



BLACK METHODIST CONSULTATION

CHAIRPERSON'S CONSULTATION 2018 SPEAKING NOTES

THEME: RISE AND WALK: FROM DEPENDENCY TO AGENCY

Chairperson: Rev Mzwandile Molo

1. INTRODUCTION

The Presiding Bishop Ziphosihle Siwa, the General Secretary Rev Charmaine Morgan, the Bishop of the great Cape of Good Hope District Bishop Mandla Hansrod and the district leadership, the BMC connexional leadership under the able stewardship of our General Secretary, all district BMC leaders, former connexional chairpersons and your executives, former district leaders, members of this wonderful movement called the BMC, friends and visitors I greet you all in the wonderful name of our Liberator and Transformer and sustained Jesus Christ.

I greet you aware that being in your company is a privilege that I must never take for granted. It is my honour to welcome you all in this 43rd Black Methodists Consultation gathering in the City of Cape Town, in the Cape of Good Hope District. Our gathering together under the banner of the BMC is a continuation of a long journey of struggle and renewal started by our forebears and we have the responsibility to continue with nobility, commitment and courage, giving all of who we are in the service of our people and the kingdom of God. Standing on their shoulders we must open our ears to the cries of our people and see their affliction so that our gathering is more than a meeting of like-minded people enjoying each other's company but a moment of deep discernment for the loving service of our people and joyful obedience to the call of God's kingdom for our time. I welcome you all aware of the sacredness of our task together in this Consultation. It is my belief that the God of transforming love and Justice will guide and inspire us.

We meet again as Members of the great movement the BMC given to us by our forebears from at its birthday by one of the great Methodist sons, Ernest Nkathazo Bartman born and bred in the streets of the Cape Flats. We owe it to his and his generation to take full responsibility for our own contribution to the evolution not only of this Movement the BMC but the Methodist church of Southern Africa in its entirety and perhaps more importantly the nations of our connexion and the people that God created in God's image and the nature that God has blessed us to live with in a mutually loving relationship. We gather together under the gaze of the beautiful Table Mountain that has witnessed the tragedy of colonialism, dispossession and Apartheid. From the arrival of Jan Van Riebeck, the loss of property and life of the Khoi, the expansion of the Dutch control of the Cape the consolidation of colonialism under the English, the birth and enactment of Apartheid in 1948, the beauty of an Island turned into a symbol of the dehumanisation of the human soul, the cosmetics of the tri-cameral parliament in 1983 and the brutality of the state of emergency of the mid 80's; this mountain has seen the worst that human kind can do to other human beings.

Yet this very same mountain has seen the best of its sons and daughters rise up against that which is evil, both in word and deed showed us all that which is noble and beautiful can never be defeated by that which is evil. It is this mountain, Table mountain, that became a backdrop of the struggle for human dignity where the Malay slaves found a way to rise up and unshackle themselves from the tyranny of slavery. It is this tradition that produced Heroes like Neville Alexander, Oscar Mpetha, Christmas Tinto to be lone stars for justice in a dark moment for the country. It is this noble tradition that inspired a young Phillip Kgosana and others to be a conscience to this city and nation with the defiance of the pass laws and the blood spilt in that

struggle. Who can forget the birth of the UDF in 1983, the 1988 defiance march led by Church leaders and other faiths that broke the psychological power of the total onslaught of the Apartheid security state and freed our people to strive for their freedom defying the State of emergency. This Mountain witnessed the clarity of mind, dedication to nobility and the indomitable spirit of a Robert Sobukhwe, witnessed the soul of the sons of this nation beautifying and humanising an Island of dehumanisation and making it a place of the triumph of the human spirit without bitterness and revenge. This mountain witnessed that glorious day on 11 February 1990 when Nelson Mandela, whose 100 birthday we celebrate this year, walked out a free man reflecting the collective dignity of our people, this very mountain heard the echoes of our people in that famous refrain I am an African.

This mountain witnessed the birth of the Methodist Movement in the 18th century and its growth in the latter centuries. This movement gave birth to men and women of integrity who refused to live a faith that gives false hope to the oppressed but engaged with them in hopeful acts for justice. It gave to the MCSA luminaries as Ernest Baartman, Abel Hendricks, giving us the prophetic witness of Jerry Silwanyana and the leadership of Ivan Abrams.

1. Our time is of great possibility

We gather at a time, members of our movement, where the possibility of renewal of the world, our connection and our countries and our church is available to us all. What is left would be the choices we make to shape that possibility into a reality of a transformed world where justice and love are the foundations of who we are and how our politics, our economics, our society and family relations are structured.

Many a people throughout the world are rising up to challenge the exploitation of many by a few. Those who have lived in the margins are now finding their voice in a world that was indifferent to them. Through migration the purity of nations is no more guaranteed. The poor are rising up against the economic elites all over the world. Through years of struggle women have found a way to claim their place in the centre of society, with the rise of the Me movement men and especially powerful men are held accountable for their exploitation and abuse of women. The voice of the LGBTI community is changing the tone and culture of conversation on sexuality, sexual orientation and othering. Poverty is no more explained through excess of prudent economic system but a consequence of human actions and deliberate policy choices that advantage others as it excludes the majority. The fight against corruption is getting momentum and those who are corrupt and unaccountable are finding fewer places to hide.

In the life of the MCSA we face a moment of great possibility. There is a generational change that presents itself before us and expresses itself by the possible change in leadership. This demands of us all to have a serious reflection on that which has been bestowed on us by the generation that is vacating a direct responsibility for the life of the church. We can never fully take advantage for the possibility of a great renewal if we do not interrogate with honest courage that which we have right now as a church. As we argued before we must not only interrogate the faces but most importantly the ethos and values that this our church represents and espouse both in action and proclamation.

The word possibility is crucial as the renewal is not a foregone conclusion. The world and the church will not renew or transform simply because we wish it or the opportunity presents itself. It can and will renew because we resolve with conviction to act consistently for the renewal we believe God wants to bring in the church and the world.

Theme: Arise and Walk: From dependency to Agency

We who gather here are called by this noble and sacrificial history to spend all that we are in pursuit of the noble dreams of our forebears and the beautiful dreams of our people inspired by the Kingdom of God. We can not be consumed by our vanity pursuits that is disconnected to that which is noble.

We meet under the Theme Arise and Walk: From dependency to Agency inspired by our history as a people that sought to move beyond victimhood to architects of the future they wanted inspired by God's vision for his world. It is this history that made our people not to be defined by the power of the oppressor but by their dream of a different reality propelling them to endure the worst of the oppression of colonialism, dispossession, Apartheid dehumanization pay the necessary price but kept on believing in the power of a dream of a day where God's people will live together in dignity in a mutually loving relationship where justice is the basis of any peaceful coexistence where race, tribe, gender, sexual orientation or class will not define who we are on each other's eyes.

It is this history of a spirituality of orthopraxis led by our mothers who would meet every Thursday and claim their inherent dignity given by God in the protest against the dehumanizing reality of being called "girls" by the madam and the madam's daughter who is younger than their own as they as these children forget the warmth of and security of our Mothers back in the absence of their own mothers who are too busy for them. It is that revolutionary spirit of these women that speaks to us as we sometimes fall into the dark hole of self-pity and elevation of our pain and powerless in the midst of our current struggles.

So as we encounter this theme we are not on our own but accompanied by a great history of heroic Struggle and hopeful living.

This theme seeks to call us away from accepted apathy and resignation to a realisation of our own power and ability to act in order to change the course of history and the accountability that comes with that. It is call to us all to rebel against an existing reality and reach for our God inspired faith and become actors with God in the theatre of life as we change it towards a loving and just society. This theme reminds us that Yesterday and today are not the final outcomes of history rather we know that we must resist and rebel against what Paulo Freire in his book titled the Pedagogy of the heart calls "existential weariness" that produces fatalists that according to Mr Freire when they look at the future they see "No viable novelty". The future is closed to anything new and possible by the power and dominance of yesterday and today.

Our theme calls for a different Spirituality. It calls for a belief in a future that is open to something new and radically different to what yesterday and today have given us. It calls on us to remember that the future is opened up by those who choose to dream it, articulate for it and most importantly act for its existence. Paulo Freire puts it well when he writes.

"A future will not come if we do not speak about it at the same time that we make it. The future is not a donation: it exists as a necessity of history and implies its continuity." Paulo Freire

The future that we want to exist must be proclaimed and lived at the same time. It will not be donated to us by some benevolent benefactor but we must act courageously for its existence. Donations create dependency agency generates ownership and potency, thus accountability. We can only own the future when we act for its existence and bring out the new possibilities that we see through the faith we have in the God of History.

Arise and walk is a call to defy not only the circumstances of being crippled but the psychology, the Spirituality that sustains the power of being crippled. The invitation is for defiance of the power of the now and the embrace of the power of new possibilities that contradict the oppressive power of now. It is an invitation to move away from the Spirituality of victimhood into a spirituality of participation. Indeed, this Spirituality is not waiting as a beggar but acts as an agent to change life and the future.

- Black people are facing the challenge of moving from dependency to agency
- This dependency manifests itself in the culture where black people are forever complaining without taking any responsibility. This leads to further sense of powerlessness where we are forever waiting for a human saviour to sort out our problem
- This culture finds serious expression in the political arena. There is a paralysing notion of representative rather than a participatory democracy. It is in representative democracy where the populace elect politicians every five years and send them to represent them in parliament. Participatory democracy, on the other hand, is a sense of agency where the population show interest and is active in society. It is about what has been referred to as active citizenry
- In the Church context, the BMC is at the point at which it needs to demonstrate and model agency. We have the fundamental responsibility to live and act that which we believe in
 - We need to embody what Alice Walker called; We are the ones we have been waiting for
 - The tasks in which the BMC has failed and the battles that it has lost is simply because we are without agency
- Part of the task of developing agency is in building strong districts, engendering a progressive ethos, sharpening its ideology and ensuring that it has sustainable programmes
- Central to agency is the virtue of responsibility where, as bona fide members of the Methodist Church, need to act deliberately.
 - We need to be the embodiment of the action of what we want and of what we want to be.
- One of the challenges facing the BMC is the tricky phenomenon where the BMC has been the rivalry from its own members. This has led to some even publicly undermining the BMC as they campaign against what was collectively and openly agreed on.
 - This tendency flows from the creeping culture of unaccountability

2. REFLECTIONS ON THE PARALYTIC

The Luke is who writes the acts is consistent with the acts of the apostles

These inter alia include the following:

- ✓ The salvation plan of God and the faith needed for that salvation presupposes, rather than disposes of, Individual initiative and Agency. Zacchaeus climbing a tree, the prodigal Son coming to his senses and going back home, the criminal on the cross asking to be remembered- in Luke Faith needs agency to come into effect.
- ✓ God always acts in concrete historical reality for his renewal of the world rather than postpone his intervention to some far off time in an undefined future that serves as a mirage for those who are suffering. The same Zacchaeus commits to payback four times those he has robbed, the one robbed in the highways of life in the good Samaritan story is not promised bliss in some heavenly future but the intervention is immediate and concrete. There is no false neutrality hoping for some blissful end but committed acts of love in the now for a different future.

In the text itself let me make the following points:

- ❖ The story is located not only a geographical place of worship, the temple, but also in the time of prayer- the three o'clock hour of prayer – thus by both location and timing there is a commentary on the piety if not spirituality of the time. – The concrete historical reality of the cries of the wounded interrupts and becomes a focal point of God's activity- true Spirituality and piety is one that is open to be disrupted by the cripple- it is only false piety and desensitised religion that is blind to the cripple and deaf to their pleas. Is it only me that see the echoes of that story in that dangerous Jericho road.
- ❖ The life of the crippled man is dominated by dependency- even to get to the place of begging he was depended on others- we are told he not only carried but also placed, thus even the spot needed to be effective in the begging he is placed in it. Even the purpose of being at the gate reflects dependency- to beg for alms- even to further emphasise the point of dependency we get indication of duration, from birth as origin and everyday to beg as an indication of no end but an existential reality, everyday is for begging rather than transformation.
- ❖ The dependency results in a lack of imagination and visioning of a different future. His spiritual hopelessness gives birth to an emotion resignation to being crippled thus a total loss of agency. Without imagination we can never have hope without hope we can never have faith without faith we can never act to change our lives and fatalism and cynicism define who we are. Listen to the writer he sees Peter and John, agents of transformation, but he asks for alms. He ask's for survival born of his resignation to him being crippled rather than transformation born of a different imagination. His expectations don't defy his reality rather confirms its power over him.
- ❖ But- Peter and John looked intently at him- look at us
- Peter and John could have sustained his paralysis through a generous act of charity.
 - The point is that important as charity is, it only ameliorates the situation but does not transform the mind and the structural fundamentals, friends **I need to remind all of us that Charity is not transformation**
- It is this “conniving with your situation” that Latin American critical thinker and facilitator, Paulo Freire warned against. Conniving with our situation is about becoming an accomplice of one's oppression. Begging is one example of internalising our own oppression and take agency from ourselves
- Moving from dependency to agency is a powerful call to believe and rebel against our own paralysis
- It is a call to self-critic and rebel against conniving with our own sense of victimhood. We are not victims but

3. BLACKNESS AS A SOURCE OF OUR AGENCY

- 2018 marks the death of James Cone, the foremost proponent of Black Theology of Liberation
- Fundamental to the legacy of Cone is not only his sustained critique of the blatant white racism and subtle whiteness but is call on Black people to be architects of their lives
- Black Theology advances the notion of the liberating God who is fully active in the daily struggles of the poor and the oppressed
- Liberation Theology advocates the teaching of God's liberative power that resides in the self
- This liberative power is what Steve Biko and his comrades, influenced by the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and Black Theology, have defined as Black Consciousness

- The BMC's partnership with the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary [SMMS] on the Centre for Black Thought and African Studies is meant to cultivate the theoretical foundations and practice on black thought
- Our theme calls on us to connect with the power of the One who liberates and appropriate that in our own lives
- Rise, stand up and walk with both assurance and conviction
- Luke, the writer of the story, reports that after standing up, the healed man jumped with excitement and went into the temple
 - He demonstrated gratitude
- The challenge for the man was not in the demonstrating his new received lease of life in the Church
- The challenge is when he leaves the temple and return to the village where he was known as the paralytic who is dependent on alms
 - It is about returning home to those who sustained him through pity
 - Returning home to those who may be holding certain stereotypes about him
 - Returning to those who held a debilitating stigma about the burden that he was
- The challenge is in returning to the future that lies ahead and breaking all those views people held about him
- It is about returning to a future where he could break out of the routine and instead re-imagine and alternative life for himself
- The power of the text is that it is left open. We do not know what he
- What we are sure of is that God has taken away the excuse.
- We surely cannot afford to have leaders who complain when they are supposed to lead
- Our nation cannot afford a president, premier, minister and even a local counsellor who is full of excuses
- No church can stand a bishop, superintendent and even a president of the manyano whose conversations are just about apportioning blame, it is lack of agency to be a leaders who is a perpetual complainer

4. LEADERSHIP AS AN EXPRESSION OF AGENCY

- Whereas the story of Acts 3 is about the agency of the individual who moved from the dependency at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to agency in society via the inside of the temple, it is also the leadership role of Peter and John that should be of interest to us
- Peter and John moved from the self-fulfilling notion of those of us with power to entrench dependency by always acting as little saviours of those in need
 - They moved away from the dominant practice of dropping alms and calling on the man to stand up and walk
- Peter and John chose to cultivate agency by empowering the man with a challenge;
 - The bible tells us as the man looked at the two disciples expecting handouts from them, they instead "...they looked intently at him... and said; 'Look at us.'"
 - Peter went on to declare the power of the agency creating Gospel; "I have not silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk."
 - They went further beyond the theoretical rhetoric and did a practical act; "And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong."
- In this manner the two disciples were modelling to us a progressive notion of leadership as agency
- This notion is well captured by Richard L Morill a chapter of the book, Liberal Education, Leadership and Values is worth quoting at length; "Leadership itself, of course, is not a theory, but a certain pattern of human agency and relationship. As agents, human beings are self-enacting beings who give shape and

meaning to their lives by the values they choose to guide their intentions and actions. In this context, leadership is primarily a form of engagement and a process of relationship between leaders and followers that occurs within a wider horizon of collective sense-making rather than a position in an institutional hierarchy of authority.”

- Leadership as agency is therefore;
 - About relationships
 - Giving shape and meaning to life
 - Values that guide intentions and actions
 - Engagement between leaders and followers
 - More about horizontal sense-making than vertical authority
- It is this kind of leadership that we have come to know from the life our legends like the late Rev Abel Hendricks of whom we heard from our Former Presiding Bishop and General Secretary of the World Methodist Conference, Rev Ivan Abrahams.
- These are leaders whose agency was tested during the difficult times of Apartheid where leadership agency was an intersectionality of the social, political, economic and religious activism

5. AGENCY FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATION

- The one area crying out loud for agency is that of gender transformation
- Research, social commentators, the criminal justice system and the media continue to point out to the exponential increase in the scourge of Gender Based Violence against women and children
 - This has become an epidemic whose character includes violent acts
 - The upsurge in femicide – where women are killed by their intimate partners is a cancer that must be removed urgently
- The ongoing social mobilisation campaigns in the world and in South Africa point out to the urgent and drastic need for intervention. These campaigns include
 - #Menaretrash
 - #Metoo
 - #NotinMyName
 - Even the recent #100MenMarch that took place on Monday in Pretoria
- The recent launch of the World Fatherhood Report points out to the need for a social agency by men
 - Those who have biological and social relationships as grandfathers and uncles
- The Young Men’s Guild [YMG] Thokoza Statement of Faith and Life, adopted at the Triennial Convention of 2004, seeks to facilitate agency by the YMG members
- Part of the focus of that social agency programme has to be about helping men to construct positive and healthy notions of masculinity rather than the toxic concepts of what it means to be a man that we have been socialised into.
- This project needs all sectors of society from the government, the private sector, civil society but more so religious institutions
- Religion, like African culture, has been misused to oppress and exploit women
- The notion of social agency calls upon us to note that women cannot just be passive recipients of the goodwill of men, especially on something that affects them directly
 - Agency therefore includes women rising and standing up on their own terms and walking into the future defined by themselves
 - It is about them doing it for themselves

- The programme of the first day of our Consultation was therefore designed to give space for both men and women to define for themselves, separately and collectively, what their agency is going to be about the transformation of gender relations and empowerment of women both inside and outside the Church
- The challenge of that agency lies not so much on the conversations, important as they are as a starting point, but more in the implementation of the action plan that has been drafted
- The BMC has committed itself, not as tokenism but a gospel imperative, to transforming itself and influencing the church in that regard
- The commitment to have the next chairperson of this movement being a woman, is a concrete expression of that commitment.
- As agents of transformation, the BMC membership is called to start undergoing radical paradigm shift and creating an enabling environment that will ensure that the gifts of whoever is identified are not undermined but are let to flourish
- It is our hope that that initiative will contribute to the cultivation of the culture where it is just normal for women to lead as equals of men

6. CONCLUSION

Our message to those who are victims of Racism and Tribalism through this Consultation is the time has long passed for you to be complicit in your own oppression. To those who suffer under the oppression of Sexism and the demonic power of patriarchy the time has come to stop conniving with the oppressive culture and power structure that dehumanises women. To those who suffer under the yoke of homophobia this consultation has to say the time is long gone where you need to justify who you are as a being created in the image of God. To those who suffer from the destructive violence of poverty and the dehumanising existence of living in the margins with no protection from hunger, want and natural extremes and being voiceless in a church where those with wealth decide the direction and Agenda of the church, this Consultation must say your station in life has nothing to do with your moral character nor is it divinely ordained by God but a consequence of human action and policies that can and must be changed.

Our message is also to those who think they are powerless and must simply accept their lot and resign themselves to their defeated state. We must ignite something deep within them that lights up a fire that awakes them to the power that lies latent in them. To those who live in Existential weariness, to those who have stopped dreaming because they are living through a nightmare, to those whose spirit has accepted fatalistic spirituality where they can only survive rather than live full transforming lives. This Consultation must stand on top of the mountain and cry out Arise and Walk. To those who are crippled by the repeated crushing blows of this life and resignation to being crippled is the only way to exist in this life we must say to them with a tender voice of love and conviction Arise and Walk.

We invite them because with Peter and John we know the defeats of yesterday and the oppressive powers of today do not destroy the new possibilities of tomorrow. We know that tomorrow will be shaped by the faith inspired choices that they make now in shaping what the future looks like. Life has crippled them, yet they are never meant to be crippled forever, they do not need handouts, they do not need pity, they do not need self-indulgent pitiful existence they need a spirituality that generates a faith that calls them out of a crippled state into a state being architects with God of what the future must be.

“Black people will have to understand, though it won’t be easy, that history creates strange children, and our responsibility is to the children we will produce and to the world which we will create. The world which we will create will have to create has to evolve itself..” James Baldwin 20 April 1971