



# The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

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## PASTORAL LETTER TO ALL MINISTERS

JANUARY 2012

Dear Colleagues,

This is to bring you warm greetings from the Methodist House, and in a sense to introduce myself and to report on duty. Since the election and the Induction, I am very much aware of the support and prayers of the Methodist people and I know that this is due to your influence as pastoral leaders. Therefore, I want to express my deep appreciation to you, because PRAYER and GRATITUDE plays the leading role in what we do as the church. Be assured of our prayers from the Methodist House.

Secondly, let me assure you that, it has uncomfortably and powerfully dawned on me that together as clergy persons at this time, we are at the forefront of what happens or does not happen in the life of the church. "We are called in Christ to be life-giving pastors – proclaiming, bearing, and sharing in attitude, word, and action the new, abundant, full 'LIFE'...THAT Christ came to give." I pray that God may grant each one of us, especially those at the cutting edge, with wisdom and "tentacles" to continuously catch the compelling vision of what God is doing in the world. Of course, this does not at all underestimate the role of the actual church – the laity – especially the lay leadership who sacrifice so much, not for gain. Take time to appreciate these people of God. You will be amazed at the impact of that appreciation in your own health. Let me borrow the words of Lowell Erdahl, to illustrate the centrality of our influence in the life of the church (of course the writer refers to educator, but note similarities:

"I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized." (These words made me think!). *Influencing the climate!!!*

Friends, we have a great task before us. As Erdahl continues; 'the work of the church is bigger than work in the church,' and in order to be able to find fulfillment in what you do, and as one colleague said, 'you have to have a compelling reason to be in ministry.' I take time every now and again to ask God to remind me 'why I am doing what I do.' May God continue to remind us.

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*A Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of Nations*

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Bishop Michel Hansrod is the new Convener of the Connexional Structures Committee. He will be leading our conversation on structural renewal. Please pray for him and his committee. Above all, please ensure that everyone in the MCSA is not left out of the conversation. We cannot be talking about ourselves forever – God’s people and God’s creation are waiting for our energies and ministry. So let us tackle all issues around structures NOW so that we can focus on the core business. How can we ensure that the Methodist Church is held together by a compelling vision and becomes a nimble movement of spreading ‘scriptural holiness’ throughout the world, beginning here in the Southern Africa? I know that we can count on you!

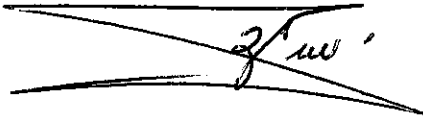
Friends, hear the words of Jesus in Matthew 9:37-38; “the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Let me encourage you to read from 9:35 – 10:42. Amazing words!!! But where is the harvest?

- The many children, who are struggling to have access to quality education or fruitful employment there-after. Look around in your own mission field and find or join partners towards a solution.
- Can you remember the two young South African ladies – one executed in China and the other arrested in Bangkok, Thailand? Let us pray for their families as well as all those who are at the risk of these ‘traps.’ We have to weep for the youth of our nations in the six countries of our connexion, and strengthen our ministry with, among and to the young people and children.
- Climate change! Would it not be helpful to enter into serious awareness campaigns – How about asking every Methodist to plant a least one tree in 2012 and use that as a reminder to educate about care of the environment? Trees can be planted at every home, church, public place or donated to a neighbor who cannot afford one.
- Relationships: I am looking forward to life-giving and healing conversations throughout the Connexion, because I know when Methodists get going....
- Together with the Executive Secretary, I took part in the re-dedication of the Waaihoek Methodist Church in Bloemfontein. This is where a meeting was held on 8 January 1912, which gave birth to what is today the African National Congress. The Media correctly called it the Waaihoek Wesleyan Church, because this is what it was known as at the time. See Laws and Discipline Chapter 2, paragraphs 2.1 – 2.3 on page 22. When one visits the history of what happened; you will discover the spirit of selflessness in those who took this initiative – mainly Christian people who had been through the Mission Schools motivated by the Gospel imperative. Makes you think!!! Here I am referring not to what we know as the political party today (it is obviously different now), but to the power of the Gospel to initiate change. I have asked Rev Dr Smanga Khumalo to publish in the New Dimension, shorter pieces of this history. Let us reflect on it as we seek to re-capture that spirit of selfless service which is deeply needed at this time.

You are in my prayers as we begin 2012. Please 'hug' those loved ones in your own family who have are continuing to sacrifice so much for the sake of the Gospel. God knows what they are going through. Let us pray for one another, speak truth to one another with the aim of building each other up. Remember Wesley's three simple rules: "Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God."

I wish you and your loved ones a Fruitful New Year!

Yours in His Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zipho', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

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**ZIPHO 'ZIPHOZIHLE' SIWA  
PRESIDING BISHOP.**