

Conference Report of the General Secretary 2018

John Wesley said: "I want the **whole** Christ for my Saviour, the **whole** Bible for my book, the **whole** Church for my fellowship and the **whole** world for my mission field."

One of the characteristics of Methodism, is that it embraces. Since the beginning, many who were marginalised, were taken seriously by Methodists - women, the poor and children were sought out and included in ministry. Here is one of many examples: The rules of John Wesley for Preachers in regard to children. It reads: "Gift or no gift, you are to speak with the children, or else you are not called to be a Methodist preacher!"

Wesley gives six rules regarding this:

1. Don't say: "I have no gift for this."
2. Ignore the view that children should be seen and not heard.
3. Help parents develop parenting skills.
4. Create special classes for children.
5. Pray for them.
6. Make sure there is an annual Education Day service.

Wesley's insistence to include and not exclude became a hallmark of Methodism. One to which, I believe, if we want the Church to be what the Church is called to be, we need to adhere to – and in many cases, return to.

We have found ways to exclude, to overlook, to band together in holy huddles, to lock the doors and to make it very difficult for people to enter our fellowship. We have grown big enough to say to ourselves: "we are fine the way we are." There is no Methodist presence in Dewetsdorp or Reivilo or Vivo or Ihambane – but it doesn't matter- we are big enough. We have grown callous enough at times to act as if: "Children are not an economically viable, so children's work has no priority".

A missional church needs to find inclusive ways of responding to the world around us. In fact, if we want to be called Church, we need to do some introspection about the way we look (or don't look) beyond ourselves and our structures. Structures were never meant to constrict us, restrict us, shrink us. Mission Groups in the church, by whichever name they go, were never meant to close us in and make us exclusive, they exist for the sake of the Gospel, and the Gospel never looks inward. It always looks outward.

District Boundaries

That is why the Church embarked more deliberately, after 20 years of talking about it from time to time, on the conversation of District Boundaries. Through a long and extensive consultation we have come to the unanimous conclusion that our District boundaries do not serve our Mission well. One of the key principles we agreed on in increasing the number of Districts was that all places of human habitation are worthy of ministry by the MCSA, however far, small or poor. Reducing District sizes relate directly to our Missional intention.

Time is given in the programme of this Conference to deal specifically with the Structures Committee's report on Boundaries, together with proposals from Synods and the relevant resolutions.

To lead this project and facilitate a smooth and strong implementation of the formation of Districts the Connexional Executive has approved the creation of a Connexional Station called Shaping for Mission Enabler. This will be a full time station for an initial period of three years,

stipend and office funded by the Mission Resource Fund, the Millennium Mission Fund. The Connexional Executive has also approved a one off amount of R 1 000 000 from the interest of Church Reserve to go to the assistance of the establishment of new Districts.

A Missional Church

A missional church needs to find inclusive ways of responding to the world around us. A Church is not a service provider waiting for people to seek us out (and often not find us because we are poorly signposted) We are Missioners who go in response to the call of Jesus, to seek the lost, to gather together those who are in need, to establish new work. This leads to more work. It is sacrificial on the community and the Minister- but that is the essence of who we are. No Minister sits in the vestry, saying: "Let them come and find me"- if they need ministry!

A missional church needs to find inclusive ways of responding to the world around us. Who are the children in our neighbourhood and how should the church relate to them? We are saying at this Conference that Children and Young people are at the centre of the life of the church. Are they? In the local Society, where are the children, and how do you give evidence of their importance in the Society? In the broader church structures, what does it say that the youth have a separate Synod and a separate Conference, and that they need to be separately delegated to Conference than the rest of the District?

I trust that in the year to come, we can in different forums, begin to talk seriously about what it means in terms of ministry, structures and attitude, what it means that we are a Child and Youth Centred church. In this year of Youth and Children I can announce that the Connexional Youth Coordinator stipend will be partly subsidised by the Mission Resource Fund for the next two years in order that he may dedicate a percentage of his time to the Connexional business of youth.

A Missional Church needs renewed passion

In relation to these points I raise above, I believe that one urgent need we have, is a renewed passion. One of the characteristics of early Methodism was a passion for ministry to everyone and anyone, that got the Wesley's and their colleagues into trouble very frequently. John was content with only a hundred preachers, as long as they were on fire! "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God..." he said.

We have everything we need to be a formidable force, to be a healing balm, to be a transforming power. The Presiding Bishop is always reminding us of the hugely privileged position we are in, in terms of our resources. In terms of human resources, creative and intellectual capacity, the capacity to love and to care, we have people who sacrifice greatly as an expression of their love of the Lord and their commitment to the church. We have a heritage, we have buildings and we have land. We have, when we put it all together, funds to put into that which we are called to. We have some exceptional leaders at all levels of the church.

But do we have the passion, the vision, the drive? Do we believe, really, that what I do in my Circuit can lead to the healing of Africa?

As we consider what structures may be best for the growth of Mission in Districts, and as we think about what it will take structurally, to bring children and youth to the centre of the

church, what decisions or changes in the Laws and Discipline it will take to bring women into their rightful place in leadership and representivity, we need to go a step further, beyond structural changes.

How do we help our people to re-imagine our place in the world? How do we re-ignite passion in the Ordained and Commissioned Orders? Until we find in our hearts again the passion for ministry, we can change whatever structures we want to, and nothing will happen.

Here are some initial responses from the church, knowing full well that the church can't make passionate people. Our spiritual life is our own responsibility. But here are four initiatives:

First, Conference 2017 has decided that each District is to have a Convocation of all Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, for the main purposes of conversation on vocation, deepening theological reflection, accountability and the renewal of Ordination Vows.

By all accounts the first Convocation held in all Districts in 2018, was of great value, and we encourage District leadership to pay special attention to the Convocation, especially in the early ears of its establishment, to that it may prove to be an instrument of renewal and energy.

Second, Conference 2017 re-engaged the process of Continued Ministerial formation. It has been agreed, for the sake of the well-being and growth of Ministers, as well as the health of the Church, that ordained presbyters in active ministry participate in Continuing Ministerial formation. We are required to do at least 100 hours of learning/study a year (about 12 days). In addition, accountability groups are to be appointed for all Ordained Presbyters, to carry out a Review of Ministry process. This is for the purpose of mentorship and to facilitate self-reflection and setting of goals as a person and as a Minister. The annual Convocation will expect a report.

The idea is to grow a thriving, learning, engaged Order of Presbyters whose calling compels them and who can firmly respond to the call of Brother Ignatius of Loyola- "Go forth and set the world on fire".

Third, understanding that any collective renewal in Mission and appetite for healing and renewing the church and society will always have a common denominator who may also be a common deterrent, in the person of the Superintendent, it is the intention of the Connexional Leadership in 2019 to initiate regional Superintendents' consultations, collaboration between the Office of the Presiding Bishop, the Education for Ministry and Mission Unit, Mission Unit and the Bishops. The Consultations will, we trust, help in building our collective ministry and understanding of mission locally, and together with the two processes already outlined and begun this year, continue to build a formidable team leading this Church and its Circuits in the task to which we believe we have been called to. Dates reflect in the Connexional diary, and Bishops are consulting on the issues of logistics.

Fourthly, the Connexional Executive have approved the inclusion in the Laws and Discipline a document entitled "Principles Guiding Clergy Conduct. This guiding document contains nothing new, but is a compilation of all that has been, for a very long time, expectations of Ministers, but now contained in one document.

Any Minister who claims that they are above accountability does not understand the Christian faith, and has no idea of Methodism. These four aids to accountability are not meant to constrict, but to call out the best of all of us, and produce conditions in which passion and mission may flourish.

These are all towards a goal of making the strong church stronger, to make a mission-minded church, mission driven, to sweep way any cobwebs of complacency and help us re-connect fervently with our heritage and our calling.

Synergising the Orders

We understand that Deacons, Bible Women and Evangelists are members of two Orders which serve the church and its mission, in different, but not less important ways of Ministry.

Last year we decided to bring the leadership of the two Orders together, in cooperation with the Church Leadership and to look in depth at how these Orders function, and how they relate to one another and to the structures of the Church.

Work is progressing, but as the conversation continues, we are delving all the more deeply, and have come to the decision together that we could not give this Conference a conclusive report yet. Our next step is to meet together with DEWCOM to deal thoroughly with issues of doctrine, before we can conclude matters of practise or order. This date has already been set.

We recognise that the Orders all have origins that relate to the history of this sub-continent, and that it is important to recognise these beginnings, as we understand the nature of the Orders.

We are discussing the fact that some are Commissioned and others Ordained, and what that means, that some are accountable at Connexional level, and others at Circuit level, that some testify to their call at Synod and others do not, that for some, being stationed beyond their Circuit of origin is a very difficult process, and that there seems to be inadequate foundational reason for the amounts at which stipends are pegged.

Issues that the Synergising Committee is untangling include questions of theology, justice, history, mission, recognition, structures and relationship.

The work of the Orders is critical to our Mission, and central to the implementation of igniting Missional Communities in parts of the Connexion where we have long not had ministry, and the Committee, including the Wardens of the Orders are deeply committed to completing this work in a manner that will strengthen the ministry of the church as a whole.

MCSA financing model and the Connexional assessment calculation of Assessments

Conference last year gave us the task to begin looking with new eyes at our financing and our Assessment allocation processes.

To begin, the increase in Connexional Cost for the last number of years has been

Year	Connexional budget - administration	% increase on the previous year
2018	15 367 482	5,2%

2017	14 601 663	1%
2016	14 458 340	6,8%
2015	13 530 000	3,6%
2014	13 052 745	8,6%
2013	12 013 200	10%
2012	10 934 505	11,6%
2011	9792350	12%
2010	8688140	8,2%
2009	8023190	

In the exercise of considering the MCSA financing model and the Circuit Assessment model some considerations are important:

1. The amount the Connexion needs for its Connexional operation. This budget is influenced by the statutory and Human Resource requirements within the society in which we operate, and the churches responsibilities regarding Revenue Services, Reserve Bank, Financial Services Board, Pension Fund regulations, receipt and payment of stipends, Basic Conditions of Employment Act, legal requirements relating to lawyers, CCMA, court cases, as well as the Church's own regulations regarding the providing of training of Members, Preachers, and those in the Commissioned and Ordained Orders, our need to interface with at least 15 Ecumenical bodies, Communications with media, members, ministers through different forums, the coordination of many functions and processes in the Connexion, training of various bodies, travel, which is a very important part of our belief in the strength of a Connexional church, committee meetings, the ministry to youth and children which is funded by the Church, and the broad work of Mission through a variety of Desks as well as the Central Mission Unit which holds together many strands of Connexional Mission Coordination and relationships with donors and other Connexions. One very large amount that is very important, but adds to the burden on Circuits, and is over and above the Connexional assessment is that of Medical Aid for all Ministers and Pensioners- Supernumeraries and widows and Extraordinary affliction grants to the Order of Evangelism.

The budget is carefully calculated annually, in consideration of the actual needs of the Church and its Units, which has in some years led to a very small increase.

2. The question is where the money comes from to cover the necessary expense. Traditionally this has come from Circuits through what we call Circuit Assessment. This is done as a calculation of a percentage of the stipends and allowances of Ministers in each Circuit.

There have been moments when the church has considered other forms of income. Such a project was the Millennium Mission Campaign, and the Jubilee Fund, one which had limited success, the other not at all.

In consultation with other Connexions, one place to seriously consider amending our financial model, is that of income through means other than only Circuit assessment.

The most obvious place to begin consideration of income generation, is the church's property portfolio. The Connexional Trust Properties Committee which was re-established this year was given the mandate by Conference to develop Connexional strategies for underutilised property for income generation for Connexion, District and Circuit. Such strategic thinking is on the table in embryonic form, and includes possibilities such as joint ventures with business where the church for example provides land, a developer builds a hospital, and we reap joint rewards from the project.

Such projects are feasible, if examples in especially Kenya are scrutinised, and we believe, will not detract from the Church's "core business" as it should be managed by people who are skilled in the sector, and can enhance not only our footprint in society, but if projects are chosen wisely, can make a very real difference in the community.

The term "Social Enterprise" is one that we have not been using, but it is one of the innovations of the current age. Generically speaking, "A social enterprise is a cause-driven business, whose primary reason for being is to improve social objectives and serve the common good." Some Methodist Churches have ventured into various enterprises, very successfully. A funeral scheme, insurance scheme, hotels, conference centres, hospitals are examples from Zimbabwe, Kenya and Britain.

A second means of income possible for the Church is interest raised through investment. This is the first reason for the creation of the Church Reserve Fund in our Connexion. It was instituted in 2007 and has in the last number of years grown through the interest accumulated in the Fund. This fund at the end of 2017 stood at R 94 500 000. If it can continue to grow for a few more years, a calculated portion of interest of this fund can begin to subsidise the Connexional expenses.

Thirdly, consider a concerted drive to inform members of the MCSA to consider the Connexion of the MCSA as a beneficiary in their last will and testament.

A fourth means of income possible is to formally assess Church Institutions and Organisations on Connexional level. This may be something like a percentage of all non-missional expenditure of an Organisation.

The first two of four possibilities for income from other sources will not have an immediate effect, but within just a few years, will be able to make a substantial difference in income for the Connexion if we put our energy into them.

3. The third major consideration is that of how the money to be gathered by the Connexion, is to be allocated up among Methodists.

The District Treasurers have given collective consideration to this question, and their wisdom from experience is that taking membership per Circuit is not a helpful calculation for various reasons. Using Circuit income is also a complicated mechanism with a number of pitfalls. To them, the most objective measure is that of Ministers' stipends per Circuit, which is the method currently used.

However, in some cases the Minister's stipend is almost the total of a Circuit's income with little spare, and for others, the stipend is a proportion of the income, and there is money for various other salaries and or ministries. There may be a better method, yet.

Here is a possible alternate means of calculating the Assessment per Circuit that is based on Assessment models elsewhere:

Calculate the amount that is to be gathered from Circuits once other forms of income have been deducted.

Then ascribe to each District the percentage of the whole it must carry of the Connexional budget, based on a weighted calculation of:

- Number of Circuits in the District
- Number of Ministers in the District
- Number of full time lay employees in the District
- Average stipend of Ministers in the District
- Consideration for particular sectors as per National statistics such as poverty rate or unemployment rate within the boundaries of districts
- Consideration given for new Districts

Each District therefore is given a figure calculated by the MCO with District Treasurers, based on an agreed upon calculation such as the one above. The Allocation to each District is decided at this forum in the manner above.

District Finance Committees then meet to decide how their portion of the Assessment is to be divided in the District, as they currently do, for District assessment. Such District Finance Committees are in touch with the temporal and missional needs and opportunities of all the Circuits in the District, and are able to make an annual decision as to the contribution of each Circuit towards the Connexional costs of the Church. The Allocation of each Circuit to Connexional Costs (other than Assessments for the cost of Ministry that each Circuit bears) is decided by the District Finance Committee and communicated to the MCO.

If the Conference is able to provide some feedback on the broad idea above, those with the necessary skill and qualification will be able to refine the idea into a proposal, for consideration by Synods 2019 and decision by Conference 2019.

As a missional church, let us continue to find ways of responding to the world around us, by all the means we can, and with all the imagination and passion we have in our hearts.