



The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

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Briefing from the Presiding Bishop To District Synods On the Justice and Service Agenda of the MCSA

The 2012 Conference of the MCSA resolved to establish the Justice and Service Function of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, and agreed to resource this work in 2013. Since Conference, the Mission Unit has taken responsibility for initiating this work. This has included:

- Developing a Strategy to Guide the Work
- Taking forward all outstanding Conference Resolutions referred to the Justice and Service function since 2009
- Securing Capacity for the Work
- Identifying Priority Issues to be pursued by the MCSA Members

We are delighted to announce that the Rev Dr Paul Verryn has been appointed to spearhead the Justice and Service agenda across the Connexion. We hope that each District will engage with him and ensure that issues of injustice and human rights abuse within your context are identified and addressed.

Connexional Task Teams have been appointed to take forward the Justice and Service Agenda on issues of concern and we are pleased at some of the work undertaken thus far.

- **Methodists Against Substance Abuse (MASA)** have developed a guideline that can be used by Societies to initiate ministries of support. This has been shared with all Mission and HIV Coordinators. A programme to implement a pilot campaign with one District has commenced and a workshop with the Presiding Bishop, District Bishops and people willing to take forward this agenda in the Church will be held in November, and allow us to plan a more substantial intervention going forward.
- **A Campaign on Gender Based Violence** has been initiated and will in the near future assist the Church in becoming intimately involved in confronting the very difficult issues which make the abuse of women and children so deeply entrenched in our Society. We believe that the men in the MCSA have a particular responsibility to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours and to become vociferous advocates in ending this scourge.
- The **Disability Task Team** has put together the SABS Building Standards which should be observed to ensure our buildings are accessible to the disabled. These are available on the MCSA website and we urge all District and Trust Property Committees to incorporate them in any renovation or new building project. We urge Bishops to find information from the member countries of the Connexion in this regard. Other issues of inclusivity are now being addressed.

A Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of Nations

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- Recognising the very serious issues of Constitutional Democracy that arise in the new legislation being developed for **Traditional Leadership in South Africa**, we have commenced work to develop a brief paper that will outline the different pieces of legislation and the human rights concerns which are being raised. We hope this will be ready for distribution in July 2013. We believe it is essential that Methodist Communities which will be affected by the legislation have access to as much information as possible and are equipped to participate in public debates.

In addition to these Task Teams we have identified poverty and inequality as one of the most severe threats to stability across the Connexion. Very serious questions are asked of us as a Church:

- *How are we involved in the life of poor communities?*
- *Do we see and respond to the appalling challenges faced by millions of Namibians, South Africans, Mozambicans, Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho people as they seek to survive?*
- *Are we active campaigners to ensure that the conditions for workers are respected by employers?*
- *The issue of municipalities / local authorities delivering the free basic services that people are entitled to.*
- *That families have access the social grants to which they are entitled. Are the refugees embraced and assisted to embark on new lives?*
- *Are we using our resources to support initiatives for healing and community empowerment?*

I spent three days in the mining communities of the Platinum Circuit to gain better insight into the ministry we need to be providing in Marikana and in other similar situations. I saw things which I had failed to see clearly before. In a meeting with Districts who are involved in mining communities we identified the urgent need for us to develop substantially more robust forms of engagement in this area. Similarly, we must address the needs of farmworkers and other vulnerable groups.

We have identified the need for the MCSA in cooperation with the Ecumenical movement to engage substantively with South African National Police structures. This must be with the combined intent to assist them in responding to the severe traumas which affect many personnel, and equally to hold them to account for violating the rights of the vulnerable.

This work will continue to accelerate throughout the year. I invite all Synods to seriously consider the Justice and Service agenda in their own Districts and to appoint Convenors for this work. Enclosed with this letter are summaries of some of the task team activities and we ask that you circulate them widely, and ask any interested person to make contact with their representatives.

Peace and Grace to you and be assured of our prayers especially for fruitful and meaningful Synods.

Yours in the service,



Ziphosihle "Zipho" Siwa
Presiding Bishop.



Kenaleone Ketshabile
Mission Unit Director

TOGETHER a healing community!