

CHAPTER 20

SETH MOKITIMI METHODIST SEMINARY

Rev. Dr. Ross Olivier

I am deeply honoured, on behalf of the seminary, to give report of the activities and achievements of SMMS since Conference last met. In the scant 18 months since we opened our doors in 2009, much has occurred. We have achieved some major milestones. The seminary is fully functional and operating in accordance with the vision of 'forming transforming leaders for church and nation.' It has been a frenetic period, filled with stressful deadlines and moments of urgent angst, yet in the midst of the pressured pace a sense of purpose, peace, and productivity has characterised the life of staff persons and seminarians alike.

For the abundance of provision and fruitfulness, we declare our joyous and humble gratitude to Almighty God, whose purposes are our ultimate guide and chief end. In everything we truly do give thanks to God. God has been good to us – all the time!

Presently we have 77 seminarians enrolled at the seminary. 17 are enrolled in post-graduate programmes at our partner institution, the School of Religion and Theology at the University of KwaZulu Natal. The remaining seminarians are registered in our internal undergraduate programs; 13 of them are in a new program, the Formation Internship Program, designed to meet the needs of seminarians who have completed their academic studies, or who are between study programs. This program with its strong pastoral and practical focus has great potential to offer diverse and uniquely tailored programs across a wide spectrum of needs.

We are, as our Dean of Studies, Rev Sox Leleki is often heard to say, "this wonderful village called SMMS!" Indeed we are a village, comprising seminarians, spouses, children, and staff persons together with their families. Each Tuesday evening, as we gather for our weekly "village" communion service, I reflect upon the fact that God is fulfilling among us the prayer of Christ that we become "one ... that the world may believe"

The construction of the new campus is all but complete. On 6th July we began our July Vocational Intensive within its wonderful embrace. Each building within the premise is special in its own right. The campus is something of which the MCSA may rightly be proud. It is a remarkable pledge to future generations, a legacy that will enrich our ministry and mission for generations as yet unborn, much as the great mission institutions bequeathed to us by our fore-parents in the faith continue to offer hospitality, welcome, formation and sacred space these many years later.

I am thrilled to report to the connexion that SMMS is now registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training as a Private Institution of Higher Learning. Furthermore, the Council for Higher Education has granted accreditation status to our B.Th. program. In addition, the program has been submitted to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) for the pro forma process of registering it within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

As I reported to the District Synods, changes in the policy for higher education mean that all institutions of higher education are required to revise and submit restructured Diploma

programs for re-accreditation. All current two year diploma programs are being phased out and must be replaced with three year programs that are entirely distinct from degree programs. The expectation is for diploma programs to be more vocational and practical in their design. Accordingly, in consultation with EMMU, we have submitted an appropriate three year diploma program to the Department.

All of these achievements have provided us with rich opportunities to shape a modern program designed to meet the challenge of forming and equipping Ministers within a classical theological framework specifically crafted to prepare them for leadership and ministry within the entire context of Southern Africa. I believe we are already in the business of bequeathing to the church and nations of our sub-continent leaders who will be fully equipped to inspire, mobilise, educate, and empower communities to glorify God by transformative service and ministry. Our sole objective is to send into the world leaders who have been formed with a deep understanding of the values and purposes of the Kingdom of God, ready and able to enable our people to transform the evils which, without transformational interventions, will surely continue to blight the future of our people and deny fulfilment of their noblest aspirations.

I am pleased to report the first Audited Financial Statements of SMMS (for the 2009 year of operation) have been received. We celebrate the fact that we were able to end the year with a surplus. Consequently we have requested a zero increase from the Connexional Assessment Account for the 2011 year of operation.

I am also pleased to report that SMMS has been approached by, and is in serious negotiations with, other church denominations who have expressed keen interest to enrol some of their ministers-in-training for the 2011 seminarian year. Further updates will be provided as these developments are finalised.

SMMS has established some key goals. It is our hope that the seminary will develop into a Centre for Transformative Formation, with the following fundamental aspects:

TO BE A VIBRANT:

- Centre of Worship & Spirituality
- Centre of Learning and Theology
- Centre of Hospitality & Openness
- Centre of Mission & Ministry
- Centre of Community in Diversity
- Centre of Leadership Development
- Centre of Commerce & Enterprise (Prophets and Profits!)
- Centre of Excellence and Fruitfulness

My own medium term priorities for the seminary include:

- Ensuring financial sustainability by developing a healthy Endowment Fund
- Establishing sustainable administrative and management structures and operational strategies

- Developing renewed partnerships within the Pietermaritzburg Cluster of Theological Institutions
- Strengthening our cooperation with UKZN regarding our respective B.Th. programs
- Building strong community relationships

Again, as reported to the District Synods, SMMS is committed to providing the best possible academic / theological education to our seminarians. We also remain committed to the ideal of spiritual formation, personal growth, ethical development, and leadership training. Seminary life therefore includes regular (and vibrant!) worship services, covenant discipleship, community forums, field work, and vocational intensives. We remain fully committed to the ideal of “forming transforming leaders for church and nation” who will be spiritually mature, theologically informed, and vocationally skilled leaders of integrity, faithfulness and excellence. Holding together the formational and educational component respectively is often a delicate balancing act, but it is imperative that we do so.

I want to thank the many people who continue to prayerfully and materially support us. SMMS could not exist without you. Those of us charged with oversight of this great venture will continue to make every effort to ensure that your generosity and support is not in vain.

In particular, I strongly commend the team of colleagues and co-workers at SMMS, both full-time and adjunct. Each continues to play their part, diligently and competently, to ensure the success of the seminary. I cannot offer sufficiently high praise for them. It has been a rich blessing to be part of such a gifted team.

I also wish to commend the Governing Council for its diligence and unwavering commitment to the seminary ideal. The studious and serious nature of the GC meetings are a real testimony to proper accountability and good governance. Finally, I shall have failed to have done justice to this Report without special mention of the exceptional contribution of our GC Chairperson, the Rev Dr Peter Storey, to the completion of this God-inspired vision and venture. The commitment he has embodied bears enduring testimony to his spirit of dedicated service and sacrifice. None have worked as tirelessly to ensure that SMMS is what it already has become.

To all: staff, supporters, and seminarians - special people, I say: **NOMGAMSO!!**

GOVERNING COUNCIL
CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Rev. Prof. Peter Storey

It is my pleasant duty to report that the decision of the 2005 Conference to establish a Seminary in Pietermaritzburg, and the mandate the Presiding Bishop gave me in July, 2007 to ensure that this came about, have now been implemented. The MCSA has a new Seminary committed to 'Forming Transforming Leaders for Church and Nation,' with a growing body of seminarians led by a fine faculty, on a new state-of-the-art teaching campus. The Dedication and Opening of the campus on 4th and 5th September this year was a joyous occasion marking a brand new chapter the life of our Church.

It is time to record our immense gratitude to those whose time, energy, wisdom and passion, have made this achievement possible. I salute the 'originals' – the Presiding Bishop for his prophetic foresight, the Planning Executive we formed after our first Visioning Gathering of September, 2007, the Birthing Teams who laid much of the groundwork for the present shape of SMMS, the founding faculty, staff and volunteers who worked heroically in late 2008 in very challenging conditions to prepare for the first intake in January, 2009. These people are heroes, but they are not alone: the anonymous Methodist who pledged R10 million and gave R11 million, and other generous donors, including our MCSA organisations, enabled us to raise nearly R30 million in a time of deep economic recession. The farsightedness of our General Treasurer and the MCO Executive created a fund that made it possible to match our fund-raising rand-for-rand, taking us close to paying for the new campus in full. I thank our laity, who more than any, have appreciated the importance of excellence in our ministry; they are the practical visionaries who have made this project possible. I also wish to thank the present Governing Council for their wisdom and support.

THE NEW CAMPUS

The new Campus with its five magnificent buildings will serve us long into the future. Before construction began, we determined that the building project would be directed by Mr Anthony Tibbit and myself, while Dr Olivier and his staff focussed on the operation of the Seminary. I thank Mr Tibbit for being a tower of strength in this work. The final structure has now emerged from its chrysalis of scaffolding and we have no reason to regret any of the fundamental decisions we made before the land was even cleared. Each building is not only exceptionally functional, but we have been determined to leave an aesthetic mark in the spirits and imaginations of our seminarians. They must know that they enter a great heritage and identity as Methodist servant leaders.

Much of this has to do with the remarkable team of architects, builders, engineers and craftsmen assembled by our developer, Jock Seeliger who throughout has offered his vast expertise and resources without charge, and as we came to know the team we learned that these were quality people. I thank God for them and must especially record the names of the two key architects, Leon Witbooi and Jon Sander. Their works will leave a special mark on the lives of generations of seminarians.

FUNDING

In the current depressed economic climate fundraising has not been easy, but thus far R22.3 million has been received, with a further R6 million firmly pledged, and a possible R1 million more, making a total of R29.3 million. Each Rand given is matched by the Church's contribution, so with all gifts and pledges we are at R58.6 million, some R5 million short of the cost of the new campus. This is the largest amount ever raised in the MCSA – and it has happened without any 'campaigns' or 'appeals' in the midst of the worst recession since the 1930's - and in spite of determined resistance in some quarters. This is up there with the big miracles!

OPERATION

Ultimately, however, the new buildings are simply tools given us for the larger purpose of 'Forming Transforming Leaders for Church and Nation' and the renewal of our ministry. Dr Olivier's presentation on the operational life of SMMS will, I believe, astound and challenge this Conference - and so it should. The hopes expressed during the birthing process are coming to fruition and what is emerging is something different than anything ever before. A new paradigm of residential, life-in-community, spiritual and academic formation is being shaped, and we are blessed to see transformations taking place each day in the lives of our seminarians. They are growing before our eyes – in knowledge, in spiritual depth, in skill and grace – and nothing rewards all our work more than that.

Dr Ross Olivier is doing magnificently, managing all the minutiae of a complex institution with finesse, while offering visionary leadership and holding himself, his team and all seminarians accountable to the larger vision. The teaching and administrative staff fully embrace the spiritual as well as academic mission of SMMS. Dr Olivier and his staff team have my respect and appreciation and I also salute the Mrs Shayne Olivier who has been indefatigable in her preparation of both the residences and the new campus for occupation. We bid a sad farewell to Prof Neville Richardson, who brings a long and distinguished academic ministry to a close with his retirement. He has served his Church and his Saviour with humility and distinction. We welcome two new appointments, Mrs Lilian Siwila (Systematic Theology) and Rev Peter Grassow (Church History), and wish them well.

A STORY TO TELL

The full saga of the conception and birth of Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary has yet to be told, but there is already a story in its stones. This bold new campus and its vibrant community of some 200 people tells of what can happen when God's mission becomes more important than any one of us, and when we are willing to trust a call from God and obey it. Now that we have this facility the possibilities of its use are limited only by our imaginations and our resources. May the God who has led us this far, give us great and holy imaginations – the resources will follow!