

Date: 03 May 2013

Young Women's Manyano Triennial Convention

Presidential Address:

READING: Exodus 2:1-10 – Key verse is v9: **“Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you”** (NIV).

In Xhosa: **“Thabatha lo mntwana, umanyise; ndokunika umvuzo wakho mna”**.

THEME: “Save and heal the promised seed”

Presiding Bishop Sir, The General Secretary of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, all Bishops present, Superintendents and Ministers, Fathers and Mothers, sisters and brothers, distinguished guests, I greet you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God who has journeyed with me and brought me to this place. It is not easy to stand where I am standing. Let me begin by saying I am not standing here as a specialist. However, I am standing here as a General Practitioner (GP). If a person goes to consult the GP, the GP examines that person. If it is something beyond his/her scope or control, the GP refers that person to the Specialist. I don't claim to know everything, I'm only the GP. I will redirect your queries to the Specialists, i.e. Ministers.

We meet on this 4th YWM Triennial Convention under the theme that has been highlighted above. I am not going to say much about the scripture lesson that we read. I am not a preacher anyway. But this is the story of Moses being rescued and saved by Pharaoh's daughter. There are 3 women here who all played a crucial role in saving Moses' life.

- It was his mother who hid him in the bitumen basket; for fear that he would be killed.
- There is Pharaoh's daughter who saw Moses' basket floating in the water and she was filled with compassion and had a desire to rescue the boy.
- Lastly there is Moses' sister who volunteers to find a nurse to look after Moses on behalf of Pharaoh's daughter. She then brought Moses' mother before Pharaoh's daughter to look after Moses.

Moses is like a seed that was saved for the purpose of rescuing the Israelites from oppression in Egypt. Without dwelling too much on this scripture, let me quickly move on to look at our theme.

I want to tease out a few points as a point of departure.

“Save and heal the promised seed” – I believe women should take charge in the community and set an example. I say that because there are so many problems in society that need courageous women to tackle.

- **Slogan – each one, teach one. We have a role and a responsibility to teach our children.**

As part of my vision I would like us to encourage the culture of reading amongst children. My target group is children from the ages 4 to 10. I believe we should do this because there is the complaint in schools that children do not read anymore. As an educator myself, I think this statement or complaint is valid. Hence there is need to encourage kids to read more. Part of the reason they do not read is because they spend more time watching television and on social media. I think we need to develop in them an interest in reading and the ability to read

and write. My father did not go to school. He had no education and as a result he could not read books and magazines. The amazing thing, however, was that on Sunday, as a preacher, he could read both the Bible and the hymn book.

Secondly I feel strongly that we need to establish libraries in our church halls and buildings around our premises. In this way our kids will find books easily accessible. **We as a Church need to promote quality learning for all children.**

- We need to develop environments that are conducive for meaningful learning.
- We need to meet the basic learning needs for each and every child entrusted on us. **Masizazi izidingo zabantwana.**
- I think it is very important to introduce children to digital information literacy such as computer network, software, visual, multimedia, audio tools and internet literacy.
- We need to promote access to newspapers and magazines for the sake of acquiring knowledge.

I think we also need to encourage YWM members to plough back the knowledge they acquired earlier on in life. They can do this through volunteering to teach reading and writing skills, offering their services, thus contributing to the establishment of libraries and reading rooms. Investment in children's education is vital and crucial. I think we also need to engage the services of retired teachers to bring their mature experiences which would help our children to gain more access to reading and writing.

Thirdly, as the church we need **to equip YWM to be the role models to young people**. Our younger sisters and brothers need to look at us and envy us and copy good things from us as their older sisters.

Our role, I believe, is to equip and encourage young women through spreading the light of education. Education is the key to success.

Why do we need to do all this? What is our focus?

(1) I am not a Theologian but let us for a moment think theologically:

I strongly believe **children have a place in God's heart**. He takes interest in them. Jesus teaches us to nurture children because that is a requirement of the kingdom of God. He also calls us to be like children in order for us to be fit for the kingdom of God. Mark 10:14 " . . . Let them come because the kingdom of God is theirs" (Paraphrase).

- MCSA's Vision of a Christ healed Africa for the healing of the nations, includes children.
- Mission charter **calls on us to be a more child centered church**
- The Presiding Bishop's campaign for education for all during our lifetime is a crucial call.

(2) Socially – Eradicating illiteracy is our social and moral responsibility.

Statistics show that about 75% of children in S.A have no access to basic education.

Illiteracy in Sub Sahara is growing rapidly rather than decreasing. That is a big challenge for us as the church. What can we do to address this challenge?

We need to contribute towards the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) towards educating children. **This will help reduce poverty and promote gender equality.**

Nelson Mandela once said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world".

Action steps: (How is the YWM going to achieve this?) I want us now to look at practical suggestions:

YWM must commit to put their hands and hearts together to establish libraries and reading rooms in each and every circuit around our Connexion. **I repeat, in each and every circuit.**

Is it not possible for us as the Church to offer after school and /or weekend classes for learners?

- I think we need to mobilise communities to support children who are disadvantaged and those who have some disabilities.

I request that we collect books for local schools.

- I encourage families to work closer with the schools.
- Let us utilise the skills and services of retired educators as I mentioned above.

Why can't we create a YWM magazine to share success stories and emerging lessons? Through such a magazine we will be able to share success stories as well as our frustrations, thus empowering each other.

We must work in collaboration with organisations that promote reading such as Read South Africa, Reading Association, etc.

I would like now to move on to another subject, which I think is important: **Gender equality** - Female empowerment is crucial. We have characteristics that are unique to us as women. We need to share such characteristics with the wider community. **Dear friends, I want to stress that to be pro woman does not equate to being anti-man.** God created both male and female in God's own image. We, therefore, need not be anti each other. We need to welcome, love, accept and respect each other.

Generational gap between women in the church:

- The older generation **must be accommodating** to the younger generation as age also means there is a difference in our approach to spirituality. We approach things differently as we come from different generations and upbringing.
- **We must be open to learning.** Learn how the younger women in the church experience and approach the world. This enables them to also renew and grow in their faith. We all must continue to learn and evolve in order to keep the spiritual flame burning. If there has to be a connection with younger women in the church there has to be a trusted communication that can allow wisdom to be passed on.
- The younger generation can learn from the older generations as in this new age it is easy to alter faith too much **as a means of accommodating this new world.** But the older generations have a discipline and knowledge in church tradition that can clarify many of the wayward new age ideas, helping you to structure your faith as well.

Experience in life and the church must be preserved to protect the customs of the Methodist Church.

- Women's esteem need to be stimulated as they must also be skillful, educated and equipped to stand up for themselves. **When children come home wanting help with homework there must be someone willing and capable of helping them.**
 - Violence against women and children is another huge current challenge.
1. We must create a future for deprived children and women through learning.
 2. We must take a proactive stance to encourage and motivate a culture of reading.
 - We must try to improve children's capacity to develop and learn;
 - ENHANCING SELF WORTH
 - We need to boost the esteem of deprived young children (age 6-10) by developing their reading skills as I have mentioned above.
 - We need to target illiteracy in order to heal and free nations.
"Remember we are a Christ healed church for the healing of the Nations".

Gender Equality

- We cannot talk about Gender Equality when there is so much violence against women and children in our society.

Currently, our society addresses this issue by simply helping those who have been the victims of abuse. **While this is the correct thing to do, it is not sufficient if we want to erase the issue.**

What we need to start doing is address the root of the issue. Why does abuse happen in the first place? Why are victims afraid to seek assistance? Why is the cycle of abuse a repetition throughout each generation? These are the questions we have to ask in order to truly seek an end to violence against women and children.

In answer to the above-mentioned questions:

- Teach your sons from a tender age, the attitude of having respect for the women in their lives. If we teach young boys to love and protect girls, they will begin to respect women. Some boys have experienced abuse from their own families and think it is the correct way of treating women and girls. However I need to say that this works hand-in-hand with women showing their value to their sons. Women must also show respect to young boys.
- By instilling this mentality in your sons, they are more likely to spread this attitude to other young men, and thus the correct attitude multiplies.
- Abused victims are often too afraid to seek assistance or report a case of abuse. This is due to their damaged self-esteem levels which tend to make them feel as though they are not worthy of being treated with dignity.
- In order to tackle this, we need to spread positive messages to other women, messages of upliftment, encouragement and support.
- Messages that do not undermine them or degrade them, but instead build them up so that they may face all challenges with ease.
- The cycle of abuse is passed down through generations because people are still reluctant to see this as a legitimate public issue.

The reality is that violence against women and children is one of the biggest issues troubling society.

- **In order to break the cycle, we need to first acknowledge that it is a problem before we take any action.**
- Our daughters need to be taught that they should not tolerate or accept any act of violence committed against them.
- Our sons need to be taught that using aggression to resolve an issue is not the answer.
- Our children need to be shown that they have loving support structures in place that will protect them. And they should be aware that it is safe to report any attacks that have violated them in any way.
- Boys and young men without biological father's, need to be provided with respectable father-figures, whether this is an uncle, grandfather, or a community member, so that they will have positive role models to look up to.
- Ending violence against women and children does not begin with the government or police system. It begins with each of us taking a personal stand against abuse.

I thank you all and pray that for the next 3 years our focus will be on issues affecting women and children. Our main emphasis, however, will be on helping our children to be encouraged to read and learn.

Thank you and God bless you.

Mrs Z E Nyembezi (YWM General President)