

Message to the Methodist People 2011



**An Invitation to a Round Table:
Revisioning Church and Ministry**



**The Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho
graciously welcomed the 122nd
Conference of the Methodist Church of
Southern Africa. We learnt that
although Methodist work in Lesotho
started in 1833, this was the first
Conference ever held here.**



We met in a mood of celebration, rejoicing in the stationing of a minister in Maseru, but also with pain knowing the recent history of secession. In his welcome address, the Christian Council of Lesotho spokesperson assured Conference however, that the only Methodist Church recognised by the Council, is the MCSA.





The Opening address during our Communion Service was enveloped in the hymn, “All are welcome in this place”. Under the Conference theme of “An Invitation to a Round Table: Revisioning the Church and Ministry”, Presiding Bishop Ivan Abrahams sketched the historical context of Methodism in this place.

In his final address as Presiding Bishop of our Conference, Bishop Abrahams took a moment to “look back” and share with the Conference, the joys, setbacks and frustrations of the journey. One of the frustrations was that the annual Conference theme is not always brought through to grass roots level. Issues still needing intensive attention include HIV, the leadership role of women and of laity, youth work, diversity, the disabled, and many more.



Referring to Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10, Bishop Abrahams challenged us to not get so caught up with institutional and structural issues that we cannot break the cycle of exclusion. We should not try to limit God, and call unclean those who God loves and accepts.



Looking ahead, the Presiding Bishop called for the adoption of a spirit of inclusivity as we come to the Round Table for our Conference, and to find new paths of mission, and to cross boundaries to see how God will surprise us.



Bishop Abrahams warned us: “I wish to affirm that I am cautiously confident that the task before us is not insurmountable. It will demand renewed commitment, immense grace, much wisdom and leadership “full of faith and the Holy Spirit.””





Rev Micheline Kamba, Presbyterian Minister from the DRC opened up the Round Table, to those among us who have disabilities. We learnt that the disciples' encounter with the lame man in Acts 3, is the story of including the excluded.



A nameless man, ignored by worshippers to the Temple receives compassion, recognition and dignity from the two Christ-followers. The question we are left to ask ourselves is: how many disabled people do we bypass on our way to church, and how we are called to offer compassion and inclusion to beautiful children of God who have disabilities?



Exodus 4 goes even further with its challenge through Moses, who was disabled in more than one way. He teaches us that disability does not equate to inability. Like Moses, we should, even in our disability, discover our potential and capacity. People with disabilities can be overcomers.



The healing of Moses was not his cure, but he was healed in learning that in spite of his weaknesses, his doubt and fear, his disobedience, lack of faith and his speech impediment, he was capable of doing great things. Moses challenges us all to know that people with disabilities can make a difference, and that God loves them as they are.



We were deeply touched by the simple, powerful message of the Bible studies, recognising our own disabilities. In our Bible Studies and Micheline's life story, we were powerfully aware of the Spirit of God among and within us, and in prayer and song we were able to open our lives to the God of Moses.



Our Connexional Lay President, Mr Fungile Dotwana, who was re-elected for a further three year term, challenged clergy and lay leaders to partner and not to create two centres of power. Three critical points were stressed, needing our attention, firstly, youth empowerment, secondly woman empowerment - not only in the vital area of Circuit and District leadership, but also on Connexional level.



Thirdly, Lay Leaders are well placed to provide not only leadership, but also education to the laity, and they will continue to strengthen this arm of their ministry to the church.





**The General Secretary, Rev Nyobole,
gave a very comprehensive and
informative report on orientation for
new Bishops, the Ministers' Indaba,
World Methodist Conference and
Governance Issues.**



The Memorial service during which remembered the lives of 18 Misters and Deacons, as well as 694 Local Preachers and other loved ones, was led by Past President Rev Jack Sholtz, reminding us that even though death shuts a door, the doors that can still be opened for all of us, are the doors of love, memory and faith.

Many of our resolutions reflected insufficient knowledge of L&D and the year book on the part of delegates to Synods, which led to resolutions that still required much work.

Some of the significant resolutions we adopted which relate to our wider society included resolutions around the TRC reparations, ecology, crime, the protection of information bill, and the promotion of peace and justice in Southern Africa and other parts of the world

The experience of this Conference was for us a time of grace. We were not only talking about the round table. We felt that we were together around the table, listening to one another with openness. There was a spirit of acceptance and togetherness. It was information-rich and challenging. We rejoiced in noticing the active participation of young people in the debates.



**Good news that we celebrate this
conference include:**



“Mission is becoming central to who we are and what we do as church. We are learning the lesson that “Mission is not an optional extra. It is the heart of what the church does.”





“Partnerships with organisations like World Vision are strengthening our ministry, and broadening the scope of our work.



“The Youth Unit is growing stronger and has entered a Youth Mentorship programme in conjunction with Heartlines. One of the areas of their attention is a Youth Empowerment project.



“The Child Desk is becoming a strong resource and engine behind work to children. They have produced an excellent Children’s Policy Booklet for our use. Networking with a number of key organisations, the Desk has vulnerable children in focus, including children at the Johannesburg Central Methodist Mission which continues to be an enormous challenge, through to informal childcare efforts as far as Angola and Somalia.





“The Clergy Indaba’s, spoken about for a number of years, have been taking place this year. This process has highlighted the need that Bishops be relieved of some administrative work, in favour of pastoral care of clergy, post ordination education, a re-look at our code of conduct and ethics and intentional communication.





“We are convicted of the need to engage in a theology of disability, and to bring people living with disabilities to the round table, having learnt first-hand from the ministry of our Bible Study Leader, the gift that people can be to us, who live with disabilities.





“The World Methodist Conference was a great success and we congratulate the Natal Coastal District and the Organising team for their excellent preparation and hosting of our world family. The highlight was a parade through the streets of Durban that introduced citizens to the Healer and Embracer of diversity.”



The Methodist Women's Organisations reported on the Assembly of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Women which was a very inspiring event. All our Women's organisations worked hard to host an event we can be proud of.





“Our Pension Fund for ministers has been able to give pension increases to Supernumeraries of an average of 13% per annum over the last six years.





“A successful audit was conducted of the MCO by the Financial Services Board. The MCO complied with all their requirements. With the MCO, we gave thanks to God for Mrs Glynnis Stokes, its Director who is retiring.



“In spite of a world economic crisis, we have a beautiful new seminary in the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary. To us it is a dream fulfilled, a vision become reality. Its almost 100 seminarians are immersed in a programme that includes not only academic, but also personal, spiritual and vocational formation. This year they were able to take their first private students.





É After a process spanning 20 years, the Structures Committee have produced a document with the intention to make the MCSA a nimble movement. Concrete proposals were brought for referral to 2012 Synods.





“The Communications Unit has developed a new streamlined website, but the New Dimension is still struggling financially. We notice, however, that throughout the church, our Units need our support in a more consistent and significant manner.





“32 Ministers and Deacons were welcomed to Conference and accepted into Full Connexion.





“The appointment of Bishop Anderson was confirmed for 2012 and Bishops Mothibi, Motswenyane, Witbooi, Mntambo, Matsolo and Tshangela for 2013.





**“We rejoice in the announcement that
Bishop Ziphozihle Siwa was elected
by Synods as Presiding Bishop from
2012 to 2014.**”





**We paid tribute to our
Presiding Bishop,
Rev Ivan Manuel Abrahams, after
having led the MCSA with passion for
nine years, saying to him, “you have
carried the cross of your leadership
with humility and courage.” We thank
him for his leadership, and pray God’s
blessing upon him as he takes up the
challenges of World Methodism.**



**We thank God for all that is past and
trust God for all that is to come.
Amen**