

Introduction

I feel greatly humbled by this august gathering of officials and delegates who represent the Methodist people of our Connexion, for affording me this opportunity to present my third report which covers abridged information on my personal participative observation in mission in the Connexion as well as the activities I have performed during the period under review. This report further incorporates what some Districts have shared with me regarding the achievements, challenges observed in the church and the instant remedial actions taken since 2016 Conference to date to address some of those challenges as well as proposed future plans moving forward.

The Lay President's Look at the Connexion

Winston Churchill whom in the body of knowledge I regard as the advocate for learning from the past and present, gives good advice to leaders to respect the past and the use of the present circumstances in making successful future plans said in his assertion, I quote, *"The farther backward you can look the farther forward you are likely to see"*. In this report, I have resolved to borrow from Churchill's assertion during my participative observation activities and focused at looking further at some of what I would call the well known six cardinal aspects in ministries pursued by the clergy and the laity in the church. These cardinal aspects I challenge us to look further backward at and hope that we together will see further forward at are:

Witness in the community and Society; Pastoral care; Leadership; Mission through singing; Education as a tool that assist in moral regeneration and nation building; and Striving for oneness in the church.

Fellow Methodists, I am not presenting a scientific paper here but giving a report based on my observation looking further backward in the Connexion and also using the data I have collated from the District Lay Leaders when reporting about their Districts of which I had requested them to do.

2.1 Aspect of witness in the community and Society in the "then and the now" approaches

2.1.1 Witness "then" In my observation looking further backward I discovered that prophetic and contextual preaching yesteryear made the church enjoy respect from the community. In the eyes of the recipients of the Gospel, the outer cleanliness and conduct of the itinerant and local mission agents was seen as the manifestation of the presence of God conveyed as a positive message in the community and Society which galvanized respect for the Methodist Church of Southern Africa which brought hope among people and harnessed them to accept Christ with confidence.

The lessons that can be learnt from the past approach in this aspect is that the Word of God, the image of the Church and of Christianity were never compromised in any way both during preaching in words as well as in personal conduct by mission agents from different categories and levels.

2.1.2 Witness "now"

Celebrity and prosperity ministry as well as self-praise in doing things observed in the "now" approach seem to be overtaking humbleness, spiritual and prophetic ministry in some churches which sometimes make those in this category get bogged down by how to gain personal popularity and lose sight from providing spiritual growth and maturity to people. **The lesson** that can be learnt from the now approach is realisation that some people may come to church obsessed with high material expectations and entitlement, because of the theology of prosperity rather than coming for self-spiritual growth and maturity. My observation is that some of those who advocate for celebrity and prosperity ministry may either get trapped into self-attention wanting popularity leading to violation of biblical ordinances or Jesus Christ's theology of humbleness found in Luke 18:14(b).

2.2 Ministry of pastoral care aspect in the "then and the now" approaches

2.2.1 Pastoral care "then"

Look further backward one remembers that the church agents would do home visits to all members individual families irrespective of their status and social standing. In some instances the agents would stay and sleep over with those particular families which they had visited, especially in rural areas since those families' places of residences may have made them to be far away from the main Society where the mission agents' manses are situated.

The lesson that can be learnt from the past approach in this aspect is that the agents would know the families, know their daily practices as well as have an opportunity to know every member of these families. This kind of Good Shepherd ministry is the direct kind of emulation of Jesus Christ's ministry cited in John 10:14-15 where John says Jesus knew all His sheep. In this approach the agents become real spiritual leaders to the families. The agents become the real pastors to families. Christianity as a religion, a Church as the body of Christ and the agents as the mission drivers receive great respect and trust from families.

Families can without hesitation open up to the agents about their intimate sorts of burdens with confidence whenever they need advice.

2.2.2 Pastoral care “now”

Some approaches being used now in some situations have been observed to be the way of grouping families and serve them at the house of one family with the notion of saying that it saves time and cuts travelling cost for the agents.

The lesson that can be learnt from the now approaches in this aspect is that some of the members of the Church feel uncomfortable and refrain from opening up to the agents on their issues of intimacy that they would have loved to get them addressed in private by the agent. It would therefore be helpful when doing pastoral care to go back to basic which is attending to individual families and not group them.

2.3 Ministry of leadership aspect in the “then and the now” approaches

2.3.1 Leadership “then”

Yesteryear, leadership role would be given to a matured person. Paul in 1 Timothy 3: 6 said “a person matured in faith”. I want to add the elements of being matured in faith, experience and respected by people. The persons both clergy and laity bestowed with such leadership responsibilities would have been afforded an exposure to incremental spiritual growth and understanding of church polity. Giving leadership role to persons who are still in the state of neophyte in spiritual and church matters is suicidal, because they might swell up with pride and get condemned in the process.

The lesson that can be learnt in this aspect is that spiritually matured persons are able to stand any test of times, and due to their experience would always avoid temptation of plunging the church into embarrassment and feuds. There is also an assertion that spiritually mature persons speak less but do more and they respect the doctrine of their church to the core. They have an abundance of wisdom, they talk with politeness and respect to both young and old. They don't concern themselves much about proving or explaining themselves to people how much they theoretically know but they like praxis and work in silence without being bogged down by popularity syndrome.

2.3.2 Leadership “now”

In the current approach sometimes people get allotted leadership in different ministries having less background and knowledge of the Church and end up backsliding, because they fear to fail especially if they hadn't been exposed to orientation and induction before they can assume their leadership responsibilities officially. **The lesson** that can be learnt from the “now” approach is that whenever individuals are given a leadership role at any level, it should be a norm that they are exposed to orientation and induction about the responsibilities placed on their shoulders so that they can perform to the best of their abilities. Many people fail to execute their responsibilities not out of their inability to perform but because they had never been orientated and advised on what would be expected of them. They find themselves doing trial and error. This challenge can be addressed through mentoring the persons for a specific period of time before the individual persons can be left to do things on their own. The individual persons must also be prepared and open to accept to be mentored for the sake of God's mission and their development.

2.4 Spiritual readiness aspect through singing in the “then and the now” approaches

2.4.1 Singing “then”

Looking further backward one remembers that prayerful singing from the Methodist hymnal and spiritual digestion of the messages found in the words of the hymn were the core of mission through singing since one of the pillars that anchored Methodism was music. The yesteryear Christian Methodists would feel fulfilled when solemn singing of the Te Dium was at its best even before the sermon which became the climax of Methodists' worship.

The lesson that can be learnt from the past approach in this aspect is that the entire congregation would be in a solemn state of preparedness to receive the Word to be preached to their hearts through contextual singing and accompaniments that were balanced not overshadowing the hymns being sung.

2.4.2 Singing “now”

The current approach in this aspect sometimes capitalises more using accompaniments which sometimes overshadow the actual singing. This style of worship finds less space in the hearts of older congregants. In some areas the total rejection of accompaniments in singing loved by youth has a bearing in some youth leaving the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. **The lesson** that can be learnt from the now approach in this aspect is that youth loves singing which keeps them excited and feel accepted in the church. So the youth must be given space to sing what appeals to them. This can be done through having youth session services time separated from the older generation services time. It means that local churches can be

seriously requested to do situational analysis and respond accordingly to the prevailing needs of their local congregations both young and old.

2.5 Moral Regeneration and Nation Building aspect of education in the “then and the now” approaches

2.5.1 Education “then”

The Church of yesteryear played a remarkable role in moral regeneration and nation building through involvement in the system of education. The truth is that numerous schools that were run by the church produced disciplined citizens, credible and ethical conscious leaders because of the valuable ethics and moral education the church inculcated in education. **The lesson** that can be learnt from the past approach in this aspect is that Ministers in particular were given platforms in schools to add great value in education. Some adults in the past who were illiterate had an opportunity to be educated in Sunday schools where they would learn to read and write.

2.5.2 Education “now”

During this era the Church’s institutions of education have been incorporated into Government controlled public institutions of learning and are now run according to political ordinances and the church now plays less of a role in education in the big chunk of the Connexion of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa unlike in Ghana where the church still plays equal role with the state. **The lesson** that can be learnt from the “now” approach in this aspect is that no religion dominates over the others. However, moral education drives, if there are still any seem to be a challenge, because of a highly fluid system of religion in schools. Children find themselves exposed to many religions wherein to some it causes confusion especially if they do not receive any proper guidance at home. This demands that the church needs to encourage families to upscale Christian education at home and on the other hand, re-invigorate the class systems at the local congregations where it has been observed to be dwindling as well as reinforcement of Christian education in all mission groups like organisations and associations.

2.6 The strategy for promotion of oneness as a church in the “then and the now” approaches

2.6.1 Promotion of oneness “then”

The church during the 90s applied the strategy of geographic Circuits in trying to forge oneness where Circuits situated in the same geographic area were encouraged to combine into one Circuit that would have comprised black and white congregation. This strategy in some Districts collapsed before the process of unification of all Circuits could be started and completed, because some Circuits removed the colourless Christian glue that was to bind them to be one. Circuits jumped out of the boat and started re-erecting the barriers that made them separated and reverted to the colour conscious approach which made them violate the church’s commitment of one and undivided stance it took in 1958. One may associate such an action with Donald Trump’s ideology of building a barrier against people he termed not wanted in his country space.

The lesson that can be learnt from the past approach is that local churches seemed to have missed the great opportunity of bringing unity among communities and Societies, because of their failures to keep their unification statuses. The church in actual fact is faced with what I call the undying subcutaneous “segregato-viral syndrome”. This kind of syndrome in my view affects Societies, Circuits and Districts. The church has to initiate research on the root-causes of this and find treatment regimen for it.

2.6.2 Promotion of oneness “now”

A call has been made again to Districts to persuade some Circuits in the same cities or towns to intentionally discuss the process of uniting and form one Circuit so that the world can believe. The inputs of Districts’ representatives in the consultative conversations that has taken place regarding reconfiguration of District and Circuit boundaries has spoken volumes and given direction that this initiative has to happen.

The lesson that can be learnt from the now approach in this aspect is that the use of bottom-up and not top-down approach has been good but it needs courageous local leadership that can initiate intentional discussions to make unity a reality without looking at self-interests but consider the importance of mission in the Circuits and Districts. The local leaders need to remember Jesus Christ’s prayer in John 17: before he departed where he prayed to God for his disciples to be one. There is no other opportune time than this to achieve intentional real oneness as the church. Oneness across all spectrum.

Activities Performed by the Lay President

During the period under review I have been able to consult with church relevant structures like the District Lay Leaders, Education for Ministry and Mission Unit and the Mission Unit Education desk wherein through their inputs a final draft of the strategy for Every Member Ministry model implementation has been developed.

I was part of the team that led the Connexional Boundaries Conversation project in four of our Connexional regions formed by Districts of our Connexion. I per invitation have been able to conduct leadership workshops at Mabopane and Newcastle Circuits and looking forward to the Central Swaziland Circuit which has received a go ahead from their District Bishop and the circuit is still negotiating a suitable date.

I performed the following activities as per 5.8.2 and 5.8.3 of the MCSA's Book Of Order:

- Representation of the Church in ceremonial activities
I was privileged to represent the church and gave messages of support at the Music Association Convention; the inductions of the District Lay Leaders of Central, Clarkebury, Grahamstown and Natal Coastal Districts; induction of the General President of the Women's Manyano in East London Mrs. G. Makhwenkwe.
- Observance of the ministry of compassionate care
In February 2017 Mozambique experienced storms disaster and I successfully motivated District Lay Leaders to join me raise money to contribute into the Connexional Mission Disaster Fund to be sent to Mozambique. I also honoured the ministries of compassionate care and presence by attending funerals in Central and Grahamstown Districts respectively.
- Visit and motivation of Church structures
I visited the Local Preachers General Committee which had held its meeting at eMseni in the Highveld and Swaziland District on 10 February 2017 where I presented Conference resolution on the directive to review the use of the word "Crusade". I further visited Highveld and Swaziland and Natal West District Local Preachers' Associations who had held their conventions in May and June 2017 respectively wherein I addressed them on DRD model. I held a consultative workshop with the District Lay Leaders in February 2017 where among other things I did was to orientate the newly inducted District Lay Leaders.
- Performance of other duties and tasks
I have been able to attend meetings of the following structures of the church at SMMS, District and MCO respectively: the Mission Congress, the SMMS Governing Council Executive, the Synod, and the Revisions Committee.
I was part of the Pastoral Commission that went to attend to the conflict in Clarkebury District.

The Lay President's Look at Districts as per District Lay Leaders' feedback

Feedback on achievements was received from Central, Clarkebury, Grahamstown, Highveld & Swaziland, KNB, Natal Coastal, Natal West and Northern Free State & Lesotho Districts to have been able to conduct regional workshops relating to numerous issues among which were Circuit financial management, revival of classes, work relations and teamwork. Some of these Districts have successfully done the following: established mission forums, established work relations with Government desks like health and social development, did clustering of Circuits, done analysis of the state of the District, organized Circuits to share best practices.

Some of these Districts cited some challenges that they are faced with such as: Insufficient resources to do mission caused by unemployment and high rate of crime; conflicts and divisions caused among other things by lack of communication, factions and ethnicity syndrome; lack of active participation in mission and poor attendance of planned workshops; The culture of entitlement to some clergy and some laity but less commitment to God's mission. These challenges have been found to be holding mission in ransom.

The District Lay Leaders in some Districts in collaboration with the Bishops, the District Executives and Circuit leadership, instantly worked together to minimize or quell these challenges through conducting workshops and seminars involving different categories of leadership at Circuit and District levels.

The Lay President's further forward seeing

After looking further backward and have seen further forward, it is my submission to this Conference that guidelines need to be given as to where shall we begin to deal with the crucial observations made so far. I therefore here make these proposed plans in order for the church to be able to see God's laughs of joy that his church has plans and commits to make them reality through his grace. The plans are as follows:

- In dealing with the aspect of witness in the community, the church needs to intentionally pursue the Every Member Ministry model using the strategy designed for its implementation and which the Connexional Executive has had access to and discussed it.
- In dealing with the aspect of pastoral care, the church is requested to direct all mission agents to intentionally implement Jesus Christ's model of Good Shepherd quoted in John 10: 14-15 which promotes the agents to intimately know their flock they are pasturing at.
- In dealing with the aspect of affording individuals leadership role, the church should ensure that all individuals elected or appointed into leadership gets orientated and inducted before assuming the leadership responsibilities.

- Ensure that the programme of mentorship for new leaders kicks in once those elected or appointed persons start doing what they have been elected or appointed to do.
- In dealing with the aspect of promotion of mission through singing, the local churches` leadership should boldly advise those who use accompaniments during singing to ensure that there is a balance between singing and accompaniments.
- Circuits should ensure that situational analysis are done in Circuits and Societies regarding singing and accompaniments; youth and elders likes are taken serious so that the approaches of doing church respond to the prevailing needs of the aforementioned people. No group of worshipers either young or old should be disadvantaged.
- In dealing with the aspect of moral regeneration and nation building, the local leadership should ensure that Christian education programmes in Circuits, in Societies and homes are up-scaled.
- In dealing with the aspect of oneness, the Connexional Executive should direct a relevant Connexional structure to conduct research and find facts and causative-effects of the subcutaneous segregato-viral syndrome that inhibits Circuits who are in the same geographic area from uniting and recommend the contextual treatment regimen for this syndrome.
- We the church needs to develop An Anger Debriefing Programme (AADP) which will be used to assist all agents that have been exposed to circuit feuds and conflicts before such agents move to the next circuit.

Conclusion

Now that I am at the end of presenting this report to you, allow me to conclude by leaving you with this quotation of advice whose author is not known which says; I quote "If you want to see the laughs of God, you must tell him about your plans".

I think this has been a good opportunity for me on your behalf to tell God about the plans of his church regarding the way it plans and hope to address the issues identified under each cardinal aspect cited in this report in pursuance of the ministries by the clergy and laity who are agents of his mission. Now that the plans have been put before God, the next step is to ask God to help his church make these plans deliverables. This will happen if we heed Nora Roberts` advice when she says, "If you don`t go after what you want, you`ll never have it. If you don`t ask, the answer is always no. If you don`t step forward, you are always in the same place". Let us therefore step forward now that we have been able to look further backward and can likely see further forward.

Shalom

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