

IPM SYNOD ELECTS NEW OFFICERS AND CHARTS FUTURE PLANS

By Doug Tilton

The Presbyterian Church (USA)'s partner in Mozambique, the *Igreja Presbiteriana de Moçambique* (IPM), held its annual National Synod meeting 18-21 July at Filadelfia parish in the Matola neighbourhood of Maputo.

The Synod celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Ministers' Retirement Fund, which was established in 1919 by the Swiss Mission which had helped to found the church. In addition to approving the budget and plans for the coming year, the Synod addressed a range of business, including:

Disaster relief: The IPM collected clothing, food, building materials and cash to assist households affected by Cyclones Idai and Kenneth, earlier in the year. In the immediate aftermath of the storms, the resources that they collected were turned over to the National Institution for Disaster Management to be distributed in the affected regions. In doing so, the IPM demonstrated its commitment to being in solidarity with all those affected by the storms and flooding—not simply the church's own members. Now that the crisis has subsided, the IPM is able to consider ways to enhance the long-term resilience of congregations and the communities that they serve. One approach being considered is the establishment of an IPM Disaster Relief fund.

Tertiary education: The IPM and other denominations that jointly sustain United Seminary of Ricatla are developing plans to expand the seminary into a university. The ecumenical institution on the outskirts of Maputo was founded in 1958 by a group of Protestant churches. Today, it trains pastors for seven member churches: United Methodist, Wesleyan Methodist, Presbyterians, Evangelical Church of Christ, the United Congregational Church of Mozambique (UCCM), the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) – Mozambique Synod, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The churches' vision is to add two more faculties: Law and another Humanities faculty, still to be determined.

Elections: The Synod elected officers as



Six new pastors were ordained, including Rev. Paulo Mafunga, centre, and Rev. Jose Bazima (to his right in blue suit).

it does every four years. In an effort to enhance accountability and transparency, they used a new system this year. Separate elections were held for each officer, in lieu of the previous practice of voting on competing “slates” of candidates for all offices. In addition,

election officers counted the votes of the 223 delegates in front of the entire synod after each ballot, tallying the votes on a flip-chart as the names were read out. With nine officers to be elected, it made for a long process, but it also rendered the results highly credible and promoted broad acceptance of outcomes. In the end, Rev. Obed Baloi, the current President of Synodal Council (a role similar to General Secretary) was re-elected for a second four-year term. Rev. Valente Tseco—who is also Executive Director of the Bible Society of Mozambique—was elected Synod President (a role similar to Moderator), filling the vacancy left by the passing of the late Rev. Ernesto Langa earlier this year.

Several thousand people from numerous congregations came together to take part in a joyous closing worship service on Sunday, July 21.

The service also provided an opportunity for the church to install the newly elected officers as well as

the Presidents of the IPM's fourteen presbyteries (three of whom are women). The IPM also ordained six new ministers at the closing service. It was a particular joy to witness the ordinations of Rev. Paulo Mafunga and Rev. Jose Bazima, both of whom had studied at Justo Mwale University in Lusaka, Zambia, with scholarship assistance from PC(USA) congregations.



Rev. Valente Tseco, the new IPM Synod President, signs the register at his induction

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