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**TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT NELSON ROLIHLAHLA MANDELA
(18 July 1918 – 5 December 2013)**

NELSON ROLIHLAHLA MANDELA: *WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS THIS?*

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), together with the people of South Africa and the world, has learned with great sadness and a deep sense of loss of the passing of our beloved President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, the founding president of a democratic South Africa. As a Church we are united in our grief with his wife Ms Graca Machel, the Mandela and Machel families, the nation and the world.

President Mandela was a humble servant of the people, serving in a collective responsibility. *"I stand before you not as a prophet, but as a humble servant of you, the people,"* he said in his first speech after his release from prison on 11 February 1990 on the balcony of the Cape Town City Hall. That was the character of the man. Although he resisted secular canonization, we must and wish to pay tribute to him, for the man and leader he was.

Tributes serve a very comforting purpose. A tribute is one of those pastoral mechanisms that help us grief our beloved in the context of who a person was, their value in life. It is also a way of calling to memory the worthwhile contributions one has made to humanity, signifying a life with and of purpose. Memory is a powerful tool in grieving and healing the wounds and pain of death and so as a Church we want to call, Nelson Mandela, the man, the servant-leader to memory.

Leroy Bennet Jr wrote a biography on Dr Martin Luther King Jr. with the title: **WHAT MANNER OF MAN**. In this biography Bennet tries to determine what kind of person King was and what significant contribution he had made to life. Tributes and biographies are much the same, it analyses a person, it tells something of a person and his or her worth in life.

What manner of man was President Nelson Mandela?

President Mandela gazed at the wall of apartheid, raised to divide South Africa's people into a privilege white minority and underprivileged black majority and said to himself, this wall must come down. When the call of history of freedom and justice came to him and his compatriots, he answered the call and stood up to be counted. Despite the fact that his obedience to the call of freedom and justice would ask of him much more than one could reasonably expect from any human being, personal and family sacrifice, President Mandela was true to the calling of the freedom of the people of South Africa; even the freedom of those who persecuted him unjustly, who called him and treated him as a terrorist, humiliated him and let him suffer in jail for 27 years.

WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS THIS? Many have commented throughout the years on the lack of bitterness in Madiba against white South Africans for the injustice they have done to him personally and the oppressed people of our country. It would have been understood justified if he came out of

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prison with bitterness and revenge in his heart. No reasonable person would have blamed him. Contrary to this normal human reaction he stretched out a hand of reconciliation, forgiveness and inclusion to white South Africans, despite the fact that they practiced, sustained and benefitted from apartheid, the crime against humanity, which excluded him and the rest of South Africa's population, through the practice of injustice and oppression. Despite his trials and tribulations under this very white sustained system, he extended the virtue of kindness, not bitterness, on 11 February 1990 when he said, *"We call on our white compatriots to join us in the shaping of a new South Africa. The freedom movement is the political home for you too."*

WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS THIS? President Mandela's struggle for a just and equitable South Africa was not an easy one. He knew adversity. He had his trials and tribulations and uncertainty, but it was his call to servanthood to a people and a nation, that made him persevere, through it all. It was the hope in him, which encouraged him to believe that another day, a better day, will dawn. It was his love for a nation in bondage that made him persevere under very difficult circumstances. **WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS THIS?** President Mandela bears in his body the marks of a servant who has crusaded for freedom, justice and peace for all. We the people of South Africa and the world have been the beneficiaries of what he could offer in terms of leadership and service and generations to come will continue to benefit from his example and work. **WHAT MANNER OF MAN IS THIS? : A President beloved and in the way he exemplified justice, forgiveness and reconciliation, in his life and leadership, a servant of the Most High God.**

The best way we, South Africans and the world can honour the memory and continue the legacy of such a great servant-leader is:

- **To serve the nation unselfishly, sacrificially and without fear in order to make South Africa the great nation that President Mandela worked and suffered for**
- **To guard jealously our hard-won democracy and not to allow the freedoms gained to be eroded by any institution or individual**
- **To continue to fight for the economic liberation of the victims of apartheid**
- **To hold our government responsible without fear or favour, for proper and effective delivery of services to the nation**
- **To make sure that the children of our country, whom President Mandela so dearly loved, receive an education which will empower them to reap the fruits of freedom and democracy**
- **To work for true reconciliation that produces justice**
- **To fight corruption and to ensure the freedom of information**
- **To make sure that our public representatives are people of moral conscience who represent the interests of the people of South Africa and not their own**
- **To strive to fulfill the dream that he had for South Africa, in general**

In his Autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Madiba writes, *"I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended."* But now, and so, his *Long Walk* to ultimate and eternal freedom, has finally ended on earth! Now he is truly free at last, to rest in peace from his hard and committed labour to the freedom of his people. Go in peace, Madiba! Go in peace!

We thank the Almighty God for his life, his commitment, his contribution and example to the freedom struggle. We will miss him as a nation, for what he was, his character traits, the leader and the man

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he was, because it is rare to find a replication of such an example uniquely exemplified in the life of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela again. We must capture this example in our hearts and minds, so that we may continue with a sense of purpose to fulfill his and our goals and the dreams of our struggle, yet unrealized.

We as the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), together with the rest of South Africa and the world, say farewell to one of our own. As we as a nation commits the mortal remains of this great son of Africa, to the African soil, and his soul into the hands of God, we carry his wife, Ms Graca Machel, the Mandela and Machel families and the nation in our prayers, to the throne of God.

For further information and enquiries, please call the Rev. Dr. Mary- Anne Plaatjies – van Huffel (Moderator of URCSA) at 0791090046

Issued by the Executive of the General Synod of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA):

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6 December 2013