and Society*, edited by M. A. Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Leepo Modise. Sun Press: Stellenbosch, 11–96. <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357599>.

Polzin, R. M. 1977. *Biblical Structuralism: Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Texts*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Réamonn, P. 2003: "World Alliance of Reformed Churches." In *Ecumenical Dictionary: Article of the Month Series*.

Reuther, R. 1983. *Sexism and Godtalk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Ryan, M. 2007. *Audit of Gender Policies and their Implementation among selected South African Churches*. Circle for Concerned African Women. Theologians University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

Sandars, J. 2009. "The Use of Reflection in Medical Education." *AMEE Guide* No. 44 (31): 685–695. <https://medicine.usask.ca/documents/faculty-affairs/workshops/ReflectionMedicalEducation.pdf>. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01421590903050374>.

Seloana, D. 2005. *Towards Developing Gender Policy for URCSA*, 1–4.

Skema van Werksaamhede, NGSK. 1994.

Skema van Werksaamhede, VGKSA Algemene Sinode. 1997.

Skema van Werksaamhede, VGKSA Streeksinode Kaapland. 2002.

Vosloo, R. R. 2017. *Reforming Memory: Essays on South African Church and Theological History*. Sun Media: Stellenbosch. <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928314370>.

WCRC General Council Workbook, 2018. WCRC: Leipzig.