

Speech by KZN Health MEC, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo on the occasion of the Fundraising Gala Dinner for Umbumbulu UCCSA at Amanzimtoti Civic Centre

8 November 2013

Programme Directors;

Members of the UCCSA denomination;

Members of the UCCSA Synod;

Iziphika Nenhlanzeko;

Amadodana;

Intsha;

Abefundisi, nabazalwana;

Comrades and friends

Good evening

We fully appreciate the role played by the Leadership of the Church in bringing us here tonight to look at means by which we can assist in building, growing and strengthening this House of the Lord.

As we commit to do our outmost best, we summon our strength and wisdom from the London Missionary Society, who sent missionaries like Dr. Theodorus van der Kemp to establish the first Congregational church in Cape Town in 1801.

We have to remind each other that the early missionaries were not simply just intent on founding new churches; that from the start, they fought for the rights of the indigenous peoples as evidenced by their act of establishing educational institutions. Honourable President Jacob Zuma during the **100 Year Celebration Conference of the Women's Organisation of the United Congregational Church of Southern African KZN Region**, last year heaped praise on Reverend William Cullen Wilcox saying:

'Rev Wilcox became like a father figure to ANC founding President, Dr John Dube. He took a 16 year old Dr Dube to the United States at the request of his mother, who wanted the young Dube to get an education. It is said that Dr John Dube's rise to national and international prominence owes much to the unwavering friendship and mentoring of missionaries William and Ida Belle Wilcox.

He continued to map out his contribution in empowering the Africans that were adversely affected by colonialism; saying:

'It is noteworthy that in 1909 the Wilcox family founded the Zulu Industrial Improvement Company, the first shareholding company in South Africa's history. That was probably the first ever black economic empowerment venture, as early as in the last century. The Company was successful in providing land to thousands of Zulus in Natal. Alarmed by the fact that Blacks owned land; the Whites in Natal worked to eject the Wilcox family from South Africa, eventually

driving the Company into bankruptcy and driving them out of South Africa in 1918-19.

Rev Wilcox returned to the United States penniless, and died a poor man with nothing to show for his 38-year investment in the liberation struggle for South Africa."

True to this country's spirit of Ubuntu and appreciation; in 2009, Rev Wilcox was bestowed with the prestigious Order of the Grand Companions of O.R Tambo for his contribution to the fight against colonial oppression and racism.

What remains of that era is that Dr Langalibalele Dube, an Educator; politician; author, minister of the Congregational Church, founder member and first president of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1901 founded a school then known as the "**Zulu Christian Industrial School** and today called **Ohlange High School**. The most important feature here is that this was the first educational institution in South Africa to be founded by a black person and that it laid emphasis on developing self-reliance in its African students.

Ohlange still stands today. Tonight our purpose is to say: we are going to revamp; renovate and build Umbumbulu UCCSA to stand for

hundred years to come just uMafukuzela OnjengeLanga did with Ohlange.

Bazalwane, the Congregational Church in this country can pride itself for building the Tiger Kloof Institution, which counts among its alumni, Sir Seretse Khama and Sir Ketumile Masire, the first two Presidents of Botswana. It should take pride in appointing a young Albert Luthuli as a member of staff of Adams College in 1921.

As I stand before you today, I am also proud to say the first South African to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize that Congregationalist; Chief Albert Luthuli. This most revered and self-respecting member of our congregation was later chosen to lead the struggle against oppression as the President of the African National Congress.

We need to pride ourselves on the fact the UCCSA was very clear in its stance against the evil system of apartheid especially when we consider that in 1978 the Assembly of the UCCSA voted to accept the World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism.

This church in 1984 rejected the concept of the tricameral parliament; a decision that led to many so-called coloured ministers, notably Rev. Allan Hendrickse, being thrown out for embracing racist policies.

We pride ourselves for producing Ministers in the ilk of Bonganjalo Goba; Roxanne Jordaan and Steve DeGruchy who participated in the development of the Kairos document which was produced amidst the horrors of the 1985 State of Emergency. Indeed this church was never afraid nor ashamed of challenging the laws and policies of apartheid but more than that, it always knew of its responsibility of ministering to the victims of that evil system.

This church has always understood that part of our mission calling is to do our best to share God's love wherever we are.

Bazalwane Abahle; whilst preparing for this particular dinner, I stumbled upon the Testimony made before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in East London on November 17, 1997 by the Congregational Church represented by **David Wanless and John De Gruchy**. What they said then has resonance with the responsibilities that we still have to carry out this present day. This now becomes our Testimony:

'There are sins to be forgiven, wounds to be bound up, hatreds to be reconciled, buildings to be re-built, pupils to be taught, leaders to be held accountable and this is the task of the church of Jesus Christ.

And although we are a small church with few resources, we acknowledge this calling and commit ourselves to nurturing this truth,

healing the nation and building a culture of tolerance and justice, so that our children and their children may never again suffer the evil which has so plagued the life of our nation.

What this says is that we all have a responsibility.

I am really proud to be part of this spirit of Congregationalism which as you can see, is based very firmly on the biblical principle of covenant - individual members covenant, to walk together according to God's ways with the Holy Spirit helping us. Yes; we are all needed.

Tonight as we embrace the fundraising efforts aimed at renovating and refurbishing our church, I thought it wise to also draw your attention to the difficult road travelled by our own revered leader; the icon, **President Nelson Mandela** who once said:

I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head pointed towards the sun, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give up despairing. That way lays defeat and death.'

Fellow Congregationalists, we can only succeed in our tasks if we are united, if we have means to do the groundwork and are able to reach

out, solve and simplify the problems that continue to beset our people.

As a progressive church, we need to be cognisant of the historical responsibility entrusted upon us as the majority of people in this country pin their hopes on the churches to lead; comfort and unify.

We as members, have no alternative but at all levels to unite, work together and strengthen our church to become a more potent weapon for the transformation of our society and improvement of the lives of all our people. When called upon to give and contribute, we have to take a leaf from **Mother Teresa** who once said:

'Let us more and more insist on raising funds of love, of kindness, of understanding, of peace.'

We all have an added responsibility to ensure that all of us are fully equipped to be entrusted with the responsibility to mobilise and involve the membership of this congregation in community work and to recruit and train new members and convert them into enthusiastic volunteers and activists who care for humankind.

Don't turn away. Let us all rise and say Umbumbulu UCCSA will live forever!

Give today and heed the wise words of **Calvin Coolidge** who said:

'No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave.'

May the Almighty Lord always shine His Eternal Light on all of you.

I thank you