**Open Letter to the Congregations
of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba**

Dear sisters, dear brothers:

Greetings in Christ from the General Council of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba (IPRC).

Our country is going through a situation unprecedented in its most recent history. Although other moments have been critical, the one we are living today adds unprecedented circumstances, such as the impact of Covid-19, to which are added already existing situations, which now, due to the pandemic, are aggravated. The blockade by the government of the United States of America has been intensified as never before, as well as international lobbying to sanction and limit Cuba because of its political and social model.

On the other hand, the renewal processes within our country, for an economic reordering and under the political and social assumptions of the "Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution", have not resulted in sufficient welfare for the Cuban family in particular, nor for society in general.

These and many other factors bring us face to face with a vision of history and the homeland whose social, political and economic course confronts us with a crisis for which many of the "reserves" that were available in similar situations years ago have been exhausted. This exhaustion leaves our society with an unfavorable balance to face, in a resilient manner, the current crisis.

It is worth noting that values such as solidarity and hospitality are still part of Cuba's present, and are the essence for many people and communities, but they are becoming fragile in the face of the advance of individualism, immobility and apathy. In addition, and as part of a trend that reaches beyond our borders, the rise of fundamentalism, in all its expressions, interrupts any intention that invites processes of dialogue, integration and unity, so necessary in the Cuban Church and society and for which the ecumenical movement and other actors of the civil society have been working.

In the midst of these vicissitudes, the mission of the church stands in its capacity to confirm values, to unite, to heal. At the present juncture, we thank God because he has given us the privilege of experiencing that we are a true family, and that celebrating the good news is not limited to that sacred place which is the temple, but that through our gifts in the Spirit we maintain our bonds and commitments in multiple ways, as sacred as our sanctuaries.

We thank God that the diaconal work of our local churches has overcome the many challenges that have been presented to us and we have continued to serve many people in need in the name of Jesus. In addition, we have strengthened our friendship in the Lord, we have accompanied sick people, known or unknown, we have practiced prayer both in cries and in outstretched hands in the face of any call to solidarity. We can say that we are a better church because we have exercised as never before the fruits of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control" (Gal 5:22), and although we have been physically distant, we are now more united in the bond of Christ's love (Eph 4:3).

There are many tensions that today saturate the Cuban social panorama. As the IPRC we confirm that it is the vocation to peace, reconciliation and unity, the sign that should mark the present and future of our nation, and in particular the human and institutional relations. We advocate that justice, participation and respect for diversity be the basis for the construction of a society "with all and for the good of all", which appeals to the potential of each person and context. We also recognize that God's love is for all creation and that his option will always be on the side of "the least of these" (Mt 25: 31-45).

Our faith, based on the example of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, has an indissoluble link with social and political commitment. Defending a cause under the ethical imprint of love-justice, which is the starting point and culmination of the renewed message of the sovereign reign of God in history, mobilizes actions that irremediably have a political concreteness. The ways in which social relations develop, are organized and structured in a particular historical moment involve the church as an active agent of society, participating under the same conditions as any other actor in civil society.

Thus, the church can stop or accelerate processes of liberation-slavery, inclusion-exclusion, participation-apathy, depending on its position more or less distant from the prophetic referent proper to the Gospel. Therefore, to say that our assumptions, approaches and actions as IPRC have a political repercussion is, first of all, an account of an (irreducible) condition that is proper to it, and confirms a Christian conception in general and a Reformed one in particular, in which faith and politics are not excluded, but are organically related.

Our Reformed tradition gives each member of our church sufficient biblical freedom and preparation to live the faith under the authority of Scripture, which is the only rule of practice and faith that we know, according to our own Constitution.

We wish, however, to affirm today some basic principles that, both in Baptism and in the public confirmation of faith, are declared by every member of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba. Our Constitution, whether in the Book of Order or in the Book of Confessions, upholds principles that are part of our Reformed and Presbyterian identity.

Therefore, based on that confessional identity, embodied in these documents that have shed light throughout history for our work in the world, we affirm that:

* "Our church is an open and inclusive community, responsive to human diversity both within it and in the society in which it is exercising its ministry"(1). "We have a co-mission as the body of Christ, that of being instruments of God's mission for all human beings and all Creation" (2).
* "We believe that the church should be open to all people and to the variety of gifts with which God blesses all human beings, to be an inclusive church that guarantees the active and responsible participation of all people" (3).
* We believe that the function of the Church is not to dominate over others, but to practice service effectively, as did Jesus Christ, who accompanies us to the end of time, and whose word cannot be chained (4).
* We believe that Salvation is the story of the reconstruction of the human being as a communitarian being. The creation of a new human being means the establishment of a new community life in a new society, where there is no room for the exploitation of the work of others, nor for racial discrimination; nor for the submission of women as objects of commercial or sexual consumption; nor for the self-interested use of the legitimate values of family life for the benefit of the false interests of the classist and discriminating society (5).
* We affirm that the Church finds in love, and only in love, all the theological material with which to formulate its doctrinal truths. The doctrinal development of the Church and all the doctrines it has elaborated through the centuries are valid, as long as they make more explicit for us the loving purpose of God towards the human being" (6).
* Our church believes that it must help people in any kind of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and oppose any kind of injustice, so that right may flow like waters and justice like inexhaustible stream (7).
* We affirm that the Church must be juridically separated from the State, which does not mean that she resigns from her historical-political responsibility, but that she proclaims the truth of the Gospel, only trusting in her Lord and captive of Jesus Christ. In this way it finds its place in the human-historical process of integral recovery. To this end, the Church does not spare the sacrifices that are necessary to fulfill its mission, whose peculiarity varies according to the time and place it has had to live (8).

Today in Cuba, and sadly from many groups of believers, aggressive speeches and campaigns for a supposed "holy war" are multiplying, which are far from the proposal of the Gospels and the project of the Reign of God that Jesus himself preached, in tune with the prophetic tradition with which he thus identified himself: "The Spirit of God is upon me, because he has consecrated me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim liberty to the prisoners and to give sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord. " (Lk 4:18-19).

Among the stated causes of these manifestations of intolerance and violence are, on the one hand, the announced plebiscite to which the renewed Family Code will be submitted and also, on the other hand, the decree of the Ministry of Education that orients a comprehensive sex education program in our schools. Many churches have expressed their disagreement with these initiatives. They argue that it would be an attack on the cultural traditions and morals of our nation.

We respect these positions and the right to express them publicly, but we do not share them, since we believe that they do not translate, from our tradition and understanding of the Scriptures, what God's will is for all of his children, much less when they are accompanied by an aggressive discourse that is far from the conciliatory spirit of the example of Jesus Christ who said: "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the good news (the gospel) of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and all strive to enter it" (Lk16:16).

In this sense, there have been incidents of intolerance in social networks against the positions of members of our Church or ecumenical activists who critically assume the study of the Holy Scriptures, and whose theology is rooted in the context and responds coherently to the current needs of the people.

Our Church, also founder of the Council of Churches of Cuba, which this year celebrates its 80th anniversary, regrets the campaign of discredit and fallacies directed at this beloved institution, whose history and commitment to the churches and the Cuban people have been its slogan not only in words, "United to serve", but in concrete deeds of loving solidarity.

We want to affirm our ecumenical commitment and our loyalty to an institution that has respected the diversity of doctrines and ways of understanding the mission of the Church and the Bible that inspires it, and has shown integrity and generosity which have even reached non-member churches and many sectors of the State institutions, with the sole intention of serving the Christian people in particular and the Cuban people of which we are a part.

In view of these actions, the IPRC:

* Calls for respectful dialogue from the diversity of ways of understanding the Bible and mission of the church, as well as the Cuban reality and its challenges.
* Affirms that freedom in Christ is a strength that we must take care of for the edification of his body which is the church, One and Universal.
* Rejects all forms of violence, whether verbal, physical or in any of its expressions as a presumed way to solve conflicts.
* Supports all initiatives, governmental or otherwise, that promote justice, equity and the rights of all people and creation, particularly those that defend the rights of sectors that have been discriminated against or silenced in the social arena.
* Pray to God that we may be agents of reconciliation, peace and love, fruits of the Spirit in whom we are and move.
* It commits itself to continue working so that, although we may think differently, we may be able to promote peace among sisters and brothers, among Cubans, wherever they may be.
* It advocates for plurality, inclusion and respect for different opinions to mark the processes of dialogue that the current times demand at all levels of society. Therefore, it supports all initiatives, governmental or otherwise, that advocate the construction of an inclusive society, in which respect and the ability to dialogue peacefully is the banner.
* It urges the creation of spaces for citizen participation in which a diversity of opinions and contributions to the present and future of the country can converge.

Certainly, there are many practical uncertainties as a Church: when will we be able to congregate again in our temples? When will we be able to hold our Synod Assembly, pending since February of this year? When will we be able to reconvene our judiciaries? We must continue to devise ways to remain active as a church, united in spirit and connected both in traditional ways and through the new tools that social networks and other media offer us.

Although daily life becomes more difficult and the challenges are ever greater, in the midst of them there are also signs of God's love: in every action of solidarity that we do for our neighbor and God's creation, in the health personnel who care for so many sick people and work tirelessly so that we can soon be an immune population, in the visible or anonymous work of workers, professionals, farmers, people who work in the private or domestic sector, or in the service sector. There are many testimonies of how life is making its way in the midst of difficulties!

"The IPRC, with a deep sense of its apostolicity and catholicity, calls on all human beings to join in the task of fully realizing on earth the new humanity that would mean the establishment of a fraternal and supportive community that, embracing all equally, achieves love as its supreme law" (9).

Dear brothers, dear sisters, may God's blessing flow in every daughter and son of his so that, in our church, in our nation and in the world, we may create a worthy place for justice, peace, reconciliation and forgiveness.

"And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." (James 3:18)

**IPRC General Council**
June 26 in the year of our Lord 2021
131st Anniversary of the Presbyterian Work in Cuba

(1) Form of Government IPRC, FG. G-1.0100 d
(2) Form of Government IPRC FG. G-1.0200 a
(3) Form of Government IPRC FG. G-3.0204
(4) Ref. Declaration of Barmen, 8.20-8-27, Book of Confessions, edited by the Publications Dept. IPRC, Havana 1977.
(5) Ref. IPRC Confession of Faith 1977, 3.C.01, 3.C.02.
(6) IPRC Confession of Faith 1977, 1.
(7) Belhar Confession
(8) IPRC Confession of Faith 1977, 3.E.04, 3.
(9) Declaración de Fe 1977, IPRC, Prefacio 0.07