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Language as a barrier to ministry of the Word with special reference to sign language in ministry: Human dignity perspective

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This article is born out of my participation in the General Synod Ministerial Formation for theological training of Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), when a decision was taken to license a student with a disability to be a minister of the Word in URCSA. Furthermore, my experience and observation of the licensing of the two candidates with hearing impairments to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament in URCSA and Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRCSA) has encouraged me to conduct this research. This article is made up of four important parts: Firstly, the researcher will discuss Belhar Confession as the confession that emphasises unity (inclusivity), reconciliation and justice. Secondly, Belhar Confession and disability from the human dignity perspective will be discussed. Thirdly, the ecclesiological practices and shortcomings from the human dignity perspective will be highlighted. Fourthly, pastoral care as the affirmation of human dignity will be discussed.

Interdisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The fields involved in this article are Systematic Theology, Sociology and Psychology. The author challenges classification of people with a disability under the category of limited competence by the Dutch Reformed Church when they license the ministerial candidates. The future results will reveal the inclusivity in terms of licensing and calling of ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church Family. This research calls for the change in the traditional discourse within ecclesiological, sociological and psychological fields, which exclude the people with a disability from the ministry of the Word and Sacraments.

Introduction

Background

My involvement and participation in the decision-making process regarding the licensing of a student that has a hearing and speaking challenge has influenced me to write this article. This article will be approached from the human dignity perspective. The language of human dignity that is utilised in this article is a compelling means to challenge the way the church perceives people with hearing and speaking challenges with special reference to DRCSA and URCSA regarding the licensing of two students. In terms of the Belhar Confession, URCSA is a church that identifies itself with the destitute, oppressed and down-trodden, which include the people with a disability. It was very touching to witness two churches from the same tradition licensing two candidates having the same challenge differently. The two candidates were licenced differently, one as a minister without any limitation and the other with limited competence. The researcher will attempt to respond to this question: should the church license people with a disability with special reference to students with hearing impairments, with limited competence (special licensing) to serve the church of God.

The problem statement in this study

The person is being called by God to serve God in God's community, and God has empowered the candidate[1] to study and complete her studies, despite her disability in language. At the finishing point URCSA intends to license this candidate with a special licensing that limits this person to serve only the congregation of people who are hearing impaired. The problem here is that the church is unfairly discriminating and excluding this person from the full ministry of the Word and Sacraments, whereas the person who does not have such challenges can serve the very same

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1.The candidate is a female with a hearing challenge, who has studied theology, and complies with the requirement to become a minister in URCSA.

community of faith. Learning from my experience as a theological student 20 years ago, we used to preach in Thibologa School for the Deaf, and interpreters were used to interpret the sound language into sign language. The Afrikaans or English preacher used to preach and minister to Sesotho and Setswana communities of faith without any hindrance using the interpreters to interpret Afrikaans to Sesotho or to Setswana. Are not speakers of English and Afrikaans, in so far as they struggle to communicate effectively in the dominant languages (Sesotho and Setswana) of their society, in some sense disabled? He furthermore indicates that, in this connection I-MAG has indicated the fact that, language can be used either to limit or extend access, participation and opportunities for the majority of South Africans who are poor and marginalised and who do not understand English (or vocal language). Perhaps one might argue against this comparison on the grounds that since hearing people can learn to use the dominant language effectively, they are not condemned to the exclusive use of their mother tongue (Brand 2013:70). In this sense, the question that needs to be addressed is the question of inclusion. Reinders (2013:31) argues: 'In many ways people with disabilities and their families do not feel they are included in their communities, nor do they feel welcome to participate'.

The point of departure from this experience, the researcher then raises the following research questions that are based on the main research question: Should the church license people with a disability, with special reference to students with a hearing impairment, with limited competence (special licensing) to serve the church of God. The following are sub-questions:

• What is a human being and human dignity in relation to disability?
• Is language the pre-requisite to become a minister in the Reformed church?
• Which practical circumstances need to be changed to include disabled people in ministry with special references to people with hearing impairments?

Aims of this study

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

• To determine from the literature a definition of human beings and human dignity in relation to disability.
• To determine the role of language in ministry.
• To determine the ways and means to remedy the situation of excluding people with a disability.

Approach and research method employed in this study

The approach followed in this article will be descriptive – normative[2]. The concepts like equality, human dignity,

inclusivity and discrimination also fall within the political theology. The interest is in how modern political theory is covertly a form of secularised theology (Hunsinger 2012:271). Hence, the author followed the political theology tools in this article.

This approach will be used to weigh the URCSA theology of Belhar as a right sort of theology, as against the right or the wrong functions of the church in relation to the candidates to the ministry, who are people with disabilities. Is the church treating them equally and justly as per the theology of Belhar Confession which states that, God is God of justice, and God in a special way stands on the side of the poor, destitute, orphans, widows, and the wronged. In this sense the Church of God should stand where God stands (Belhar Confession, 1986). In relation to this article, they should stand with the people with a disability.

The research method employed in this research study is qualitative research where observation and literature reviews will be used. This study is the product of observation as a minister of the Word and church polity expert in the URCSA (Actuarius), who has to advise in terms of church law. A theological framework for this article is anthropological and ecclesiological in nature.

Belhar Confession and disability in relation to human dignity

It is vitally important to contextualise the Belhar Confession, particularly with regard to the kind of society the church found herself in then and now. Piet Naudé (2010:185–200) correctly expands the focus of this reconciliation from 'the enforced separation of people on a racial basis' to include sexism and gender discrimination or divisions, as well as the marginalisation of people living with HIV and AIDS – issues that were not even part of the dominant public or theological discourse at the time. In the context of this article, one could expand Naude's comment to refer to people with a disability who are included in the marginalised in Naude's argument. So Belhar Confession as a confession of faith needs to be functional, to address this issue of disability of ministers and members in this church.

The church and society at large, including the medical fraternity, must first embrace these special persons (persons with a disability) as human beings. However, the person suffering from any impairment or disease, not necessarily a disability, is identified as a 'medical case' by the medical condition one is living in. They are also seen as persons who are incapable and dysfunctional first and later as human beings, which is an act of dehumanisation. The church and society must also recognise that these people with a disability

2.Political theology falls into two general categories, namely, the descriptive and normative. They need not be mutually exclusive. Descriptive accounts may have a normative agenda, while normative accounts usually incorporate elements of

(footnote 2 continues...)
political description. Descriptive accounts look at how theology functions in political contexts: normative accounts, about 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. In actuality, 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).

as well as the majority of so-called 'normal people' belong to God, hence they are precious in nature (Samadhanam & Elmoraj 2015:19). A person is considered as a composite of the image of God and rooted in nature; therefore, they need to be recognised as human beings with human dignity.

Human dignity is a concept that has captured the attention of theologians, philosophers, scholars and jurists alike. Since the ancient era, thinkers from a wide variety of interdisciplinary fields have explored the notion of human dignity, its ramifications, and its effect on civilised society and the church. Even though URCSA theologians and scholars have also participated in this discourse within the Belhar Confession, with increased attention in recent times, the notion of the role of human dignity within the church circles is still an under-explored topic. Claassens, Swartz and Hansen (2013:7) indicate that the belief that human dignity belongs to all people regardless of factors such as skin colour, gender, social status, physical or mental capabilities and sexual orientation constitutes a basic element of religious belief that can be recovered and employed in order to move the dialogue away from achievement or utility value in assessing human worth. The fact that dignity is seemingly becoming a more 'vital and vibrant' precept, the time has arrived to explore what is meant by human dignity and, more significantly, whether and/or how this meaning can be imported into the church polity structure of URCSA. However, it will be very important to define what a human being is before one can define what human dignity is.

Kavanaugh (1970:82) asserts that the fact of being human will give rise to the structures, values and demands which will not militate against any one's freedom but which will actually make freedom possible and enhance that freedom. In this article it will be of substantial value to relate people with a disability and their challenge as God's plan and acceptance of being people as important as a human being. Furthermore, Fillmore (1931:158) indicates that a human being is a part in the creative process to express the divine ideal. When a human being knows himself or herself as the perfect offspring of divine mind, that human being expresses the perfection of the creation of God. Then it is of paramount importance to define what a human being is: a human being is the image of God, the perfect God.

Belhar Confession as one of the confessions of URCSA informs the church as a whole how to behave and handle issues in the church. This confession has a great impact on the way church polity of URCSA is structured and implemented. It is emphasised in Belhar Confession that God is an inclusive God. Hence, in its Article 4 it says 'God is the God of the poor in a special way'; the special part of it is born out of the ignorance of the white South Africans who could not see poor black people as human beings. For the purpose of this article, the question is 'What does it mean to be human despite one's challenges, either mental or physical'.

Inclusivity is also implied in the critique of situations where 'the enforced separation of people on a racial, physical and mental basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity' (Article 3). Finally, the Belhar Confession holds that God is 'in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged and that he calls his church to follow him in this' (Article 4). Inclusivity, one may say, is indeed integral to all three of the core themes of the Belhar Confession, namely unity, reconciliation and justice. This emphasis on inclusivity is of course not unique to the Belhar Confession. It is found in the Freedom Charter's emphasis that South Africa belongs to all who live in it. On this basis the option of an inclusive democracy has become the cornerstone of the South African constitution, which calls all the institutions, including the church, to be an inclusive institution without any unfair discrimination. Such a shared emphasis on inclusivity may be attractive for the sake of a public way of doing theology, moreover on the admission of ministers of the Word to the public ministry, with special reference to women, disabled people, lesbians and gay men. In this article the focus is on language as a challenge to ministry and a tool to exclude deaf and dumb ministers from full service to the church despite all other abilities.

As with any decision a church, social club or society can take regarding people with a disability, what is at stake here is the question of human dignity. In the early world the term *dignitas* (dignity) denoted to a person's place and part in the society. One's value as a human being was determined by the status of one's *dignitas* or social position. When the concept dignitas was engaged by early Christian thinkers, its meaning changed fundamentally. Dignity was now viewed as something that fits equally to all, since it is not based on someone's social standing, but on the fact that he or she is an object of God's love and concern (Brand 2013:71–72). Furthermore, Brand (2013) argues that, by contrast, many theologians have postulated that dependence and vulnerability as such are not to be regarded as undignified, and can even be viewed as reflective expressions of human dignity. In order to understand dependence and vulnerability rightly, people should not value it for its own sake, but for its function within a broader, dynamic context of relationality. The church or the community of faith or society does not grant dignity to its members and to every child of God, but is called merely to recognise, celebrate, proclaim and act according to that dignity. The responsibility of the community of faith is to recognise and respect the dignity that is already and always there from God. The one who grants dignity is God, and it is because human beings are in good relationship with God. Wolterstorff (2008) even argues that the most well-known theistic rationale for human dignity, namely, that humans are created in the image of God, is an insufficient basis for human dignity. This is the situation because the *imago Dei* concept has, for some, the ideal functioning of a perfect human being with various capacities in mind. He argues that human dignity finds its strongest and most adequate basis in the love of God. He utilises Augustine's identification of three types of love to describe the divine love which is the foundation of human dignity. Human dignity is something that is given to all humanity by

God, and the church and the world need to recognise what is already given by God. In this sense inclusivity for all humanity disregards their physical appearance, challenges and disability. Language as a barrier that calls for dependence and vulnerability should not be seen as indignity to the person who could not use sound language, but the function of that person is very important.

Ecclesiological practice and shortcomings on people with a disability from a human dignity perspective

Research on the need for including ministers with hearing impairments in full ministry in Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

Descriptively, in terms of what is happening in URCSA ecclesiologically, and politically, there is no provision in the church order and regulations of the church for ministers or candidates for ministry who are challenged by a hearing impairment. Hence the theological training of URCSA did not include the curriculum and method of teaching for people with hearing impairments in their curriculum. Based on observation and document analysis, the researcher has looked into the following documents: minutes of the General Synod of URCSA and the church order. In the church order, it was found that to become a member in URCSA one needs to be a member of the church, and the condition to be a member is belief in Christ, therefore no physical or mental condition can be used to discriminate any member for any opportunity in URCSA (church order – Article 3, 2012). The following points were found in the minutes of the General Synodical commission in Durban 2013:

- GSC confirms the decision passed at General Synod 2012 about the need for ministers to serve the hearing impaired communities.
- GSC takes cognisance of the request of the Cape Regional Synod MFTT to license Betty Wanza[3] at their next Licensing ceremony scheduled for 24 November 2013.
- GSC reiterates that ministers are called by God to spread the good news.
- GSC confirms our own inability to accommodate hearing impaired ministerial students into our current ministerial formation centres.
- GSC endorses the Curriculum of DCMA as sufficient in meeting the minimum standards for entrance to the ministry.
- GSC affirms that URCSA does not have a concept of licensing with 'limited competence' ('beperkte bevoegdheid') like the DRC, and that a hearing impaired person who is licensed on the basis of the DCMA curriculum can minister to all members of URCSA, like any other URCSA minister.
- GSC affirms that this is a new beginning for URCSA in its ministry to hearing impaired people, requiring a new commitment to this ministry and to furthering the formation of other impaired ministerial students.

3.Betty Wanza is the first female minister who is challenged by hearing impairment to be lincenced by URCSA as a full candidate for ministry without limiting her to serve certain groups of the church.

- GSC approves the request of Cape MFTT to license Betty Wanza at their forthcoming licensing ceremony. (URCSA Minutes 2013:86)

Based on the above findings, it will be very interesting to carry out further research about the whereabouts of this candidate for ministry and where she is ministering and how she is coping with the members of the congregation and the colleagues in the presbytery. It will be important to investigate from the literature how language has impacted on the ministry of the Word.

Language as a barrier to ministry of the Word in the church

Language is said to communicate when others understand the meaning of our sentences, and we, in turn, understand theirs. Communication, of course, is not limited to language; we convey much information to others non-verbally by gestures and other means. The church in Africa is an offspring of the church from another part of the world that is using a different language to convey the message of God to the African people. Language was a serious barrier for missionaries to spread the Word of God to African people and they were trained and licenced with limited competence to serve the African church in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) family. Likewise, people living with hearing and speaking challenges who wish to be licenced as ministers of the Word in URCSA and DRCSA will experience the same problem as foreign missionaries who struggle to communicate with African people in the African languages.

Language is very important in the life of a congregation. The minister needs to use language to preach to the congregation; for administrative purposes; house visitations; conducting training and workshops for congregants; and for counselling. During the process of establishing the daughter churches, the mother church trained ministers for the specific purpose of serving the daughter churches in this regard, this minister was licenced for that purpose only and they were not allowed to accept a call to the mother church congregation and therefore they were licenced with limited competence to serve the church of the 'heathens' and to convert heathens to be Christians in a special way. In this case the educational standard of the ministers for black congregations was the key factor to limit their competence to serve the mother church congregation, but not the language, while language was also a barrier for ministry as Afrikaans-, English- or Dutch-speaking ministers who are supposed to serve the Setswana-, Sesotho- or Zulu-speaking congregations who will not understand the language and context of the minister. The church at that time trained the assistant minister (Evangelist) from the converts to assist the minister to convey the message, sometimes using informal sign language to convey the message. Deaf ministers had the same challenge as the missionaries had the language as a barrier to their ministry.

The central area of concern for me is the language of instruction, preaching and communication in a congregation which will

be served by the minister of the Word who is living with a hearing and speaking disability. It is always important for any organisation like a church, school or business that is in the process of development to do a comparative study of the area of concern, in this other language. The church needs to study and copy from organisations like I-MAG, which was more concerned about multilingualism. Brand (2013) indicates that:

> I-MAG was established as an alliance of individuals and organizations seeking, through advocacy and community project, and in the spirit of the language clause in the South African Bill of Rights, to promote multilingualism, which can be defined as 'more people using more languages in more registers and in more domains'. Central areas of concern for the organization were the languages of instruction and communication in primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions; the fair distribution of airtime on the television and radio stations of the public broadcaster; equitable language use in the state organs such as parliament, government department and the courts; and the interaction between different language communities in the country. (p. 67)

Brand (2013:67) argued it very well in terms of equality and fair distribution of time allocated for all languages, but the problem is the promotion of multilingualism which is the promotion of a dominating language like English and Afrikaans at the expense of other languages and the dominating language becoming the standard for other languages. In the spirit of this article sign language will be rated in terms of the vocal languages, for example, the airtime on the radio station allocated to other languages, deaf people will not be included in the conversation. The language barrier is a challenge experienced by many, if not all ministers of URCSA and DRCSA as ministers from these churches are suffering from an inability to communicate in all South African languages, including sign language. The inability to perform certain duties does not qualify a person to be regarded as disabled and restricted from fully participating in the ministry of the church and society.

In most cases, people realised that they are also handicapped by several misconceptions they have about sign language. The hearing thought that signs in these languages were transcriptions of words from other languages such as Afrikaans, Xhosa or English. They had not realised that sign languages are languages in their own right, each with a distinctive vocabulary and grammar. Nor had they understood the implication that, for deaf people, learning to read coincides with learning a new language, the sounds of which are, to them, inaudible. Sign languages were artificially designed, like mathematics or computer languages, not realising that sign languages are as much natural languages as any South African official languages, and therefore the differences between sign languages from different parts of the world had not resulted from a 'lack of planning', but from the very same factors that account for the differences between Afrikaans, French, Setswana and Papiamento, namely spontaneous linguistic evolution (Baynton 1996:108; Marschark & Hauser 2012:102; Reagan 2006:330). Sign languages might

be a barrier like any other languages that are communicated to the people of different language. In the same spirit sign languages or the inability to communicate verbally do not qualify a person to be labelled 'disabled' and unable to perform the function that is performed by a person who can speak with the sound language.

It is of paramount importance that, to understand disability, one has to realise that disability is socially constructed and relative, not merely in a linguistic or discursive sense. In the concrete political sense that the severe restrictions to full participation in society associated with certain inabilities are to a large extent a function of how society is structured. For example, in a society in which it is strictly required of everyone to write with their right hand, left-handedness is regarded, and actually functions, as a disability, since it restricts many left-handed people's access to full literacy. In the same way, if sign language speakers could use their language in virtually all domains of life, as Swahili speakers in Tanzania can, their inability to hear would be much less socially restrictive than it is currently. For argument's sake, does this not apply to every language that is socially marginalised? Are not speakers of such languages, in so far as they struggle to communicate effectively in the dominant language of their society, in some sense disabled (Brand 2013:70)? He furthermore indicates that, in this connection I-MAG has spoken of the fact that language can be used either to limit or extend access, participation and opportunities for the majority of South Africans who are poor and marginalised and do not understand English (or vocal language). Perhaps one might argue against this comparison on the grounds that since hearing people can learn to use the dominant language effectively, they are not condemned to the exclusive use of their mother tongue (Brand 2013:70).

Pastoral care as affirmation of human dignity

The church is a shepherding community and it needs to stand where God stands, meaning on the side of the people who are dependent, vulnerable and disabled. However, it must be recognised and noted that persons with a disability who need extra attention and pastoral care for their wellbeing in the flock are excluded from life, witness and ministry of the church. Therefore, it is important for the members of the congregation and ministers of the Word and Sacraments to understand what pastoral care in a context of disability ministry is all about and how it can be rendered to persons with a disability in the church, moreover the ministers of the Word and Sacraments with a disability. (Samadhanam & Elmoraj 2015:15). It is not that the church needs to include persons with hearing impairments or persons with disabilities in ministry, but the church needs to provide pastoral care to those ministers of the Word and the congregations to create an enabling environment for the work of God through these ministers.

Pastoral care will be the first step the church needs to take, to prepare ministers with a hearing impairment or a person

with a disability in order to journey with them to total inclusion in the full ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Samadhanam and Elmoraj (2015:15) indicate that, to render pastoral care, one needs to understand, define and practice drawing the building bricks from sources like the Scripture, history, experience, faith tradition and confessions in quality with the changing contexts, needs and challenges. Furthermore, they identify the 10 approaches in pastoral care for the persons with a disability or hearing impairments, and for the sake of this study only four of these approaches will be briefly discussed.

Essence and basic functions

In the context of this article, pastoral care will be needed as a helping act done by the representative Christian persons directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of the troubled persons, whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meaning and concerns (Clebsch & Jaekle 1967:4). Gathering from the above argument pastoral care involves four primary functions, namely healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling. In the normative way, what ought to happen in URCSA is to include the ministers of the Word, who are persons with a disability, verses persons that are licenced and left in the dark without calls to serve in the congregations, nor pastoral care to take the journey with them. Koopman (2010) argues that, in terms of healing and restoring, the rebuilding of dignity in the framework of Christ's priestly work implies that brokenness will be healed, and that estrangement will be overcome. The church and society, with its various forms of brokenness and alienation, need the dignifying work of Jesus Christ the priest through pastoral care.

Sustaining care

Sustaining care can be captured in the definition of pastoral care. Hiltner (1956:68) defines pastoral care as the quest for the good a person can achieve through the ministry of cleansing of one's psychopathology in a path of sustained guidance leading into a realm of reconciliation where the person with a disability reorients and reorganises him or herself in a context of life's experience of physical or mental disability. Furthermore, in his book 'The Christian shepherd: Some Aspect of Pastoral Care' he reflects on sustaining:

> But sustaining is meant that aspect of the shepherding perspective that emphasizes standing by! Unlike healing, in which the total situation is capable of change, sustaining relates to situations that as total situations cannot be changed or at least cannot be changed at this time… Sustaining is the ministry of support and encouragement through standing by when what had been a whole has been broken, or impaired and is incapable of total situational restoration, at least now. (Hiltner 1959:20)

It is a fact that the church cannot do anything to change the situation of the person with a disability, in this case the candidate for ministry who is challenged by hearing impairment, if the church cannot bring total restoration to the situation then the church needs to change the environment.

The environment needs to be an enabling environment. For the church to maintain an enabling environment for the person with a disability, sustaining care needs to be the core business of the church. This is the case in URCSA, where they realised that they are the church of Belhar Confession, and they need to stand where God stands, so they approved the use of the *DCMA curriculum* for its students who are physically and mentally challenged. URCSA needs to take this decision further, by providing steps and means on how they will stand by these ministers in their ministry. As is stated in the Belhar Confession, God stands with such people and the church needs to stand where God stands (Belhar Confession 1986).

Inclusive care

It is very important for pastoral care to be a ministry of shepherding care which is being rendered in addition to Christian representatives, even by other religious groups, towards persons with a disability hailing from different peoples, groups and communities. Pastoral care is all about how those pains and possibilities relate to the person's possibilities of a joyful relationship with God and other human beings; by means of directly relating to the person or persons. The relationship can take the form of teaching, guiding, crisis intervention, and sustaining, reconciling, celebrating, encouraging, disciplining or performing acts of physical or psychological healing; can be momentary or sustained over decades; can be verbal, physical or take the form of communication; but is always an attempt to represent the love of God and the church for the recipient of care (Samadhanam & Elmoraj 2015:21). It is of pivotal importance for the URCSA to apply this care for its members and ministers who are challenged by disability, inclusively.

Modifying attitudes

In most cases in the church buildings and church service, the environment is not conducive for persons with a disability or the environment is not enabling for these persons. This goes with the environment that is created for the persons with a hearing impairment as audience and as the sender of the message (minister of the Word). It becomes normal and acceptable to the congregation and the minister of the Word who can communicate verbally to serve the congregation that has persons with hearing impairments, but abnormal and unacceptable for the same congregation to be ministered by a minister who has a hearing impairment. This is a matter of attitude towards people with a disability. This particular pastoral care needs to be taken very seriously if the church wants to address such a challenge. Samadhanam and Elmoraj (2015:20) indicate that persons with a disability live not only in their own lives of pain and suffering, but are also forced to encounter difficulties such as inaccessible structures, spaces and minds to perform to the best of their ability, like the minister who is challenged by language: in terms of sign language would it be possible but improper for her to serve in a congregation that is using verbal or sound language? Van Dongen-Gerrad (1983:2) asserts that the pivotal

aim of pastoral care for physically disabled people is to alleviate their vulnerability as far as possible by assisting able-bodied people to modify their attitudes and relationships with disabled-bodied people and their families.

The entire mind-set of human beings is filled with attitudes of an able body that has no deformity or malfunction. These attitudes reflect through human thought processes, behaviour and actions. Attitudinal barriers are best seen and felt in stigma and discrimination that the persons with disabilities experience in the church and society. When the Regional Synod of Cape made an application to the URCSA GSC to license one of their candidates who was challenged by a hearing impairment they were clouded by the human thought processes, behaviour and actions of the church and society, forgetting the church order instruction on Article 3 of the membership that the only condition to be a member in URCSA is belief in Christ; no gender, colour, race or ability is considered. The request was to license Betty Wanza within the line of the DRC licensing people with 'limited competence' (GSC Agenda, 2013). The church could have agreed to this arrangement, then the church could have excluded the candidate from full participation in the church, to the advantage of the able-bodied. In this context, pastoral care should work towards transforming all the existing physical structures, spaces and minds. Furthermore, disability friendly church order, regulations and policies should be worked on to create an enabling environment for all members of the church who believe in Christ.

Findings, recommendations and conclusion

In conclusion, the researcher has come to the realisation that human dignity is God's gift, equal to the unity of the church, also embedded in the Confession of Belhar, and the people of God need to recognise, celebrate and proclaim this gift. Furthermore, it is noted that URCSA possesses the Belhar Confession that demands from this church to stand where God stands. The challenge is that the URCSA church order and regulations are written in accordance with the Confession, with exclusion of the regulations that address where the church stands in terms of people with disabilities and the creation of an enabling environment. It was found that this church has taken a step further by approving the training of ministers of the Word who are challenged by hearing impairments, and licenced the first candidate in 2013

with the full status of minister of the Word and Sacraments. The challenge is how to utilise this minister in all congregations without barriers like the ministers who served former black congregations without the knowledge of the language of the congregation. Finally, pastoral care should be the key aspect used to create an enabling environment for these ministers.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

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