


# Women liberation in church and political organisation governance: Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and African National Congress perspectives



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This article consists of six parts: firstly, the author will provide orientation on how this research was conducted and the origin as well as the motivation to pursue this research study. Secondly, concepts like gender, equality and human dignity will be defined and clarified to give the reader a better understanding of these main concepts in this article. Thirdly, the position of theologians on the struggle against gender will be discussed. Fourthly, gender policies of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) and the African National Congress (ANC) will be discussed to explore the correlation between URCSA gender policy and ANC gender policy. Fifthly, the shortcomings in terms of the implementation of these gender policies during an elective conference or synod will be stated. Finally, the author will provide findings and recommendations that can assist to improve the implementation of these policies.

## Introduction

In 2016 the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) held its seventh General Synod in Benoni. This was the elective synod where the leadership of the church was elected by the seven regional synods and its presbyteries of the entire URCSA. Throughout the election and the plenary, there was an outcry from the female delegates that the synod must take into consideration equal representation of men and women in the leadership of the church. A similar situation occurred in the African National Congress (ANC) during its elective conference in 2017 held in Johannesburg Nasrec. The women's league chairperson Bathabile Dlamini has an outcry about the lack of sufficient women in the elected leadership (top six) of the ANC. This article will illustrate that the ANC and the URCSA do have comprehensive policies on gender justice, but do not adhere to their policies. The URCSA and the ANC were selected as investigative samples for two reasons: both have comprehensive gender policies with a clear quota in terms of leadership, but both do not have a constitutional directive in terms of quota during the election of leadership. The researcher will focus on the 23 years (1994–2017) of the ANC and URCSA in the democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa.

## Background and motivation of this article

The arguments put forth by the ANC Women's League chairperson Bathabile Dlamini, around gender justice and the election of the leadership of the ANC, during the recent conference (December 2018 conference) challenged and motivated the researcher to engage in this research. The similar argument occurred in the seventh General Synod of the URCSA, where the researcher was an active participant in all the discussions and decision-making. The same argument was put forward by an activist woman delegate from the Western Cape in the synod regarding gender justice and equal representation of women and men in the leadership of the church, but contrary to that, out of seven, six men were elected and only one woman in the person of Rev. Prof. Dr Christina Landman. These arguments challenged the researcher's theological thinking to write this article to demonstrate how the URCSA and the ANC have well-documented policies on gender justice but do not have the constitutional power to implement them during the election. The case in the ANC was similar, where out of six, five men were elected and only one woman, namely Jessie Duarte. The basic question is why it is so difficult for both the URCSA and the ANC to adhere to their gender policies when electing people into positions of power. This question leads the researcher to the problem statement for this article.

## Problem statement of this article

It is regrettable that it is still necessary to write an article that argues that women are not treated with dignity in terms of leadership positions in the church and political parties, moreover the so-called liberation movement like the ANC. The researcher observed that there is still internal resistance in the URCSA and the ANC to elect women in the top leadership. The assumption can be that there is internalised oppression and domination. Documents are crafted in such a way that they give the impression that there are no oppression and domination of women in the URCSA and the ANC. Makoro (2007:59–60), however, indicates that there are barriers that prevent women from assuming leadership positions in the church and society, namely:

- The doctrinal barrier – the teaching that women should not lead the church.
- The economic barrier – when women want to further their studies, they are barred by financial constraints, as some families are still hesitant to educate girls and women.
- The female barrier – there is frequently an absence or lack of support from other women in the church committees.

Makoro (2007) writes from the church perspective, but at the very same time these churches have long-standing histories of influencing the society and political parties. The barriers Makoro (2007) puts forward have bearing in organisations' political and philosophical thinking. The ANC is the only political party that has a 50/50 gender representation policy, but it still stuck with the doctrine (culture) that women should not lead the organisation even in a democratic, non-sexist and non-racist country. This reflected well in the Mangaung conference (2012), where the media reported that the 50/50 gender policy does not apply to the presidency when two males were contesting for this position. Likewise, in the recent conference in Johannesburg (2017), where the conference elected only one woman, and by doing so, decreased the number from two in the previous conference. The doctrinal and cultural barrier played a major role in the thinking of members who attended the URCSA and ANC conferences. The religious and cultural affiliations reflect the surface structure of internalised oppression and domination.

Furthermore, the final barrier has also played a role where women would advocate for the male candidate instead of a woman candidate for the presidency of the ANC. Even the woman delegates, who were campaigning for a female, but based on loyalty to the group they support, there is a high possibility that they have not voted for the woman in the position of the deputy president. This is a clear indication that South Africa has not reached complete liberation. Winn (1992) indicates:

- First, there is political liberation, the liberation of oppressed classes from their oppressors.
- Second, there is human liberation, in which human beings begin to assume conscious responsibility for their own destiny, seize the reins of their own evolution, and become the creators of a new humanity and a society.

- Third, there is liberation from sin, which is the root of all alienation, injustice, and oppression. Unjust situations do not happen by chance; human beings are responsible for them. However, this responsibility is not merely individual, private, and interior: it is social, historical fact. (p. 403)

The political behaviour of voters in the ANC and the URCSA will be evaluated, based on this threefold analysis of liberation. The question is, were those women who voted for male candidates, while contesting with women, really liberated or not? There are some tendencies that women endorse internalised oppression and domination. The main research question is: Are these organisations adhering to their gender policies as documented in terms of election to positions of power? This question is divided into four sub-questions:

- What are the theological reflections from different theologians regarding gender justice?
- What are the key issues in gender policies of the ANC and the URCSA?
- Are these organisations adhering to their gender policies in terms of elections to positions of power?
- Is there any solution to these challenges?

## Aims of the article

The aims of the article will circulate around the above research questions:

- To investigate from literature the position of theologians on gender justice.
- To illustrate that the ANC and the URCSA have well-documented gender policies that need to guide them in the operation to avoid discrimination of women in leadership.
- To show that these organisations do not adhere to their gender policies when coming to elections of top positions.
- To provide some recommendations to resolve the challenge in terms of election to positions of power.

There is a need for a specific method to achieve these aims. In the next section, the author will discuss which method he is going to utilise, as well as the theological framework in this article.

## Research method

The approach followed in this article will be descriptive-normative.<sup>1</sup> The concepts of equality, gender justice, inclusivity and discrimination also fall within the political theology. The researcher's interest is in how modern political theory is covertly a form of secularised theology

1. Political theology falls into two general categories, namely the descriptive and the normative. They need not be mutually exclusive. Descriptive accounts may have a normative agenda, while normative accounts usually incorporate elements of political description. Descriptive accounts look at how theology functions in political contexts, normative accounts at how it ought to function. Normative accounts usually assume that the right sort of theology correlates with the right sort of political function (+/+), and the wrong sort of theology with the wrong sort of function (-/-). The mixed possibilities, however, are rarely entertained. Actually, however, as a human imperfection or inconsistency, the right sort of theology may correlate with the wrong sort of function (+/-), and the wrong sort of theology with the right sort of function (-/+). (Hunsinger 2012:271).

(Hunsinger 2012:271). Hence, the researcher followed the political theology tools in this article. The research method employed in this research study is qualitative research, where observation and literature reviews will be used. Informally the researcher will employ quantitative research to verify facts that both organisations do not adhere to their gender policies. This study is the product of an observation as a minister of the Word and church polity expert in the URCSA (Actuarius), who must advise in terms of church law. A theological framework for this article is ecclesiological and political in nature.

## Clarification and definition of main concepts

It is of paramount importance to define and clarify concepts like *gender*, *equality* and *dignity*. Mwaura (2001:168) indicates that *gender* is a systematic concept that refers to a system of roles and relationships between men and women, that are determined not by biology, but by the social, political and economic context; it differs from sex which is a biological category that identifies the biological differences between women and men. Gender, therefore, refers not simply to women or men, but to the relationship between them, and the way it is socially constructed. In simpler terms: gender is a social construct that must include women and men. The working definition is that human beings are born female and male, but they learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. The construction of gender roles and relationships is a permanent process. Gender roles, that are determined patterns of behaviour in terms of rights, duties, obligations, and prerogatives assigned to females and males in society, are not universal. Gender roles are maintained and reinforced through the similar process of learning or conditioning (Mwaura 2001:168).

Plaatjies van Huffel (2014:111) indicates that *equality* of all human beings, women and men, is one of the principal values enshrined in the South African Constitution, alongside the principles of non-sexism and non-racism. Every human being is equal before the law and may not be discriminated against directly or indirectly, on grounds such as disability, age, gender, sex, and marital status. Equality in this regard implies that human beings have the right to equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms, including opportunities and responsibilities in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres. Human beings as images of God need to be perceived as equal in all respects. Furthermore, Plaatjies van Huffel (2014:111) states that gender equality denotes that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices, whereas gender equity means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. Gender equality is linked to human dignity.

Kobia (2018:12) indicates that *dignity* is real whenever and wherever human beings claim their right to life and insist that life in all its forms is sacred; that is to mention, all of life

is the gift of God and requires our deepest appreciation, respect and defence against any threat. It is the power of dignity that requires human beings to take risks in the struggle for justice for all images of God. Human dignity is embedded in the image of God. Ssekabira (2018:84) defines human dignity from a creation perspective, that human dignity originates from God and is of God, because the human being is made in God's own image and likeness. Human life is sacred for the reason that a human being is the most central and clearest reflection of God in the universe. Human beings have transcendent worth and value that comes from God. This dignity is not based on any human quality, legal mandate, or individual merit or accomplishment. In simpler terms: human dignity is inalienable (Ssekabira 2018:84). Cardinal to the Christian vision of human life is the notion that every human being is created in the image of God (Gn 1:26–27). Human dignity is inalienable; it is an essential part of every human being and is an intrinsic quality that can never be separated from other essential aspects of the human person. An inherent dignity is bestowed on men, women and children equally. Women are also the bearer of the image of God, therefore gender justice in all respects should be enhanced in the church and society.

## Position of theologians on gender justice

Daly (1975:54) has a case against the church over a period in history. She has a passion for knowing, this passion turned into perplexity as she endlessly struggled against the church. She was the victim of the circumstances, hurt, detested, and rejected in her efforts to search out the knowledge of God and she eventually decided that the message to the women was clear: women are not worthy of spiritual knowledge as this is the exclusive right of men. Daly's primary task was to argue for equality for men and women as church members. She exposed the masculine bias of Christian theology against women and demonstrated the practical and psychological consequences it bestowed upon women in the church and society (Daly 1975:54). This argument is the basis of the struggle for women's liberation in the church, which still has reflections on leadership of the church.

The debate on gender equality has a long-standing history in human sciences. Cone (1984:397) is one of the black theologians that has challenged the church on discrimination and oppression of women in church leadership and exclusion in ministry. Cone (1984:397) indicates that the time has arrived for black people to deal fairly with their differences, their damages, and their pains. Black people cannot pretend any longer that all is in order and that the problem of male-female relations is limited to the white community. It is in the black community as well; and it is time they face up to the need to speak openly and honestly about what is right and wrong with the black community in relation to black men and women. It is a contradiction for a black man to protest to racism in the white church and society. At the same time, they failed to apply the same critique to

themselves in their relation to black women. Furthermore, black people are going to create new roles in the ministry, black men will have to recognise that the present status of black women in the ministry is not acceptable. Since the gospel is about liberation, it demands that they create new structures of human relations that enhance freedom and not oppression (Cone 1984:397).

Furthermore, Cone (1984:397–398) became the victim of the rage of white theologians and too many black-skinned ones as well. When he confessed his own male-oriented theological language and participation in sexist practices against his sisters and accused the black church and community by participating in this dreaded sin against black women and humanity, he found that he often had to stand alone. Although some of his black male colleagues have joined him in standing against sexism, it is evident that at this writing few have been as emphatic and outspoken on this issue as Cone (1984:397–398). In this sense, one cannot propagate liberation of the oppressed without emphasising gender equality in all spheres of life.

Phiri (2017:16) argues that there was a peaceful march in Malawi in 1995 to present the petition to raise the issue of the lack of partnership between men and women in the church, violence against women, lack of participation of women in leadership roles including the ordination of women to the ministry of Word and sacrament. The church women have made history of being on such a march as it was the first of its kind in the country. This should be understood in the context of the then-just realisation of the political transition to democracy in Malawi, where the church had played a significant role in taking a prophetic stand against all forms of injustices experienced by Malawians. Through the petition, the women were demanding that the political and economic justice that the churches were seeking for all citizens of Malawi should include gender justice for women who are also in the church and society.

Landman (2017:364) is arguing in the line of Cone (1984) and Phiri (2017) that one needs to practise what one is preaching or preach what one is practising. She indicates (2017):

If the church was not ready to ordain women in practice in 1982, and to confess its faith in inclusive language in 1986, we are constrained to ask whether the church is ready now, and of what benefit the use of inclusive language will be to the spiritual wellbeing of women in the church. (p. 364)

This is an indication that the church that confessed the Belhar confession, that speaks against oppression and discrimination, was not ready to practise what they confess in the Belhar confession in terms of women's ordination. Daly (1985:158) indicates that the space of the women's revolution is an exodus community. It is a pilgrimage towards achieving individuation and participation; it is the leaving behind of the false self and of a sexist society. The exodus is not only a spiritual one, but also a physical and social exodus formed by a new covenant. The new covenant is an agreement presented

within the self and other selves (Daly 1985:159). As time goes, the URCSA has found itself in that exodus community, the community that is changing from patriarch into a harmonious community of faith, even though very slow. Plaatjies van Huffel (2014:111) confirms that the URCSA also recognises the importance of equitable relations between women and men, and how this results in differences in power relations, status, privileges and needs. The church also notices the obstacles to the full inclusion of women in every aspect of life, both in the church and society. Women had been admitted in the URCSA during the past decades in the ranks of leadership as church council members, ministers of the Word and even on the moderamen, albeit that theological presupposition still holds women in submissive roles in the church and society.

Flaendorp (2014:1) indicates that the first woman to be ordained in the Dutch Reformed family was Rev. Prof. Dr Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel in November 1992. Since 1992, women were ordained and inducted to serve congregations in the URCSA, but it was difficult to elect them in the position of power or leadership of the church. The first woman elected to the leadership position as assessor (Deputy Moderator) was Rev. Dr Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel in the General Synod held at Hammanskraal, 2008. During the recess (2008–2012), she was the only woman in the leadership of the URCSA. Furthermore, she obtained the majority vote to become the first female moderator of the URCSA and the Dutch Reformed family in 2012 in Okahanja, Namibia. This progressive transformation was supposed to energise the URCSA to maintain momentum by increasing the number of women in leadership positions and regulate the election in terms of the quota (ratio of men and women). Hence, Plaatjies van Huffel (2014) indicates:

The inclusion of women in decision-making structures did not change the dominant discourse, however, which has locked women into submissive roles in societal structures. Institutional or organisational power here refers to the way that power is distributed in the church through its decision-making processes. Institutional power also refers to the way that roles are allocated with varying degrees of responsibility. In URCSA women are included in the decision-making structures, but very few women participate in decision-making bodies where church agendas are set, and policies are determined. A high proportion of ordained women are employed on a part-time basis. (p. 115)

The URCSA was supposed to address this injustice in the similar way she addresses regionalism in the leadership as stated in chapter 3 (regulation 1.1.2) of the Church Order of URCSA (2012:19), namely that: 'The executive is elected consecutively, one member from each of the regional synods of the URCSA'. Likewise, in the ANC the number has never increased, instead women were not elected in the top four positions. In 2016 Rev. Prof. Dr Christina Landman was elected as additional member of the executive. One would have argued that her experience, qualifications and her struggle in the church could have earned her some better position to be elected to serve in the executive of the General Synod as a woman.

Cone (1984), Phiri (2017) and Landman (2017) suggest that one cannot propagate liberation from oppression and at the same time participate in gender injustice and inequality. The world perceives the URCSA and the ANC as institutions that ought to be at the forefront of justice and liberation for the oppressed. Contrary, they ignore gender justice when coming to leadership elections, despite their impressive gender policies and confession of Belhar. Statistics speaks for itself in this regard: out of six members of the top leadership of the ANC, only one woman was elected; out of seven members of the moderamen, only one woman was elected. Njoroge (2005) indicates:

In other words, African women have named the 'evil' and 'injustices' that hinder half of humanity's full participation in God's mission in the church and in the society. It is not a secret that even in this country (USA) theologising and theological education and leadership in the church and participation in decision-making organs of the ecclesial institutions has been the preserve of men over the centuries. Even today there are people who cannot comprehend that women are equally endowed with theological mind and leadership qualities, especially if they happen to be black women. (p. 34)

The policy documents of both the ANC and the URCSA recognise women as full human beings with dignity, but in terms of participation in leadership in the URCSA and the ANC, this recognition does not exist. The sad story is that even women themselves participated in the oppression and domination of other women. To put it in context, other women participated in disregarding women as potential to take the lead in the URCSA and the ANC; it was observed at the ANC elective conference in December 2017 in Johannesburg, when Baleka-Mbete gave her vote to Cyril Ramaphosa against Nkosasana Dlamini-Zuma. Furthermore, the propagator of the gender justice, Bathabile Dlamini, based on loyalty and group dynamics as she voted for DD Mabuza as deputy president of the ANC against Lindiwe Sizulu. There is a serious need for a remedy for this syndrome. Williams (1995) argues:

When black women accept the realization that far too many black men and white men in power agree on the subordination of black women, perhaps they will begin a free women's movement within the denominational churches – a movement to free women's minds and lives of the androcentric indoctrination and the exploitative emotional commitments that cause many women are tools of their own oppression and that of other women. (p. 214)

Williams argues from the church perspective, but this reality affects also the entire women population in the society and organisations such as the ANC, which have good policies, but do not implement them when coming to the election to positions of power. The argument of Williams (1995:214) supports the argument of Winn (1992:402) that it is in human liberation that people themselves must initiate to assume conscious responsibility for their own destiny, seize the gearshifts of their own evolution, and become the creators of a new humanity and society. This is what Williams's calls free women's movement, which will advocate the liberation of

women from male indoctrination and exploitative emotional commitments to cause many women to be tools of their own oppression and that of other women. The argument of Williams (1995) and Winn (1992) is captured in the discussion paper on gender policy of the ANC as follows:

The ANC Women's League has been a critical pillar within the Party to raise awareness, sustain and carry forward women's empowerment and advocate a gender equality agenda. The formation of the Progressive Women's Movement in 2006 in Mangaung, involving a broad range of women's organizations from different parts of the country, was an encouraging new development. Similarly, with its strong gender focused civil society, including researchers, grassroots organizations and feminist intellectuals who have contributed to advocate and continue to influence policy developments biased towards women, South Africa has moved from strength to strength towards the total emancipation of women. (Policy discussion document on gender equality 2012)

The idea of the ANC Women's League was in line with the free women's movement in 2012 to free women from androcentric indoctrination, but this does not bear results due to the results of the 2017 election in terms of a 50/50 representation, likewise the URCSA General Synod (2016). This argument leads the author to the next discussion, which is the organisational policies regarding gender justice.

## Gender policies of the African National Congress and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

Gender is a socially constructed understanding of what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman. It is the social imposed divisions between two sexes. It refers to the psychological and physical attributes which a given culture expects to coincide with physical maleness or femaleness. Women and men are created by society. Thus, it is observable that the deliberate social division of the sexes is deeply embedded in our consciousness; as a result, it influences the way in which societies are organised in terms of 'male responsibilities' and 'female responsibilities' in the family, the economy and in society. Generally, these responsibilities are not biologically determined apart from pregnancy and childbirth but are culturally allocated (Policy discussion document on gender equality 2012). Both the ANC and the URCSA (on documents only) have attempted to deconstruct the social constructed notion of gender through their policy on gender justice.

The church does not exist in a vacuum; socioeconomic and political factors always influence the church history and church polity. According to the ANC policy discussion document (2012), the country has also ratified some international and regional instruments that promote gender equality. These instruments include the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (ratified 1995), the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (signed 1996), the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Optional Protocol

to CEDAW, ratified in 2005, and the AU Heads of States Solemn. These developments on gender equality have influenced the whole society, including the church. The Declaration of Gender Equality in Africa (adopted in 2004), the ratification of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, signed by the president in 2008, must be fast tracked. South Africa is bound by international, regional and sub-regional laws ratified and must take all necessary steps to protect women from discrimination and abuse in all spheres (Policy discussion document on gender equality 2012).

The ANC gender policy document emphasises the re-examination of the progress made by the ANC towards its commitment to a non-sexist society, within the organisation and in its stated transformation agenda and its role in influencing gender-based practices in South Africa and the entire continent. The policy emphasises a 50/50 representation in all spheres of life for men and women, according to the policy document of the ANC. The policy states that:

- The New Growth Path represents a significant step forward in scaling up efforts to promote job creation and a green economy. The New Growth Path for economic development must be engendered to ensure that women are 50% beneficiaries of the Job Fund.
- Job creation and skills development targets are crucial elements of the New Growth Path. Women must make up 50% beneficiaries of this target for jobs and within all the sectors identified, including in the skills development provided.
- State Owned Enterprises must ensure that in awarding tenders and contracts, 50% is awarded to women. In awarding contracts and tenders, especially to women-only cooperatives, SOEs must ensure that they create markets, value-chains and value-add for sustainability of these businesses.
- The ANC must oversee that, in compliance with the Copenhagen and COP 17 agreements on climate change, women and children are not further exploited, discriminated and disadvantaged. Women must make up 50% of the green jobs and the green economy in South Africa.
- More women are increasingly accessing tertiary education, as well as increasingly entering previously male domains with respect to career choices. However, the science, technology and engineering fields are still predominantly male in nature. Fifty per cent of all leaderships must be earmarked for young women to ensure that empowerment is provided especially for previously male dominated areas.
- Both Basic and Higher Education targets and interventions need to be gender-disaggregated and monitored and the 50% rule applied (Policy discussion document on gender equality 2012).

The African National Congress applied the 50% rule in most sectors of the government and State owned enterprise, while the policy is silent on the leadership position in the ANC top six. The constitution of the ANC generally respects gender

equality. The African National Congress policy influences the government policy since the ANC is the ruling party; the URCSA could not escape this influence.

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa is a reformed church which is based on *Sola Scriptura*; therefore, any policy adopted by this church ought to be biblical and theological grounded. The URCSA acknowledges and embraces the equality of men and women as created by God, redeemed by Christ, gifted by the Spirit and will continue to reject any teaching and practices, which perpetuate gender inequality (Acta of the General Synod 2005:53). The theological basis that justifies this notion is that God created human beings in God's image, male and female God create them (Gn 1:27). At the same time, we understand that we live in broken power relationships between women and men where women are often undervalued and treated as inferior to men. Furthermore, the church strives to understand God's will in the face of unjust gender relations and broken human relationships in the church and society. Sexism is a structural sin, like racism and must be denounced and eliminated. The church believes that when one is in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: 'for ye are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28). The URCSA gender policy emphasises the following objectives:

- To change unjust structures and distorted symbol systems reflected in gender relations.
- To strive towards a complete mindshift regarding relations and work towards the creation of a new community of believers and a new society.
- To uproot all instruments within the church that perpetuate inequalities between men and women.
- To promote 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 disseminate information and collaboration with partner churches on gender justice.
- 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 an opportunity of being enriched by the contribution of women in serving God and the world (Acta of the General Synod 2005:54).

Furthermore, the church states in its action plan on gender justice that it will ensure that women have at least 30% representation and strive for 40% of all decision-making structures of the church that is church council, Presbyteries, regional synods, General Synod and all ministries (Acta of the General Synod 2005:54). A similar argument as the ANC is the creation of a gender commission of women and men at

all levels of the church that will spearhead the work on gender equity in the church, as the ANC has gender commissions and departments that deal with gender and children. The author has stated the gender policies of both organisations, to illustrate how well these organisations have documented gender justice in their policies but seems to have challenges to apply these policies in their leadership positions or decision-making body. According to the Church Order of the URCSA (2012), under integrated ministry there is 25% policy which applies to female and youth (Church Order of the URCSA 2012). In the next section, the author will discuss the shortcoming in terms of implementation of these policies in both organisations.

## Shortcomings in terms of implementation of the policy

The argument above indicates that the ANC and URCSA have well-documented gender justice policies. It was found that the URCSA and the ANC have a similar governance structure (National Executive Committee for the ANC and the General Synodical Commission for the URCSA) that ought to implement decisions of the conference or synod during recess. Both of them have top executive members. The ANC is called top six while those in the URCSA is called the moderamen (Executive) which consists of seven members.

During the establishment of the URCSA, gender policy was drafted, and it was endorsed in the General Synod of 2005, but it was not regulated in the Church Order to guide the election process in terms of proportional representation of women and men to the top leadership positions of the URCSA. In that synod which has endorsed the policy, seven churchmen were elected for the next 3 years to run the affairs of the church. Similar with the ANC during 2012 was the elective conference that has adopted the gender policy, but did not implement the 50/50 gender policy on the leadership of the ANC.

The NEC of the ANC consists of 86 members who are elected by the conference. Statistically, out of 86 members, 46.5% are males, while 53.5% are females. Based on numbers one might be convinced that the organisation adheres to the gender policy. The composition of the NEC does not provide a quota for proportional representation of men and women in terms of the 50/50 representation in the structures. The interesting part is that the top positions are reserved for male delegates, for example the top six: out of six, five members are males while only one is female. Furthermore, it's become more interesting to find that the bundle of males from position 1 to 26 are 17 males, while females are nine, from position 60 to 80 there are 19 females with one male. The ANC is in control of eight provinces in South Africa, and out of the eight premiers of the provinces, only one is female while seven are males. This argument is verified by the survey from Glass Ceiling quoted in the gender policy discussion document of the ANC, namely that the 'Glass Ceiling' survey shows that while there was a high proportion of women in the media in

general 50%, these figures are not reflected in the decision-making (top management – 25% levels). A high number of women in the media are employed on part-time or non-permanent basis (61%). Many women are confined to support departments (human resources – 74%; marketing or advertising – 61%; administration – 59%). There is indication that there is still a lot to be done to deconstruct the social construction of gender and power.

Similarly, the URCSA in its 2016 elective synod, endorsed the Synodical commission, which consists of 37 members, and out of 37 members, 33 are male and only 4 females in this very important discussion making structure of the church. Of the top seven of these 37, six are males while one is female. Interesting is that the females that are elected in top position of this church are the ones who are highly educated at the ranks of professors; this is an indication that sexism and classism is very prominent in this church. The first female assessor (2008–2012) and Moderator (2012–2016) was highly educated with double doctoral degrees when she became an assessor and moderator.

## Findings, recommendations and conclusion

In conclusion, the researcher concludes that women in the church and society are images of God, as equal as men, and therefore need to be treated that way. Furthermore, it is noted that the ANC and the URCSA possess comprehensive gender policies that need to guide gender justice and equality in both organisations. The challenge is that these policies are not implemented during the election and there is no quota to cater for gender justice in the composition of the NEC and Synodical Commission. From the above information in terms of qualitative and quantitative data, there is still a lacuna in relation to gender justice in the ANC and the URCSA when coming into positions of power. The recommendation is that the organisational constitution should have a gender justice clause, that gives a clear quota when coming to the election of women and men.

The church ought to mainstream gender in all the church planning processes, institutionalise gender-specific awareness and mutual models of services, and create safe spaces for men to grapple with masculine identity, authentic spirituality, and roles in gender transformation. Mainstreaming requires revolution and evolution at different levels of the church. A paradigm shift in the ways of thinking, and in the goals, structures and resource allocations, agenda setting, policy making, planning, implementation and evaluation is required (Plaatjies van Huffel 2014:116). The recommendation made by Plaatjies van Huffel (2014) implies that the church should be a changing agent for the entire society. If this is the agenda of the church, then the society will change for the better, because the church has the privilege to teach human beings for 52 Sundays in a year. Finally, this article recommends that the church ought to play the role of deconstructing the constructed mentality that women are not equal to men when coming to positions of power.

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