



The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Tel: +27 (0)11 615 1616
+27 (0)87 0561201
Fax: +27 11 615 1511

Methodist Connexional Office
33 Ernest Oppenheimer Ave
Bruma Office Park, Bruma
Private Bag X11
Garden View 2047

FREEDOM DAY IN SOUTH AFRICA- A TIME TO PAUSE AND REFLECT

Today the 27th of April in South Africa we celebrate freedom. We celebrate democracy, a progressive constitution and the freedoms to express opinion, of association and movement. For those who had been denied, it is a celebration of freedom to vote for the leaders of our choice, freedom to live where we want to in our country etc. Basically we celebrate to be granted full human being status with all human rights and responsibilities by the Constitution.

I must confess however, that I have come to hold this day with a feeling of sadness and irony. I ask myself how freedom worth celebrating is measured. Is it measured by well -intentioned words in a constitution? Is it measured by the ability to vote for some individuals to be called leaders of the people when all they care about is themselves? Is freedom worth celebrating to be measured by the lived experience of the majority of citizens of the country? As we talk about freedom in South Africa, we have to also turn our eye to the perpetual systematic oppression that we still live with. As we speak about freedom, we have to look in the eyes of our children, our mothers, grandmothers, our brothers and sisters, our Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) children and siblings and know that these citizens live in no freedom at all.

South Africa, instead of being a bastion of freedom, ranks among one of the most unequal countries in the world. Socio-economic well-being is still largely affected by the intersections of race, class and gender.

“It just takes 23hours for a CEO to earn what the average worker earns in a year. Moreover, the richest 20% of people in South Africa control almost 70% of the resources.” (Oxfam Report 2020)

In South Africa, we know that we are still trapped in the quagmire of colonial and racial entanglements that make it impossible to access health care, education, the job market and other freedoms entrenched within our constitutional democracy. The cycles of socio-economic and political exclusion are generational and built on already pre-existent systems of exclusion and oppression:

“Sadly, most people’s income and wealth levels in South Africa are determined at birth. If you do not have the right start in life, shelter, quality healthcare and education, educated parents with good paying jobs, then you are most likely to live a life of poverty. The earnings of 9 out of 10 people once they enter the labour market are determined by what their parents earned. Therefore, despite what we hear about free markets and individual choice, the structure of South African wealth and income inequality looks more like a caste system, where one’s social status is determined at birth and is based on race, class and gender than a system of free association among people of equal value.” (Oxfam Report 2020)

Being born a woman, being born differently abled, being born poor, being born black, being born queer automatically excludes and inhibits a person from living a full, free life in this our country. It is very difficult to celebrate democratic freedom in the light of such inequalities.

A Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of Nations

Presiding Bishop:
Rev Purity N Malinga
E-mail: presbish@mco.org.za

General Secretary:
Rev Michel W Hansrod
E-mail: gensec@mco.org.za

Lay President:
Mr James M Nkosi
E-mail: jm.nkosi@gmail.com



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The violence does not just end here in the realms of the socio – economic and the political. It is brutally enacted on the bodies of the oppressed and excluded groups. Not only does South Africa rank as one of the most unequal countries in the world, South Africa also has one of the highest rape incidents per a capita in the world! It is dangerous being a woman in South Africa. It is dangerous to be a child in South Africa. It is dangerous being a person who is different in South Africa. As a nation we are reeling from high levels of violence everywhere and no one is safe, except maybe those who have body guards. Criminality goes unabated. Now and then there are spikes of reported murders of people e.g. elderly, mentally ill women, accused of being witches! Recently there have been reported and publicised murders of the LGBTIQ people – but their murders and corrective rape has been happening for years. Perpetrators are hardly found or brought to book. It is dangerous to be alive in this country! We strangle our humanity in layers and layers of oppression and exclusion, even while we absurdly celebrate democratic freedom!

As we celebrate this day, fellow Methodists, I call for acknowledgement and introspection. It is in this action of acknowledgement and ownership that we can begin to reimagine who and what we can be. We can individually and collectively begin to shape a life of freedom in which the patterns of inequality and violence can truly end. It is Dr Nelson Mandela who said;

“For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others...” (Long walk to Freedom)

Let us acknowledge on this day, that the urgent work of our time is to imagine and reimagine what it means to be a church whose theology and praxis promotes a society in which violence in all its forms ends. Let us acknowledge that in our practices, we have not been a believing community that models nurture, care and enhances the full humanity of the oppressed and excluded of society. We have often- times perpetuated violence and exclusion by our complicity, our complacency and our participation in theologies and practices that are grounded in the toxic entrenchment of imperialism and violent patriarchy. We grieve the countless lives of people who join our church, hoping for better experience of the life of love and freedom but end up hurt, excluded and diminished by our wounding practices.

I encourage all Methodist people on this Freedom Day to reimagine what it means to be a community of healing and transformation. I encourage us to hold the experiences and lives of all whose humanity is trampled upon- as sacred and as entry points into how we reimagine who we can be as members of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and as South African citizens in particular. I encourage us to shape our church communities so that the thinking, attitudes and communal practices that harbour and feed hatred, division and the dehumanizing of the different, can be dismantled.

Let us remember always to live by our rule of life:

1. Doing no harm, avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is more generally practiced.
2. Doing good by being merciful after one’s power; doing good of every possible sort to the bodies of people as well as their souls and as far as possible to all.

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3. Attending upon all the ordinances of God.

May God bless us all as we seek to be agents of Christ's healing and transformation in Africa.

Nkosi sikelela I Afrika!

Rev. Purity Malinga
Presiding Bishop

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