

A MISSIONAL CHURCH AND THE FORMATION OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP.

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For about two decades now, the MCSA proclaims a vision of a Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations and is guided by a mission statement of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ for healing and transformation. The strategy towards our vision and mission has been the mission imperatives:

1. A deepened spirituality as individuals and as a Christian community.
2. Justice and service in church and society.
3. Evangelism and Church growth which builds up the people of God.
4. Empowerment and development which gives dignity and new purpose to those who are deprived.
5. Education and Christian formation.

While we talk and do “mission”, this topic begs us ask a question whether we can call the MCSA “ a missional church”.

The term “ missional” has become a buzz word that has come to mean many things in the “ new church” or non- denominational churches conversations and literature. The missional church movement has emerged from the West as a voice calling for a return to the church’s inherent missionary nature and identity. The nature and the identity of the church is patterned after what God has done in Jesus Christ. God sent Jesus Christ to redeem God’s creation. Jesus sends the church to continue the mission of God in the world.

McNeal (2009) in his book “ Missional Renaissance “ defines missional in this way, “ Missional is a way of living, not affiliation or activity. Its emergence springs from a belief that God is changing his conversation with the world and with the church.(Look! , I am making all things new “ Rev 21:5) Being missional involves an active engagement with this new conversation to the point that it guides every aspect of the life of the missional believer. To think and live missionally means seeing all life as a way to be engaged with the mission of God in the world.” (p. 14)

This is one of the many definitions of missional, which can offer us a lens to view ourselves as individual believers and as a community. For the MCSA to be

missional every individual member needs to think and live missionally- actively engage with what God is doing in the world.

The MCSA has not been unaware of the role of an individual member in making the church what it should be. In the past three years we have been reclaiming discipleship. Through the Conference theme, “ Together, a transforming discipleship movement” we have been reminded that we are not just members of the church, but we are first and foremost followers of Christ, following Him into participating in God’s mission in the world. Discipleship is key to missional living. It is the building block for the missional church. It is correctly argued that leaders who want to lead communities of faith with a missional ethos must focus their attention and efforts on discipleship. “ Without a plan for making disciples, any missional thing you launch will be an event and will be completely unsustainable”. (Breen 2011)

Questions:

1. What discipleship programs has leaders in your society/circuit put in place/ is being followed?
2. What new thing is God making through me / my society/ circuit/ organisation?
3. What can be done to encourage missional living in the MCSA?

FORMATION OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

Formation refers to the process of giving shape or form. If we were to talk about the formation of a human being in general- we know that human beings are formed by families and by societies in which they live- including the institutions to which they are exposed. It is a general assumption that children receive their first formation from parents / guardians. By the time they attend school, the basic formation language is already formed i.e. “ Yes”, “No”, thank you etc. As the child grows s/he picks up different languages and values (good or bad). At the end this human being will be influenced and molded by the teachings, the experiences and the support (coaching)s/he gets or not get to become a responsible or not responsible person.

In the Wesleyan church context formation refers to the process of shaping believers towards the spiritual, character and intellectual capacity necessary for disciples of Christ. As Wesleyans, we understand that every disciple is on a life-long journey of formation towards Christian Perfection. The Holy Spirit forms us continually to be more like Christ.

The question to discuss however, is about the formation of transformative leadership in the MCSA. **What processes do we need to put in place to shape those in the leadership of our church so that they lead us to missional living?**

Leadership in the MCSA is shared between the clergy and the laity. It has been pointed out however, that clergy are leaders of mission and they are role models of leadership in congregations. The need to form transformative ministers in the MCSA was identified in 2004 when Conference appointed the Commission to Review Ministerial Training and Theological Education. The work of that commission gave birth to Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary and its vision “ Forming transforming leaders for Church and Nation”. Those trained at SMMS are expected to be leaders among other things :

1. Whose spiritual life has been formed and continues to be nourished by the gospel and by the rich traditions of Christian Spirituality and Wesleyan heritage.
2. Whose personal conduct and way of life are above reproach and an example to others
3. Who have passion to call people to Christian discipleship.
4. Who respect the dignity of all people, resist injustice and seek to empower all people, especially the poor and marginalized, to develop their potential as children of God. (MCSA 2005:2)

These are not new expectations that the commission thumb sucked. They have been expectations for Methodist clergy since John Wesley’s time. Now it is a fact that SMMS and Seminaries before it have and will always have a great contribution in the formation of clergy. For the period of attending seminary, knowledge and examples are given. Spiritual formation and character formation systems are put in place and followed to shape seminarians into maturing disciples. New learnings and skills are acquired and the prospective church leaders are equipped for the task ahead of them.

It is critical at this point to note that formation of an individual adult can only be achieved by the individual him/herself. Others can provide guidance, but the ultimate decision to seek maturity and to strive towards holiness is for an individual to make. Some of the ministers in training come out of the Seminary with maturing spirituality and enthusiasm, ready to change the world!

The question is what kind of leadership do they find in the church they get sent to? What do those who have experience of being church leaders model for the new ones? What kind of lay leaders do they find in their societies and circuits?

There is an entrenched understanding of leadership in the MCSA which is a blockage to the transformation we so desire. Leadership continues to be seen as power over others, domination, about self gain and popularity, insisting on keeping things the same etc. Our systems of electing leadership and of accounting to those we lead leave a lot to be desired.

If as a church we are serious about forming transformative clergy, I suggest :

1. we take continuing ministerial formation seriously. It cannot be that ordination is the end of the formation process for clergy. Maturing towards Christian perfection is a lifelong process. We must invest as much to post-ordination training as we do to probationer training. The challenges of our contexts demand a minister who can move beyond a focus on his/her own well-being, toward a greater understanding of his/her role in the mission of God. Every minister requires ongoing personal and systematised formation in leadership, theology and spirituality.
2. How about formalising small groups/ classes for clergy? Holiness in Wesleyan theology is never personal and individualistic. Through these ministers across racial, gender, and age divides would care for one another, pray for each other and lasting relationships could be developed.
3. There is need to strengthen a sense of mutual accountability among our ministry. Leadership is about responsibility and accountability. We have as a church well organised systems of accountability and yet they get bypassed or ignored. There is need to create platforms for wrestling with the moral and religious character of ministry, what is called "watching

over one another in love". There are district Bishops who have identified this need and have begun to have ministers Convocations and I believe these must take place across the Connexion.

4. There is need for the present leadership to courageously model transformative and missional leadership. People learn better by seeing than just hearing.

What about Lay leadership? Who forms them? How do we form our Class Leaders, Sunday School Teachers, Presidents of organisations, Society and Circuit Stewards to be transformative leaders?

The ongoing process of discipleship which leads to spiritual and moral maturity is key to transformative leadership whether lay or clergy. Every minister has the responsibility for the spiritual growth of the members in the congregation.

The challenge that some of lay leadership has is understanding their ministry as serving and pleasing the clergy/ presidents. The other opposite of the spectrum is lay leadership that abuse and undermine the clergy. As I understand leadership in our church is shared between clergy and laity and together they are servants of God. The mission of God is central for both.

1. There is however, a great need to encourage and insist on missional ways of identifying lay leadership. The love of God, spiritual maturity and willingness to serve are key in identifying a leader.
2. I dream of the day when the MCSA will do away with automatic leaders. That might be too difficult, but then ensure that they focus on God's mission and not on themselves. When those with the character and gifts for leadership have been identified there is need to ensure they are given leadership skills.
3. There is need for vigorous teaching on Methodism and on the mission of the church. Sometimes lay leaders are appointed based on their secular leadership and are not helped to grasp the transformative values of the church.
4. Again- those in leadership must be made to account. (reports, follow up etc.)

If the MCSA seeks to be an authentic missional church it must invest in forming and re-forming its leadership, clergy and lay. The kind of leadership we have is

key to our mission. Analysing the African challenges, a catholic theologian Louse Kretchmar, in her article, “ The indispensability of spiritual formation for Christian Leaders”, lists all the things we know, poverty of the masses, unemployment, violation of human rights, corrupt politicians etc. She then asks a question, “ Does the African church have the moral stature, spiritual discernment, managerial competence, to contribute to the liberation and construction of the continent?” As a church in Africa, with the vision of a healed Africa we need to ask ourselves the question. And it is a fact, that the moral stature, spiritual discernment and competence of a church is reflected by its leadership.

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