

STATEMENT OF THE 124TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA TO THE METHODIST PEOPLE:

Introduction

The 124th Annual Conference of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa congregated in Mthatha of the Clarkebury District, home to icons of the nation and the world. Meeting in a city that was founded in 1876 and was named after Mthathi, a tree that was famous for its medicinal properties, reminded us that we need medicine for a number of social ills that are continuing to ravage communities around the countries of our Connexion. The coincidental power cuts, causing some sessions of the Conference to be conducted in the dark while some in the light, was a symbolic reminder of the socio-economic reality of our time, where some are experiencing the light of abundance and others are groaning from the darkness of poverty and suffering. The stormy weather was nature's reminder of the storms of our contexts in which we seek practical ways of expressing the conference theme, *"Together a transforming discipleship movement."*

Presiding Bishop's Opening Address

Flowing from our vision statement, "A Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations" and informed by the journey of themes and conference messages and the context of our times, the Presiding Bishop, Rev. Ziphozinhle Siwa, in an opening address, unpacked the theme of the conference, *"Together a transforming discipleship movement"*. He shared his concern that because of our failure to respond effectively we are sacrificing the opportunities of women, African children and many others. He reminded us that discipleship is about being continual learners and workmen/women.

In response to the Presiding Bishop's address Conference decried the state of Education in the countries of our Connexion and particularly in South Africa. Conference however appreciated the efforts of the Women's Manyano towards education. However, a lot more needs to be done.

Bible Study session 1

In the first of a two-part Bible Study the Rev. Trevor Hudson re-affirmed the challenge of discipleship. He noted that there were three tasks at hand for disciples, i.e. to make disciples, teach and baptise people into the Trinitarian social God. He

suggested that we teach by who we are and what we do. He challenged us to be disciples and not just church professionals.

In constituting the conference we noted with appreciation that 44% of Conference delegates were women and that 30% were youth.

General Secretary's report

The theme of discipleship was re-visited in the report of the General Secretary, Rev. Vuyani Nyobole. He pinned his report on an introspective question – “how is it with the Soul of the MCSA?” In his report he reviewed our integrity as we do the work of God and noted that in our work with money, power, and use of church property and in engaging in our communities there are grave concerns. He encouraged the church to consider where our intent is good – but not being expressed correctly and where our intent is not aligned with the word of God.

Methodist Connexional Office report

In the report of the MCO we heard of the significant work which has been done and the deep plea to Societies, Circuits and organisations to maintain integrity and discipleship in our accounting for finances, and in the way we use our resources – finances, property and other assets – to do the work of God, and not only for our own members.

Further, the Conference enacted the resolution to integrate all Connexional Offices and Units under one roof. A deep sense of pain fell on the Conference as we considered the impact on the lives of people that will be affected by the strategic relocation of the offices of these entities. The conference sent a sincere word of appreciation to all the dedicated staff members who have been serving in all the Units that were to be affected by this move. We further appreciated that the Presiding Bishop and General Secretary will continue to offer a pastoral support to all persons affected.

EMMU, SMMS, MU and Organisation reports

We accepted with appreciation the reports of the different Units and organisations as they were spelling out the work of God that has been done in the respective entities. 18 candidates have been received to be trained for the ministry of Word and Sacraments. It was however, noted with sadness that so far only one district has established a child care desk.

Conference noted with great appreciation that after many years the Justice and Service Desk has been re-established and looks forward to the fruit of this work. The situation of the refugees and the developments in Marikana continues to be viewed

with a deep sense of compassionate justice. We received a report of great appreciation by those affected in the Marikana tragedy regarding the intervention and witness of the church in those situations.

The Conference also elected the Rev. Charmain Morgan to be the General Secretary for the period 2015-2017.

Bible Study *session 2*

In the second instalment of the Bible Study we heard Christ reminding us that, in a life characterised by the trauma of loss, discipleship should be practiced in our homes and in our workplaces. A sharp and bold caption of the message of the Bible Study sessions was, *“discipleship is expressed in the world and the world shapes our discipleship.”*

The Rev Dr. Ananias Nyanjaya shared a conscience-pricking and mind challenging story of the socio-economic and political reality of the church and people of Zimbabwe. The conference received and appreciated the story of the resilience of the people of Zimbabwe and affirmed the witness and discipleship of the church in a rather difficult context. The greatest challenge here was the lessons the Zimbabwe situation teaches all the countries of our Connexion so that the situation is not replicated in the region.

The Saturday morning worship moved our hearts and came on like gentle-persistent-soul penetrating droplets of Spirit-fire and set the tone for the business filled day.

Resolutions and Acceptance of Ordinands

Conference further processed a number of resolutions related to its discipleship work. It was with great joy as the Conference accepted 28 Ordinands for 2013 and sent them out to the Mission field to make disciples with the anthem, **“Thuma mina, thuma mina Nkosi yam.”**

To God be the Glory!