

LOOKING BACK - THINKING AHEAD BMC - 2005

INTRODUCTION:

Members of the National Executive, Bishops and Bishops-Elect here present, Colleagues in the Ministry and your spouses, distinguished guests, directors and leaders of various units of our church, delegates from all district BMC Structures, ladies and gentleman: I greet you all.

I am deeply humbled and grateful to God who through his mercy is affording me yet again an opportunity to address you for the last time this year.

I am also honored to be addressing you at a time when the BMC is celebrating 30 years since its inception.

It is no co-incidence that these celebrations come soon after the 10 years celebrations of our democracy. Recently South Africans came together again to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Freedom Charter adopted in Kliptown in 1955. This charter became the embodiment of the democratic ideals of all people of the Republic of South Africa.

By its very nature this conference is intended to acknowledge and praise the role the BMC has played in the democratization of the South African Church, but more particularly to praise the contribution to the changes it has helped bring into the life, structure and the administration of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

On this role, I want to believe that having this has been consistent with the mandate received from those who made the first delegation to the 1975 consultation in Bloemfontein. It was in the light of many issues that were discussed at that consultation that this BMC produced for itself a document of a Mission, Vision and Objectives which characterize the purpose of its existence. It is this document that has become like the 'Peoples Contract' which had to be viewed in the context of the imperatives presented by the MCSA's commitment to improving equal representation of all Methodists in the decision making process of their church. Hence, we proclaim – BMC – *"IFA LABAZALI BETHU – LE FA LABATSOADI BA RONA"* - BMC

Our theme is both interesting and significant. The concise Oxford Dictionary defines "Looking Back" – as a survey of past events or time, and "Thinking Ahead" – implies a prospective obligation.

With this theme in mind, I wish to encourage every Black Methodist not to forget the great achievements of the BMC. I wish for us to recall the process Africa has had to engage in for her to gain liberation from colonial and imperial domination. I also want

doomed to fail, and that Blacks needed to strategically come together and join forces to challenge the status quo.

Then under the influence of Rev. Ernest Baartman the BMC was founded and he became its first chairman with Rev. Dr. Mgojo as his first Secretary.

Neelato Whilst the BMC was initially a consultation of Black Ministers only – A year later it became apparent that the voice of the laity was not heard and it became open to them as well. However, even at that point the BMC remained a male only consultation, - only in 1980 did the BMC open its doors to Black women.

It is unfortunate to note that this has been a trend applied by the MCSA for many decades, that the involvement of woman in the affairs of the MCSA and its decision making process has always lain with men and that it has not been completely eradicated yet.

Ⓟ It was saddening for me to discover that the very movement that stood against discrimination maintained some forms of discrimination within itself too. One immediately recalls the recent saga around the name of our first lady Lay – President, Miss Lindeni Madlala. It was the very people who championed the struggle against injustice and discrimination who found it difficult to accept her victory as Lay – President of the MCSA.

However, to this end – there is no secret that the BMC did not allow anything in its way to dampen its spirit, but that it continued to synergise its efforts to meet most of the expectations and the requirements outlined in its mandate. Most of these expectations and requirements were based on the need to transform and restructure the MCSA in all its departments of operation, and this to a greater extent has been realized over these 30 years – and we can boldly say that some progress has indeed been made.

Although we may not have met all our expectations over these past thirty years, we however, cannot but acknowledge the role this movement has played in enabling the MCSA to vigorously look at some of the issues that form part of the concern for the Black agenda. Fundamental to these has been a need to address the profound inequalities inherited from the past, the need to meet the moral, social, spiritual and economic demands in the MCSA and indeed in the new South Africa, and the challenges of the National and International opportunities presented by the present climate of change. These challenges include – same sex relationships, domestic violence, child and women abuse, HIV/AIDS pandemic, crime, and unemployment etc.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES:

I am certain that this BMC will continue to look at what could have been or still is our history's biggest lost opportunities, sometimes caused by a culture of complacency which compels us to look inward too often as if giving devotion to past ideals and methods, so much so, we become suspicious of new ideas.

– How will he not also along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8: 31 - 32).

I can never read these verses without being deeply moved that it is this same God who has graciously intervened in the life of the Church and indeed of this movement in the past 30 years. Often times there were conflicting views on a number of issues and as a result there were those who did not have hope for the future, but faith and trust in Jehovah has kept us going, and thus far the Lord has been with us.

I have no doubt that the legacy of this movement has touched, in a profound way, many lives. I personally have been the beneficiary of that powerful legacy. I am a quite certain that over these 30 years the BMC has left behind a track record of accomplishments so that those who are coming behind us will not need to wander in a maze of dead ends and false starts as they head towards the goals of this movement.

Those that are coming behind us will know that people of daring and imagination fought hard to push back the barriers of ignorance so as to open for us a world with full opportunities.

Those who come behind us will know that the BMC has been powerful in identifying ideological forces that shape the understanding of the role and purpose of the movement. They will know that the BMC has always been aware that as a non-constitutional movement it exists within the main stream of the MCSA and that for it to be effective in achieving its objectives, it has, time and again, to stop and ask the following questions:

- Where have we been?
- Where are we now?
- Where are we going?

In short, those who come from behind us will always know that the BMC has always been conscious of what our location is with in the MCSA. This has been a deliberate exercise so as to help share the sense of purpose and role with those new members that join the movement

TRANSFORMATION:

Transformation is indeed in the air we breathe these days. The recent developments in and around us are just a witness to that. But transformation has been with the MCSA and the BMC for sometime now. Since 1981, the MCSA has been following a ten year trend of self – assessment.

From Obedience '81, we had the Journey To The New Land process and recently it was the Mission Congress. All these programmes were attempts of re-orientation towards new realities and challenges of life that the church and society is faced with.

Considering the outcome of the Umtata Mission Congress and its desired objectives, this BMC should identify the key challenges, especially those that seem to trouble the MCSA in our era. We should join hands with the Mission Unit in designing strategies, which will assist in adequately interpreting in the simplest language, and disseminate