

**LAY PRESIDENT`S ADDRESS TO CONFERENCE  
OF THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA  
HELD IN PORT ELIZABETH FROM 23-27 SEPTEMBER 2015**

The Presiding Bishop, General Secretary, District Bishops, District Lay Leaders, Members of Conference, Distinguished Guests, Greetings to you all in the name of the one who paid with His life to redeem all Nations from eternal condemnation Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I feel much humbled by the honour and privilege given to me to stand before this august Conference after my two hundred and sixty seven days (267 days) in office, where according to our Church`s tradition I am expected to address you. I never dreamt in my life that I would ever address the esteemed leaders like you, and worse the Policy-making body of God`s Christian Church, especially the Christian Church of our time. I`m reminded of the day when I made a declaration by choice to be a Christian under the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and also when I committed myself to adhere to its dogma and practices. I have those memories as I`m standing here today before you. These memories make me find it appropriate to renew my declaration and commitment to Christ and his church, and remain a disciplined Methodist Christian.

I believe it is by God`s grace that I am part of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa`s capable leadership whose current agenda focuses on the collective ministry, and from whom the theme of **Together a Transforming Discipleship Movement** has been born, with the sole aim of striving towards achieving the tenets of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa`s vision of Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of Nations.

I would like to put on record my appreciation of the Christian way the Connexional leadership has welcomed me in this office and the conversation I had had with the head of the Church the Presiding Bishop Rev. Zipho Siwa which served as an orientation and induction for me before I assumed my responsibilities.

Fellow esteemed members of conference, Methodist Christians allow me first to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my predecessor Mr. Fungile Dotwana and all past Lay Presidents who came before him for the contributions they have made in the church during their terms of office. I would like to express my gratitude to you members of Conference, and the Methodist Christians of our Connexion who are not here, for your faith in God which intentionally guided you to entrust me with this important ministry of leadership. I acknowledge your gesture and appreciate the appropriate framework you as the church have drawn for anyone who is traditionally assigned to function in this office. This framework which is well crafted and cited in the 12<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Book of Order paragraph 5.8 subsections 5.8.1 and 5.8.2 serves as a clear guide to me as I pursue my role and functions in this office of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

Like with all Methodist Christian leaders, the expectation is that I should perform my role and functions in harmony and in collaboration with God`s people with an aim of promoting God`s mission at all times and avoid placing God and his church, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in disrepute.

### **Introduction**

I`ve noticed that from time immemorial, a decision was intentionally taken to have Conference take place during September which is the heritage month. I don`t believe that this decision was just a sheer coincidence that conference should be on this month. I believe it

was taken after serious discernment. I assume this decision was intended to allow conference leadership and delegates not to miss an opportunity to reflect on things that are the Church's heritage while they deliberate on issues of importance to keep the Church relevant and to be on track with its contextual internal and external affairs.

I therefore, being informed by this notion of reflection on the Church's heritage, would like to request and submit to this conference to allow me to First give an epitome report on the Perspectives of District Lay Leaders, covering abridged Achievements and Challenges elevated from their reports about our performance as the church. Secondly would touch on the activities performed by myself as the Lay President. Thirdly would talk about the issue of balancing the Methodist Conventional and the Dot com approaches when conducting services in our churches. Fourthly would share with you the tenets of the statement which says, "Now You are a Methodist Christian and a Methodist Christian leader". This will then lead to the conclusion of my address.

### **District Lay Leaders` Perspectives on Church Achievements**

It is with great excitement for me to report to this Conference about the sterling work done by the District Lay Leaders (DLLs) at their respective districts. These Methodist Christian leaders` reports give assurance on the achievements our church has managed to have through the direct participation of the DLLs as well as working with Bishops, District and Circuit leaders. The DLLs successfully facilitated and conducted workshops in the districts and circuits where the following topics were dealt with: Trust Properties, Financial Management, Effective Circuit Management, Invitation, Stationing process and its challenges, the Methodist ethos and policies, the HIV/AIDS challenges just to mention a few. These DLLs addressed District Organisation Conventions on issues such as church membership, the call of Christian Women, financial management just to mention a few. The DLLs visited circuits with Bishops, attended and participated in the induction services of ministers in their districts. They attended District and Connexional consultations. Some of the DLLs met with Circuit Superintendents to try and resolve issues that were found to be noticeably hindering God's work in the Districts, circuits and societies.

### **District Lay Leaders` Perspectives on Church Challenges**

The District Lay Leaders have noted with concern the challenges in their districts that hinder circuits from performing to the best of their abilities, but these Methodist Christian leaders, the DLL's have started working with their Bishops, District Executives and Superintendents to find solutions and ways to address these challenges. The common challenges the DLL's noted among others are as follows:

Failure of some circuits to pay Districts and Connexional dues, because they cannot afford which leads to losing ministers. The DLL's perceive that this untoward eventuality leads to increase in a number of ministers who end at the foot of stations. The DLL's have noted a challenge where at times the lines of communication are flouted by some circuits` leadership, and such contraventions were found to be contributing to the feuds that bedevil circuits and societies and hinder proper functioning of circuits.

### **Activities Performed by the Lay President**

I thank God and the leadership of the Church who in my past 267 days in office enabled me to cruise cross the Connexion and pursued numerous activities within the provisions of the framework given in paragraph 5.8 of the Book of Order. I have epitomized in the provided framework all the activities I pursued as follows:

- **Representation of the Church in ceremonial activities**

I represented the church at the Inauguration of the first Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary Chancellor, represented the church at the SMMS Graduation and as per invitation at the Black Methodist Consultation and again represented the church at the funerals at the Cape of Good Hope, Natal Coastal, Natal West and Clarkebury districts.

- **Pastoral Interventions**

I served as a Commissioner in the Rev. Dr. Mehana's Pastoral Commission which was assigned to resolve a matter at Clarkebury District and again served as a Commissioner in the Rev. Professor Jafta's Pastoral Commission which was tasked to resolve a matter at Natal West District.

- **Visits and motivation on Church issues**

I visited the Local Preachers General Committee which had held its meeting at eMseni in Highveld and Swaziland District on 13 February 2015 as well as visited the joined meeting of the Bishops and Synod Secretaries who had held their meeting in Cape Town on 4 March 2015. In both meetings I presented a proposal on elevation of Every Member Ministry Model (EMMM) as a project I want to pursue during my term of office, and motivated them to look at the possibilities of formulating a strategy for full implementation of EMMM in the church. I further presented the same proposal at the Consultation with the Lay Leaders in Bloemfontein in March 2015. In this consultation other church issues like interrogation of the Presiding Bishop's, Lay President's and General Secretary's 2013 and 2014 Conference addresses was done, with an intention of developing insight on the direction the church leadership had invited all Methodists to take as well as the pertinent issues we the church have to take cognisance of, as we honour the ministries we are called to pursue.

Rev. Dr. Mehana and I visited Clarkebury District in May 2015 to assist the preachers at the Local Preachers' Association Convention to understand the different operations of the Local Preachers' Department and the Local Preachers' Association respectively. I visited Natal Coastal District on 25 July 2015 to give inputs on the discussions regarding existence of Organisations in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and hosting of their conventions in circuits.

I visited during their Synods' time Kimberly Namibia and Bloemfontein District; Northern Free State and Lesotho District and Natal West District where I presented a paper on the title **The Church a Community of Partners** of which I used the allocated time to motivate and broadened insight with regards to the Church's operations and lines of communication.

- **Other duties and tasks**

As a member of the MCO's Committees assigned specific duties and tasks, and a member of the SMMS Governing Council, SMMS Governing Council Executive, I have been able to attend one SMMS Governing Council meeting, two SMMS Governing Council Executive meetings and all five meetings called by the MCO's Committees in which I am a member.

### **Balancing the Methodist Conventional and Dot Com Approaches**

As Methodist Christian leaders, we are leading the church during the changing times, changing needs, the times where one part of the church still believes on conventional ways of doing church and another part wanting a paradigm shift in the way we do church, since the emerging of technology. I have therefore observed that as the church we are sometimes having a big challenge of how to balance the conventional and dot com approaches in our church services.

I believe that if we have decided to introduce the dot com approach in our services over and above the known Methodist conventional approach, we as Methodist Christian leaders need to be sensitive to the plight of our old mothers and fathers of our church who were born before technological changes when we conduct our church services. These mothers and fathers are the heritage of our church, they love this church and they are used to the known 20<sup>th</sup> Century Methodist conventional approach when they are in the service. We need to cater for them as well and move with them at a snail's pace. I believe they do not want to be left behind or their needs left unattended to. I believe they want the service that will appeal to their hearts and bring healing in the spiritual wounds they might have experienced in their lives, as the service would equally address the needs of the dot com generation.

My plea therefore members of conference in this regard does not ignore the needs of the Dot Com generation who were born and became fortunate to be exposed to technology which make them more geared to have services conducted using technological apparatus or gadgets. However, my clarion call to you members of conference especially the Methodist Christian leaders is that let us all at our local churches work out how can we **sensitively** balance the use of the two approaches in order to cater for the taste of both groups during our services.

We should take into account that if we do not balance the use of the two approaches, we might find ourselves having membership drainage from our churches if it has not already happened. I have no doubt that membership drainage if it happens has a negative impact in the finances of our societies, our circuits and our districts. This challenge of lack of funds in our circuits and our societies was also elevated in the DLLs' reports. If such an eventuality of membership drainage kicks in, we will in no doubt experience an increase in agency withdrawals by many societies and circuits, because the few members that might be still left in the society or circuit may find themselves unable to meet all the financial contributions to sustain an agent in the circuit. Let us remember we are Methodist Christians and Methodist Christian leaders, let us not discard our heritage but let us build on it and move hand in hand with everyone like the Israelites when moving out of Egypt, they moved out with all their belongings. The old age people were there, the youth was there, the babies were there, their live stock was there, and they even took Joseph's bones and left with them, because when Joseph was still alive he requested them to take his bones with them the day they are brought out of Egyptian bondage. So let us leave no one behind as Methodist Christians and Methodist Christian leaders.

### **Now You Are a Methodist Christian and a Methodist Christian Leader**

In the 80s Rev. Dr. HM Dandala and the late Mr. S Dube co-authored a series titled "Manje Usuphendukile", literally translated to be saying "Now you are converted". This material was helpful to the class leaders to use it during the process of initiation of the new converts who at the time would have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and joined the class. This to me serves as a good example of a heritage material, written in a simple language that people could easily understand, and was shaping new Methodist Christians in class and also empowering the Methodist Christian leaders assigned with leadership role and functions in the church of God.

The spirit and aim behind which the material of this nature was produced influenced me to intentionally use the simple statement, "Now You Are a Methodist Christian and a Methodist Christian Leader", to affirm Methodist Christians and Methodist Christian leaders as members of Conference about their important current dual leadership responsibilities of being

disciplined Methodist Christian and at the same time disciplined Methodist Christian leader who I believe act as such or shall I say they are expected to act as such at all times within the corridors of the church and in the platforms of society representing God and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa expediently.

I believe it is proper to remind ourselves as members of Conference that we are Methodist Christians of the now 21<sup>st</sup> century, hence I say in this my statement **“Now”**, because I don't want to focus on your past. I say this borrowing from Paul's words from second Corinthians chapter five verse seventeen, where Paul says, “When anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come.

We have to remind ourselves that we have no chance to abdicate our Christian embedded dual responsibilities where God has placed us to serve him and his people hence I say in this my statement **“You”**, because every Christian is a servant and has to conduct oneself as such. We have to remind ourselves that we have no option but have to demonstrate a Christian character being Methodists where ever we are and stand for Christ and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa when we happy and during times of upheavals, hence I say in this my statement here is **“a Methodist Christian”**.

We have to remind ourselves that we need to demonstrate a Christ-like leadership character and not be afraid to take difficult decisions and stand by them as long as they advance God's agenda in his church. When we do that we would be emulating our great leader Jesus Christ who advanced God's agenda despite the criticism he received from Pharisees but he never stopped. The individuals who emulate Jesus Christ in leading God's people without failure hence I say in this my statement here is **“a Methodist Christian leader”**.

One of course is aware of the fact that taking unpalatable decisions goes with criticism, but never despair or shy away from doing the right thing, because it is a right thing to do so and you will be something that God can trust and rely on. I believe like what Jesus said in Matthew chapter twenty five verses twenty one and twenty three, the same thing can be said to the one who has done good where his/her master will say, “Well done **you** good and faithful servant”, because the individual would have not feared criticism on what he/she would have done. Aristotle once said, “To avoid criticism, do nothing, say nothing, be nothing”.

Members of conference I can see we didn't want to be nothing hence we took a bold step to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour when he was introduced to us knowing very well that we will in the process face to fight against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this darkness age (Ep 6:12)

I believe we can positively and successfully respond to the tenets of this statement explained in the fourth section of this address only if we remember who we are, what we are created for, what we are saved for, what we are called for and what we are commanded to do.

At this juncture I find Paul's words in Ephesians chapter two verse ten fitting extremely well here to remind us as he reminded God's people at Ephesus and said; “God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus, he has created us for life of good deeds, which he has already prepared us to do”. Indeed all Christians are destined for good things.

Members of Conference, Now You are Methodist Christians and Methodist Christian Leaders trusted by God and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, because God has prepared to serve him. I believe serving God is not difficult, because Paul has assured us that through union with Christ Jesus, God himself has prepared our hearts and souls to do good things. Let

us then “Together a Transforming Discipleship Movement” serve God by being sure that we are blinking in the light where all can see, because blinking in darkness no one will either see nor experience God’s wonders. I believe that the prefix of the current Conference agenda which says **Together** makes an insinuation of inclusivity which means everyone or anybody in the Transforming Discipleship Movement has something to do.

In the context of this address, allow me therefore to reiterate the call on every member of Conference and all Methodists of our Connexion in whatever sphere of life they are to join the collective and serve God with diligence being conscious of the fact that they are Christians and leaders in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, and are expected to adhere to its dogma and practices, but shy away from putting God’s mission in disrepute.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Martin Luther King Junior said, “Anybody can serve. You do not need to have a college degree to serve. You do not have to make your subject and verb to agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love”. The issue is the serving whether its within the framework of God’s and his church’s ordinances. Members of Conference I call on the hearts that are full of grace and the souls that are generated by love to do something for God and his people, because if **you** do nothing, say nothing, **you** will be nothing.

Remember, Now You Are a Methodist Christian and a Methodist Christian Leader.

God bless you

Mr. J. Mabhalane Nkosi