Today was a glorious day. Beloved in the Lord, we now fondly unveil this 50th Anniversary logo and the theme “Reaching New Frontiers: Hope and Healing” to you. The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) and its forebears have always had a trait for justice running through its self-understanding as church. Testimony of this commitment to justice is seen in the social location of their mission work among the poor and marginalized. UCCSA since its formation in 1967 has also had an unequivocal stance as church with and for the poor, standing on the side of the oppressed. Our conviction is that we should never just plod on as the people of God; we should always stop to assess where we have come from, what God is saying to us today and what are the signposts for the journey ahead. It is our hope that this way of operating should be adopted by the whole church. We ought to always plan and map the journey ahead rather than just live one day at a time. The local churches, regions, synods and organizations need to retreat, regroup and ask the question what difference we are making. How can we do what we do better and seek to be faithful to God.
In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, we are assembled together to launch the celebration of 50 Years of Unity between the Bantu Congregational Church of the American Board Mission, the Congregational Union of South Africa and the London Missionary Society Church, which Churches, having dissolved themselves in terms of their own constitutions, entered into a solemn covenant with God and with each other on 3rd October 1967 to be constituted as the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa.

Believing the call to make visible our unity in Christ to be the partial fulfilment of our Lord’s High Priestly prayer that all His people should be one, let us hear now the gracious words of Holy Scripture which declare the oneness of Christ’s Church in Him and with Him. Jesus said, I am the Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep, and they shall hear my voice … and other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall become one flock, one Shepherd.

Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might present the Church to Himself a glorious Church, not having any spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members, of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. Now you are the Body of Christ, and severally members thereof.

“Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might present the Church to himself a glorious Church”

Hence we all gathered here not to mourn, but to celebrate 50 years of glory, we celebrate your golden jubilee and thank the Almighty for taking you the UCCSA this far.

From the humble beginnings of 1967 you have become the sermon, the LORD have lifted you up the UCCSA from the deep muddy clay and planted your feet on the high way road.

As said by the Poet…
You won the hearts of men, pointed them to a Savior, who saves as he says, you became the beacon that shines so bright, chasing away men’s plight for your soon coming savior.

Our thoughts are on the great, when the Golden race shall shine so bright, depleting our plights and restoring our pride in Christ.

Long live the spirit of pride long live, long live the spirit of unity long live, long live for the looking forward of the coming of Christ, long live the 50 years long live.

My brothers and sisters, honorable ministers, leaders here present today, fellow congregants, my colleagues, mind you, mine not greeting you was not a mistake, but this matter was so important that it couldn’t await greeting, therefore I bid you all a very good morning into 50 years AYOBA 50 Years!
The 50th UCCSA Launch was graced with much of eye catching moments filled with much of singing and celebration. In pursue to mark the much awaited celebration scheduled October 2017 at Durban KwaZulu Natal, Synod of South Africa; it became the core business of the mission council to unveil much of preparatory work done so far.

Amongst major preparations done, is the presentation of a unique Bible—only designed for fifty years celebration. In his presentation, the Mission Convenor Rev. Kudzani Ndebele stated that rather than choosing a torch the committee chose a Bible “as a symbol of unity, oneness, oneness in our diversity; Bible as commitment to healing, renewal, justice, and the hope that we all pray for”.

He further explained that above all cords that kept the church active and alive is the Bible that has carried the UCCSA for the past 49 years.

Amongst the six Bible presented; one Bible was signed by the President, General Secretary and Members of the Executive whilst the other five Bibles each will be for synods to hand them over to regions and local churches to be signed by Minister and Church Secretary which will later be closed at fifty years celebration and archived.

In his appeal he emphasized that members of the UCCSA be innovative and “celebrate the UCCSA in whatever way God has made us to be”

Presentation of audio Bible

“Thank you so much for your support and commitment in making sure that the UCCSA becomes an inclusive church”, said Convener for Ministry of People with Disability when receiving second audio Bible from Mission Convener Rev K Ndebele. Ms Victoria Ramabana expressed her gratitude to the support received by ministry of people with disability especially those with vision impairment.

The gathering was however updated that the audio Bible presented was the English version and second whilst the first audio Bible was in Afrikaans.

When handing over the audio Bible the Convenor shared that “as a church we are deliberate that we are a church that is inclusive…of the people with disability, ministering to them, with them and by them”

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“UCCSA a nation gatherer, My pillow the UCCSA, I am a noble and do walk tall, I am a giant and sure of my UCCSA story, SHAPA”

SHAPA LONTONE SHAPA!

Such was a phrase used by a youthful pupil from Lephoi Centre for Disabled a UCCSA project based in Francistown, Lephoi Region Synod of Botswana.

It is true that we need not to be alike and we need not to be the same for God to use us. As Apostle Paul stated in Epistle to Corinth…we are one body with many different part.

The celebration was graced by a poet, a pupil from Lephoi Centre taking pride in the unity and diversity of the UCCSA as he went on with his poetic statement “lontone mophutha ditshaba Ke samile lontone Ke ngwenya kea gata Ke kakapa, ke sure ka story Shapa lontone shapa!”

Botswana being predominantly LMS stripes the poet refers to UCCSA as ‘Lontone’ which is commonly used in Botswana as compared to UCCSA.
Sermon Extract preached on the launch of the UCCSA Golden Jubilee Celebrations – Rev Mosweu Simane

Theme: “Ooh magnify the Lord with me”

Psalms 34:1-10 & Philippians 4:4-13

Grace, Peace, Love and Joy from God our Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

◊ We are here to mark a journey towards UCCSA Golden Jubilee which will start at the every level of our Church and end in October 2017 in Durban.

◊ We celebrate 50 years of Church Unity and 218 years of Mission in Southern Africa; One Church in 5 Countries, bringing together more than 30 languages and dialects. 50 years of a church founded in a rich and strong legacy of LMS and ABM, 50 years of a Church that has shaped the history of Southern Africa.

So I have chosen a Hymn called Psalms 34, with focus on Verse 3 to invite the UCCSA family to magnify the Lord; for great things he has done.

Despite our faults and weaknesses, God remains faithful and steadfast. In his reflection on God’s faithfulness, the President highlighted that the church, given its history has experienced God’s immeasurable faithfulness and love as he said “we have had our challenges over the years, as individuals we have our ups and downs but through it all we have learnt that God is faithful and his mercies endures forever”.

Amongst the different ethnicities, race and dialects, God has survived the UCCSA thus far, and that the UCCSA brand has been challenged throughout time.

In his conclusion he charged the congregants that on our preparations for the fiftieth year celebration at Durban, each do count their blessings for the UCCSA story is though one is made up of many different footprints of mission work traceable all the way from remote to developed areas.
“To whom must we speak truth to power to? What is the warning that they must hear?” said Rev Desmond Van Der Water.

On the last evening of the Executive gathering held at Francistown Lephoi Region Synod of Botswana, the Rev Van Der Water graced the evening with meditation from the Book of Esther.

From his meditation, the Book of Esther alongside the characters such as that of Esther and her uncle Mordecai, do carry significant message for the church against the roles and expectations faced by the church from the world.

Esther surpassed her role as Queen after she heard a pressing message from Mordecai her uncle ‘I will go to the King even if it is against the law, and if I die I will die’

Such reflection on Esther’s response challenges the church on the question about time - the kind of time and mood of time; what is the spirit of time which we live in? what is the kind of response is God calling us to? What is the nature of our kairos today? What kind of crisis and such areas which time compels us to look into will be;

- **Economic front**
  - Our communities, our countries, our world is not good a good place. Vast areas are in desperate hardship living grinding poverty and leaving little or no access to basic resources to sustain life.
- **Political front**
  - Most countries represented are verging on instability and some very close to chaos.
- **Social front**
  - Most of our societies are struggling for coherence. The centre is no longer holding together and things are beginning falling apart not least in regard to the basic unit of the society, namely the family.
- **Environmental front**
  - Human life, plant life, animal life are showing the strains and stress of degradation. Climate change to global warming to everything else in between.
- **Church of Jesus Christ**
  - The church militant; what do you suppose the LORD and Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, makes of his body — the church today? Fragmented as we are? Wrecked with conflicts as we are? Preoccupied with institutional survival.

In his conclusion the Rev Van der Water shared that Esther’s response challenges us today in three ways

- **Priestly task**
  - We hardly ask of Esther this way. Though she was the Queen took the initiative to talk to her husband in a prophetic way, the challenge is “to whom must we speak truth to power to? What is the warning that they must hear? At a time as this, what is it that our political leaders, business leaders, civil and church should hear from the LORD?” and that Esther was prepared to lay down her life for the people to be set free.

- **Prophetic task**
  - The prophetic word that we must speak if it has to carry real power will be an uncompromising word because our mandate is a divine one.

- **Pastoral task**
  - We are to offer service and compassion word to the multitudes of God’s people. People who feel helpless and abandoned; cast aside, uncared for and unloved. Jesus had compassion on the people. The current challenge being experienced is the seemingly reluctance from ministers to continue on compassion and pastoral work.

UCCSA said ‘If I DIE, SO BE IT!’