

GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

2013 CONFERENCE

1. INTRODUCTION

The theme of the Conference: **Together a transforming discipleship movement** demands that we continually expand our capacity to create results; we nurture new and expansive patterns of thinking and we constantly learn to learn together thus become a *learning community/organisation*. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to learn of His way/s.

This report is a reflection on the organisational health state of our Church. It gives a balcony view on various organisational aspects affecting the life and witness of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Like all previous reports, it is meant to open conversations on the various issues raised.

The first part is therefore a response to the Wesleyan question: How is it with (the Church's) soul? The latter part highlights certain governance and operational issues.

2. THE STATE OF THE CHURCH

2.1 Mission consciousness

As reported last year there is a welcomed emerging consciousness of the Church as a vehicle for God's mission that is reflected in the Districts', Organisational and Unit reports. Almost all the report narratives reflect stories of reaching out to the needy, the wretched, the marginalised and the vulnerable.

The Mission Unit report gives testimony to ordinary Methodist people, some in remote areas, that are embarking on extraordinary 'works of mercy' to improve the quality of life of the *least* in their communities. We cannot call ourselves Christians proclaiming to know and love Jesus and turn away from the poor.

Linked with these initiatives is a growing awareness and focus on justice and sustainability issues. There is an encouraging realisation that hand-outs without empowerment and a will to address the causes of injustice is a futile exercise.

For instance the Connexional YMG, Natal Coastal Youth, Limpopo Women's Manyano, Queenstown District Children's Ministry Practitioners (CPMs) marched against gender-based violence and women and children abuse. Such activist approaches are refreshing. In the Wesleyan tradition there is no separation between piety and social justice.

In line with this mission trend, we direct local congregations to use their buildings as **mission stations** and not just see them as **monuments** which are used by a select group once or twice a week but as centres that exist to serve the community. Jesus' agenda is about changing the world. We celebrate that more and more people are coming to know the saving power of Jesus through these Methodist mission outreaches.

2.2 The moral crisis

The Church is faced with a moral crisis. Societal moral degeneration is hastily making inroads into the Church's life. The Church is becoming morally bankrupt judging from what has been in the public and social media; correspondence, reports and telephone calls that come through our office. These range from sexual abuse; promiscuity; family violence; unashamed misuse of church money for self-enrichment; derogatory statements; blatant abuse of power; alcohol abuse, especially among ministers and pornography addiction to name but a few. These are signs of a Church that is rotting at its core. If this trend is not arrested it will destroy the very fibre of our Church community and compromise our witness.

We call on all the organisational and ministers' forums to urgently create safe spaces to address these matters and come out with practical solutions of countering these destructive forces.

The recently established ecumenical **Clergy Support Foundation** must be utilised to rehabilitate clergy who are struggling with these moral challenges.

2.3 Racism

The evil of racism (and tribalism) is rearing its insidious head and manifests itself in assorted forms and shapes within the life of the Church. The tragedy is that it goes unchallenged as it is no longer politically correct to speak about racist attitudes and tendencies.

We are still trapped in the apartheid ghetto which will in time reverse gains made in the past 20 years of moving towards a 'one and undivided' Church. We must, as a matter of urgency create platforms for life giving, *wet cement conversations* - thoughts that are open to reshaping, rethinking and reconsidering at all levels of our structure (Society, Circuit, District and Connexion).

2.4 Agency reduction

Agency reduction is a matter of great concern. During the last five years there has been a membership and assessment revenue increase but even so there has been an agency reduction in some Circuits. What is puzzling is that this has been the case in urban growth areas.

This points to a serious, misguided notion that the less the agents the better the chances of survival whereas the opposite is true. Recent surveys show that quality pastoral care and focussed individual relationship boosts membership commitment and giving.

Given our average Church attendance figures of just over 850 000 and the 711 active Circuit ministers, it means a minister ought to serve an average of 1140 members, but in reality about 70% of ministers serve in congregations that far exceed that number. The rest serve affluent congregations of less than 400 members.

If we are serious about being ***Together a transforming discipleship movement***, this is one area we cannot ignore.

2.4 'Being' and 'Doing' Church – a new paradigm

The winds of change continue to impact the way of 'being' and 'doing' Church and unless the Church takes cognisance of these and adjusts accordingly, it will lose its saltiness. 'Being' is the 'why' of our faith. It is about our identity in Christ - a new creation. 'Doing' is about the 'how' of our faith.

Reading the signs of times is a spiritual discipline that helps us to look at the world with Kingdom lenses and to see clearly what it means to be a Church in the present milieu. Reading the signs of the times is also about deeply reflecting on and engaging with the changes that are unfolding before our eyes. It is about interacting with life rather than reacting to it. It is a 'kairos' moment that focusses on ripeness (what is coming to fullness) rather than on wrongness.

Dan Dick and Evelyn Burry in their informative book, titled: **A new kind of Church**, demonstrate that people are looking for a church that they have not been able to find.

A church that:

- *Cares about the needs of the world rather than just her own needs;*
- *Spends more resources on others than on itself;*
- *Spends time out in the world sharing the good news, joining God in what He is doing in the world than it does gathered behind closed doors; and*
- Grow people into disciples - Christlikeness (my addition).

We need a new kind of Church that is able to adapt to the prevailing changes without losing its essence in the process. A new kind of church where people can find forgiveness, healing and a different way to live that only Jesus Christ offers; a new kind of church that steps out in faith and is on a disciple-making mission.

The theme of this Conference invites us to embark on such a journey.

3. GOVERNANCE

3.1 Office centralisation and restructuring

Last year's Conference directed that the Methodist Connexional Office and the Presiding Bishop's Office together with all other Units be centralised. The process of finding a home for the new offices has been achieved.

A new block of offices has been acquired in Bruma, Johannesburg and the Presiding Bishop's office will be the first to move, hopefully before the end of the year and next year will be used to facilitate the transition, consolidation and rationalisation of the work, to move and train staff thereby strengthening our Connexional character and capacity. This move has been long overdue. We thank God that this amalgamation is now in process.

3.2 Medical Insurance

As a way of alleviating the cost to minister burden, the General Treasurers have secured an insurance facility that will help reduce the Pharos member's portion of the in-hospital account. This came into effect on 1 May, 2013 and affected ministers are already enjoying the benefit. Without the Church Reserve Fund this, and many other initiatives, would not have been possible.

Continuous improvement is a hallmark of good governance.

3.3 Financial accountability and transparency

The 4C schedules that are submitted to our office reveal the following:

- That there is a limited disclosure, not all money collected/received is declared;
- That not all money collected/received is banked;
- That we are a Church that is for itself – money is spent on maintenance, rather than on mission;
- Proper financial procedures are not always followed - major contracts are signed without reference to Superintendents
- That some church funds are redirected to Circuit run Section 21 companies which is illegal.

All the above are in breach of our financial policies and procedures and we call upon all those entrusted with trust funds to adhere to standard financial accounting procedures.

3.4 Exploring new financial streams

The fast changing economic situation and the seemingly dwindling Circuit resources, dictate that we explore long term viability as directed by last year's conference. There is a need to find alternative ways of resourcing our mission. The assessment methodology needs to be urgently reviewed as it will not be sustainable in the long term.

We invite Districts and Circuits to suggest innovative ways of resourcing our mission work and operations. We are also exploring how other Churches are dealing with the challenge.

3.5 Signage

Our churches are invisible because there is no signage. How do we expect people to find us if there are no clear readable signs on the streets that point them to our worship centres?

Signage plays a significant role in converting awareness of a church's location. They carry the image and brand of our church, and grab the attention of the passer-by, act as invitations, pointers and greeters. They are the church's public interface with the world, the 'shop window' that most people will encounter first. One cannot underestimate the importance of signage as a way of attracting potential members.

We encourage all our churches, even those in rural areas to create sign posts to all Methodist churches. A set of guidelines for the uniform appearance of these signboards is being created and will be available on the Methodist Church website, www.methodist.org.za shortly.

3.6 Interesting statistics

Statistics tell a story about an organisation. The following stats show the current state:

# Ministers (active)	: 741 (599 Ordained, 83 Probationers, 59 Seminarians)
# Full time non itinerant	: 20 (6 FTNIST & 14 FTNINS - 6 Ordained, 8 Probationers)
# Part time non stipendary	: 32 (20 Ordained & 12 Probationers)
# seconded ministers	: 23
# Chaplaincy services	: 23
# Women ministers	: 127 (90 Ordained, 25 Probationers, 12 Seminarians)
# Supernumeraries	: 580 (350 Supernumeraries, 230 Widows/ Widowers)
# Deacons	: 33 (9 Stipendary, 14 FTNINS, 7 PTNINS, 3 FTNIST)
Average age of ministers	: 43 years
Average life span of ministers	: 72 years

4. SPECIAL PROJECTS

4.1 Education Focus

The Presiding Bishop's call for Methodist people to reclaim their role in education has been met with great enthusiasm throughout the Connexion.

The Education Task Team has met regularly to craft the way forward and has developed concrete action steps to ensure greater religious community impact.

Several Districts and Circuits have organised stakeholders' seminars, workshops and services to raise awareness on the education crisis especially in South Africa.

This initiative has also been taken up by certain Circuits who have intentionally engaged in issues affecting education. Parents are taking seriously their citizenry role through active participation in School Governing Boards and the education of their children. Methodist teachers are becoming more and more aware of their responsibility of nation building through education. Some ministers are offering chaplaincy services to schools in the communities' they serve.

The Women's Organisations have embarked on a number of life giving initiatives with an education focus. For instance, the Connexional Women's Manyano has renovated classrooms, donated school uniforms, computers and stationary, offered study bursaries to disadvantaged Methodist young people. The Young Women's Manyano launched its reading club campaign for primary children at its Triennial. Through this campaign they want to establish reading clubs, libraries, make reading accessible and inspire parental involvement thus reinforcing literacy.

4.2 Preserving Institutional Memory

Christianity is one of the most significant institutional forces acting on the collective memory attributed to humanity. It is our responsibility to capitalise on, and create memory banks of "institutional memories" from before, during and after our lifetime, for the benefit of this and future generations.

The importance of a development and management strategy for the MCSA's Living Heritage has emerged as a critical priority to address the challenges pertaining to a lack of a balanced and integrated approach of our heritage preservation. Strategic objectives have been identified as interventions in this regard which include the identification of architectural, theological and cultural heritage as well as possible pilgrimages for sustainable management. The MCSA has been in consultation with major heritage stakeholders including The National Heritage Council, The South African Heritage Resource Agency and other government stakeholders, taking learning's from their studies, guidelines and policies to further develop the MCSA strategy on Heritage Preservation

District Heritage Champions, who will be selected by the Bishops, shall work closely with the General Secretary's office to ensure that appropriate action plans are developed for the preservation of identified heritage sites. Grahamstown, the hosts of a recent Heritage workshop held in Port Alfred, shall also host the February 2014 Heritage 'Journey of Discovery' Indaba where the District champions will be introduced to the Connexional Heritage Plan to better equip them in their respective Districts preservation tasks, training them in various aspects of heritage preservation for which they, as Heritage Ambassadors, shall be responsible.

We highlight the need for marketing, promotion and raising awareness of our heritage preservation across the Connexion. To this end the MCSA shall host its first ever "Making History for Heritage" Golf Day, to be held early in 2014. Funds raised at this event shall go towards the preservation of our diverse heritage with a view to making this an annual event to be hosted by all Districts.

“When an old person dies, a library dies with them” - we thus welcome all people called Methodists to submit artefacts, historical data, photographs and any other historically relevant pieces to their District Heritage Champions, the details of whom are available on the Heritage Website, the link to which shall appear on the MCSA website in early 2014.

4.3 Digitising of Methodist Archives

Modern archive management and practices necessitate that new ways are explored to preserve the Methodist archives housed at the Cory Library of Rhodes University. The Cory Library is the official repository of the MCSA archives.

The MCSA has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Rhodes University for the digitisation and upload of the archives to an electronic platform to facilitate research and preservation.

The two year project shall entail electronic storage to obviate physical handling of the aging material and facilitate easy access.

The Connexional Women’s Manyano shall offer bursaries to five Methodist students studying at Rhodes to assist with this project.

The expected outcomes from this initiative include:

- the preservation and conservation of Church registers and other materials;
- training of five Methodist students in the practice of archiving;
- achieving open access to the Church archives, as well as giving open access to the research community world-wide.

5. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Leadership Capacity Building

There is an undisputed dearth of capable, effective leadership at every level of our Church. This is more so with ministers than with laity. It is the responsibility of any credible organisation to invest in the development of current and future leadership. Such development should focus mainly on discerning the calling, character building, enhancing leadership competencies and aligning them to the Church vision as well as sharpening Church governance and financial management skills.

There is an urgent need to nurture and mentor emerging leaders, especially those entrusted with leadership at Circuit level – the Superintendents. It would be worth considering calling a Connexional/Regional Superintendents’ Indaba/Summit to identify shortfalls, explore

opportunities and strategise for future development. My view is that this is where things tend to go wrong.

5.2 Equipping the 'saints'

One of the most neglected tasks of our time is that of 'equipping the saints' for their work. Equipping people for Christian living and mission is at the core of who we are as Methodists. Underpinning our theological understanding of Methodism are the concepts of:

- The teaching ministry - a major tool for evangelisation and instilling Christian values;
- Life-long learning as the foundation of Christian growth and spiritual maturity
- Education as an empowerment tool for all.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge and extend my sincere gratitude for the input made by various team members at the Presiding Bishop's Office and at Methodist Connexional Office in the compilation of this report. Without such dedicated assistance, intellectual acumen, moral and prayerful support it would have been impossible to give an informed account to this Conference. Henry Ford, an American industrialist, is quoted to have said: *Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.*

Siyabulela! Nangamso! Together we can achieve more.