

MESSAGE TO THE METHODIST PEOPLE

Statement of the 126th Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to the Methodist people:

The 126th Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa was held in the Grahamstown District from the 23 - 27 September 2015, under the theme : TOGETHER a transforming discipleship movement ” and the sub-theme “Shaped for Mission.”

We assembled in the District which stretches from the Amatola Mountains across the dusty plains of the Karoo, from the City of Saints, Grahamstown, to the shores of the Indian Ocean, known as the heartland of Methodism in the Eastern Cape. The Grahamstown District itself produced faith pioneers who have contributed immensely to the history of our faith and country. At Graaf Reinet in the Karoo a preacher and political activist was born by the name of Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe. We note that September is the anniversary of Steve Biko’s death and this year is also the 30th anniversary of the Kairos document.

In his opening address the Presiding Bishop Ziphozihle Daniel Siwa used a variety of rich metaphors to highlight the fact that the journey is not yet finished. With “Asikaqedi” – we are not yet finished”, which was first used by the Masikhulume Group , he said that peoples’ lives are put on hold by the circumstances they are subjected to; that the people of the member countries of this Connexion are free from colonial subjugation, but “Asikaqedi.” We heard his passionate call for a Movement that has space for serious reflection, Kairos consciousness that is soaked in prayer and punctuated by moments of forgiveness and openness.

He pleaded with all to embrace the 40 year celebration of women as Presbyters, but lamented the fact that so few women have been elected to senior positions in the church. Into the future, he invited us to consider the journey of a movement that is shaped for mission. It involves seeing endless possibilities where others see empty buildings. It requires hope, and strong and effective partnerships to maximise the impact of God’s resources and connecting people with God and one another. “Asikaqedi” the journey is not yet over!

During the Bible Studies led by Rev Dr Ketshabile we were given direction for the journey. He implored us to deconstruct some of the gods that we have created and then boldly claimed as tradition. He cautioned against the domestication of God and urged us to reconstruct an authentic faith movement . As Africans we need to start drinking from our African pots and gather around the fireplaces in the villages where the stories of faith can be shared. “Asikaqedi”.

Our Conference was shaped by worship and prayer. Our Services were linguistically diverse and liturgically rich. Our joyful singing punctuated the days in a range of languages. Our Bishop sensitively allowed for moments of reflection, contemplation and prayer at significant points. A very moving Memorial Service was led by one of our fathers Rev George Irvine. We remembered 32 ministers who have walked the way before us. In our worship and our prayers we were reminded that for us- *asikaqedi* – (the journey is not yet finished).

The Lay President, in his address, aligned himself with the Presiding Bishop's theme "Asikaqedi", warning that the pace at which we move from the traditional way of doing church to .com churches should be a pace that all can journey together.

The General Secretary informed Conference about the focus points for the next 3 years:

- Starting at Conference in 2015, we celebrate 40 years since the Ordination of the first Woman Minister.
- Starting at Conference in 2016, we will celebrate a Year of Heritage. 200 years since the commencement of our witness at Leliefontein on the Cape West Coast, we pay our respects to the heroes of faith in our tradition and in our part of the world.
- Starting at Conference In 2017, we will focus on unity – reflecting on the impact of that resolution on our life together.

We were reminded of the joy and privilege of our Connexionality. Conference celebrated funds being made available from the Church Reserve Fund to station 21 Ministers and Evangelists for 2016. We applauded the financial donation to the Mozambique District.

It was with joy and appreciation that we accepted the reports from the different Units and Organisations of the work of God in the connection. They shared the work done and the challenges faced.

We acknowledged that integrity in our financial management is crucial to help us reflect the values of the kingdom of God that bears witness to the Gospel. It was with concern that we noted that this integrity is not always evident. As the plight of the vulnerable was highlighted it was clear – "asikaqedi" conference therefore welcomes the Mission congress in 2016 to find ways to continue our journey.

Conference celebrated the appointment of the new EMMU Director, Rev Purity Malinga and the SMMS President Rev Dr Simangaliso Kumalo. We are delighted with the appointments of the following bishops Revs Michel Hansrod – Cape of Good Hope, Mthobile Matyumza - Queenstown and Rev Gary Rivas. Central District.

We noted with a deep sense of appreciation Conference's awards to Mrs Jabu Mngomezulu (Natal Coastal District) and Mr Artur Mu ca Chua (Mozambique District) acknowledging their commitment, sacrifice and dedication to uplifting their communities, shining examples of our disciple movement in action.

Conference rejoiced with Bishop Michael Vorster on the awards he has received from the eThekweni Municipality as a Living Legend and Diakonia Award for his work for human rights

We congratulated Rev Dr SN Gqubule on his appointment as the first Grand Chancellor of SMMS and his award as a Distinguished Old Rhodian presented to him by Rhodes University for his immeasurable contribution in Education.

In our initial engagement with the resolutions we realised that "asikaqedi". However, as we engaged one another further we realised that each one of these resolutions spoke of a manner in which we can continue the transforming discipleship movement's journey in seeking God's desire for us as a Church. We applaud and affirm Conference in implementing the consensus method of decision making as we seek to move forward as one body of one mind and one spirit.

Conference affirmed by the imposition of hands and prayer men and women who have journeyed with God. In recognition of God's call on their lives 29 brothers and sisters were accepted into full Connexion.

Together, "asikaqedi", the transforming discipleship movement's journey, continues!