

CHAPTER 2

CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS

2.1 YOUTH PRESIDENT

Conference resolves that the issue of the Youth President's duties be referred back to the Connexional Youth Conference for further engagement with the Presiding Bishop and finalization at 2011 Conference. The Connexional Youth Co-ordinator is mandated to embark on an educational campaign regarding this and ensure that information is cascaded down to the Districts for discussion.

2.2 METHSOC

Conference resolves that all METHSOC reports and activities, just like all other organisations and structures, be channelled through the established structures of accountability and communication. (i.e. from Circuit Youth Council to Circuit Quarterly Meeting to Youth Synod).

2.3 CONNEXIONAL YOUTH UNIT

Conference, noting the lack of positive role models in our society, calls on the Youth Unit to establish and develop youth mentoring programmes that would enable young people to live positive, life affirming lifestyles. This mentorship programme should form part of the intentional, holistic and focused Christian Education as highlighted in the General Secretary's Conference report. This is to be distributed to Districts before 2011 Youth Synod for further engagement, and then sent to Connexional Youth Conference and 2011 Conference for finalisation.

2.4 YOUTH PASTORS

Conference notes with disappointment and concern the minimal attendance of Youth Pastors at Youth Synods and urges Bishops, Superintendents and Synods to ensure their (youth pastors) regular participation at Youth Synods.

2.5 YOUTH REPRESENTATION AT CONFERENCE

Conference resolves to amend Laws & Discipline paragraph 5.20 to increase youth representation to Conference from **one** to **two**.

2.6 PEOPLE LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

Conference notes the growing number of church members who are differently-abled, especially the deaf. Therefore Conference resolves that EMMU, in consultation with the Mission Unit and District Trust Properties, develops ways and means of inclusion - for example sign language, accessibility to buildings etc. as part of the curriculum for our Seminarians and Christian Education programmes at every level of the church.

2.7 SCHOOL/EDUCATION CHAPLAINS

Conference resolves that School/Educational Chaplains be formed into a separate cluster under the supervision of a Principal Chaplain to be appointed by Conference.

Conference further directs Revision Committee to broaden the Laws & Discipline chapter on Chaplaincy to include other Chaplaincy services.

2.8 PART TIME MINISTRY CATEGORY

Conference affirms the great value of the non-itinerant, part-time, non-stipendiary ministers to the work of the MCSA, without which many small, poor communities would have inadequate pastoral oversight.

Conference resolves that EMMU create a more flexible formation training for non-itinerant, part time, non-stipendiary category of probationers. Any such change must aim at the highest possible quality of training. EMMU in consultation with DEWCOM should ensure that the outcome of NINS ministry training is aligned to the original twofold objectives of this ministry, i.e. cost and missional with special emphasis on the poor.

2.9 ORDERS FROM OTHER CONNEXIONS

Conference directs EMMU to develop procedures and processes for the transfer of members of Orders from other Methodist Connexions.

2.10 RESOLUTIONS REFERRED TO CQMs AND DISTRICT SYNODS

Conference reaffirms its directive to Units that all matters referred to Circuit Quarterly Meetings and Synods be forwarded to the Superintendents and District Synod Secretaries by not later than 15 April of each year to allow for adequate time and discussion.

2.11 METHODIST SCHOOLS IN SWAZILAND

Conference resolves that the Mission Unit, in partnership with the Highveld and Swaziland and Northern Free State and Lesotho Districts, investigate the feasibility of adopting the MCSA Mission Schools in these two countries as Connexional Projects.

2.12 REVIVE CHRISTIAN CITIZEN DEPARTMENT

Conference reaffirms its 2009 decision (2010 Yearbook para. 2.12, page 83) to establish a Justice, Service and Citizenship Desk in the Mission Unit and urges the Unit to partner with relevant existing community structures e.g. alcohol and drug abuse, I.O.T.T and Government institutions. The Mission Unit is requested to give a progress report at the 2011 Conference.

Conference declares 1st Sunday of November, starting this year, as Social Awareness Sunday wherein substance abuse and other related issues will be addressed. All organizations and other relevant structures within the Church are urged to run awareness programmes pertaining to substance abuse and other related issues throughout the November month.

2.13 SUPERNUMERARY FUND

Conference resolves that after the current Arbitration process is complete and before 2011 Synods (contingent on the date when the Arbitration has been finalised):

- A series of District Dialogue Events (Connexional “Road Shows”), which any interested Methodist may attend, be convened for the purpose of information, discussion and communication. The travelling team should comprise a mix of MCO officials, Trustees of the Fund and Connexional leadership.
- Once the Arbitration has been completed all the resolutions and memorials, that have been sent to Conference from Synods and Circuit Quarterly Meetings, must be assessed by both the MCO Executive and the Trustees of the Fund to ascertain whether there are any components within the resolutions before Conference that have not been addressed by the Arbitration award and then advise the 2011 Conference accordingly.

2.14 AUGMENTATION FUND AND PARITY OF PENSIONS

Conference strongly supports the Augmentation Fund and urges that a handbook be made available by the Trustees of the Fund as soon as possible and be presented at District workshops for discussion.

2.15 COVER FOR MONEY IN TRANSIT

Conference directs the MCO to explore a cover increase for money in transit and act accordingly.

2.16 PASTORAL CARE FOR MINISTERS’ FAMILIES

Conference resolves that pastoral care for deceased ministers’ spouses and families regarding occupation of manse, education of children should include dependants (cf. 2010 Yearbook, para. 2.22, page 87). The interest of both the Circuit and the family must to be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

2.17 SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Conference recognising:

- the important role the church has to play in promoting sustainable living and addressing the issue of climate change;
- the significant difference and impact that collective action by a church the size of the MCSA can make on the environment; and
- the increasing cost of electricity in South Africa and the huge collective financial cost this has for the church;

encourages Circuits to install solar water systems at manses, churches and new church complexes to replace or augment electric geysers. Conference further directs District Trust Property Committees to facilitate this process.

2.18 TRAVELLING ALLOWANCE AND OTHER MINISTERS BENEFITS

Conference notes the request for the revision of guidelines for calculations of travel allowance from vehicles in the R80,000 – R120,000 range to vehicles in the R120 000 to R160 000 range.

Conference directs the MCO to investigate alternative remuneration models for clergy, taking into account circuit affordability, tax implications etc. and report its findings to the 2012 Conference.

2.19 COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE MCSA

Conference affirms the Presiding Bishop's prophetic leadership in matters of public issues, advocacy and communications.

However, noting the importance and urgency of such matters Conference resolves the following:

- that the Presiding Bishop gathers together a small advisory group of people passionate about issues in the field of public interest e.g. economics, education, politics, legal and social matters.
- that the Bishops be informed of all proposed statements and act in accordance with Laws & Discipline, Miscellaneous Resolution 1.37, page 235 by virtue of their strategic position and calling to gather and disseminate the information.
- that the Superintendents send public interest information to the Bishops where a prophetic voice is needed.

2.20 ARBITRATIONS PANEL POWERS

Conference receives and adopts the report of the special Commission dealing with the matter before the High Court regarding review of an Arbitration Award.

Conference further resolves that in the event that the Arbitration Panel, when making an Award in terms of the provisions of Appendix 14, believes that practical action is required for which no provision exists within the Laws & Discipline, no such Award may involve amendments to the Laws & Discipline or have the effect of establishing any structure that is not already defined or established within the L&D.

If the Arbitration Panel finds that the L&D contains omissions or defects, it shall refer such finding/recommendation to an appropriate authority described within the L&D for corrective action. The Arbitration Panel may not supersede the provisions of the L&D when making any award.

In the light of the above, Conference directs the Revision Committee to review the relevant clauses in the Laws & Discipline to clarify such matters and avoid ambiguity.

2.21 MILITARY CONSCRIPTION

Conference notes with concern the call being made by the South African Minister of Defense for a return to a system of military conscription for young school leaving South Africans.

Conference rigorously opposes this call on the following grounds:

- such a move will contribute further to the militarization of our society which will exacerbate the endemic problems of crime and violence in our land;
- there are other spending priorities for our country at this time - inter alia basic service delivery, education, health and housing

Conference supports the objectives of the National Youth Development Agency that seek to equip and empower young people with entrepreneurial and other skills that will enable them to play an economically productive part within our society. In this regard, Conference calls for the adequate resourcing of the NYDA out of the national fiscus.

Conference requests the Presiding Bishop to engage with the South African Minister of Defense to present the views of the MCSA in this matter, encouraging youth to be incorporated into programmes of other Government Departments especially for the purpose of skills development and job opportunities.

2.22 INFANT BAPTISM

Conference reaffirms the process that is currently under way by DEWCOM, with the distribution of a conversation document for Districts and Circuits, and awaits feedback before making a decision.

2.23 STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Conference, noting the on-going discussion and various proposals on structures, directs the Connexional Structures Committee to convene a Connexional Structures Indaba that will seek to address all issues relating to structures. The Structures Committee must bring concrete proposals to the 2011 Conference for referral to 2012 Synods and final adoption by the 2012 Conference.

2.24 LAWS & DISCIPLINE 12th EDITION

Conference receives the report of the Revision Committee regarding the work in progress of revising the 11th edition of Laws & Discipline and directs that all proposed amendments be referred to Circuit Quarterly Meetings and Synods for final adoption by the 2011 Conference.

2.25 INCLUSIVITY OF CONNEXIONAL DEWCOM

Conference resolves that DEWCOM, together with the Presiding Bishop's office, restructures this committee to include representation from all Districts.

2.26 ROBINING OF EVANGELISTS

Conference notes the confusion regarding the robing of Evangelists and refers the matter to the Order of Evangelism to develop guidelines for Circuits.

2.27 SAME-SEX DEBATE

Conference reaffirms the current theological position of the MCSA with regards to the same-sex debate. This position has evolved over a number of years, as reflected in the various Conference resolutions that have been adopted on this issue:

- At the Conference of 2001, a foundational principle in the same-sex debate was adopted, that the MCSA seeks to be a “community of love rather than rejection.”
- At the Conference of 2003, a discussion guide on Christians and same-sex relationships was adopted as a tool for the church’s engagement on this issue, and was referred to the Methodist people for their study, comment and response.
- The robust debate generated by this discussion guide made it clear that within the MCSA there are widely divergent convictions on this issue that are sincerely and passionately held by both clergy and laity who are deeply committed to following Christ and who hold to the authority of Scripture.
- This recognition of the divergent convictions within the MCSA on this issue prompted the Conference of 2005 to commit the MCSA “...to an ongoing journey of discovering what it means to be part of a church which embraces many different and even opposing views on this issue” (*Yearbook 2006*, para.8.3, p.75), and to affirm that the one body of the church is “enriched and strengthened by the differing views and perspectives of its members” (*Yearbook 2006*, para.8.5.5, p.76.)
- The Connexional Executive of 2006 reaffirmed the 2005 Conference resolutions on the same-sex debate, and directed that until Conference has pronounced on the matter, the MCSA continues to recognise marriage as only between a man and a woman, and urged ministers to refrain from officiating at same-sex unions” (*Yearbook 2007*, para.4, p.50.)
- The Conference of 2007 declared its determination not to permit different viewpoints around the same-sex debate to further divide the church, and sought “...a way forward that both respects and holds in tension differing views among our ministers and people” (*2008 Yearbook*, p.81, para.2.5.1, p.81.) This Conference further resolved that “...any decision and subsequent action on the issue of civil unions between same-sex partners must await the outcome of the ongoing process of engagement as specified by Conference 2005...and, in the interim, expects Methodist ministers to continue to offer pastoral care to homosexual individuals.” (*Yearbook 2008*, para.2.5.1.(vi), p.82.)

There are many who mistakenly assume that the MCSA does not have a formal position on the same-sex debate. This is clearly not the case as the Conference decisions referred to above plainly indicate. The MCSA, in fact, has adopted a very clear position on this issue which:

- affirms that the MCSA is seeking to be a community of love rather than rejection;
- recognises the diversity of conviction within the church when it comes to same-sex

relationships, and celebrates this diversity as a challenging but potentially life-giving gift;

- calls for an ongoing process of respectful dialogue and truthful engagement between those holding differing views, not with the intention of ultimately having one mind on this issue, which is unlikely, but rather to come to a deepened understanding of what it means to be the one body of Christ;
- takes seriously the church's ongoing pastoral responsibility to homosexual people;

In the light of the above, Conference notes the following:

- ❖ The MCSA is, *de facto*, a church with divergent convictions on this issue that have theological integrity;
- ❖ There is a current theological inconsistency within the MCSA where it allows this divergence of conviction to be held without the freedom for such divergence of conviction to be exercised.

Conference therefore resolves that:

- The bible-study material entitled "In search of grace and truth: Christian conversations on same-sex relationships" – which represents an intentional engagement between the divergent convictions referred to above – be adopted as a discussion document of the MCSA and be referred to the Methodist people for their study and response.
- Districts find ways in which this material can be engaged with to and bring concrete suggestions to the 2012 Conference as to how the MCSA can create the space for such divergence of conviction to be exercised in ways that will preserve the integrity and unity of the church.
- Conference asks that this material be translated into various languages for accessibility. Conference notes that it is not possible for some to engage this matter due to different countries' laws and constitutions. The church continues its prophetic work in these places to facilitate open discussions on transparency on any issue".