

CHAPTER 17

DOCTRINE, ETHICS AND WORSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT TO CONFERENCE 2019

Bishop Mthobeli Matyumza

DEWCOM's responsibility is to offer theological reflection to the church on matters of doctrine, ethics and worship. The committee comprises of Methodists, lay and clergy, from a variety of contexts such as the local church and academia who have a variety of theological interests, persuasions and specializations. Gratitude is expressed to each of the members that served in the committee in 2019. This present report gives account of the work of this committee since the last Conference. It is our hope that information contained in this report will be engaged with critically by all Methodists throughout the Connexion so that we may become truly a "transforming discipleship movement."

1. DOCTRINE

1.1. LGBTIAQ+ Conversation

This is an ongoing conversation that the committee is working on. Conference is referred to the resolutions that appear in section 4 of this report.

1.2. Diversity & Interpretation of Scripture

DEWCOM commits to produce a discussion document on this topic for presentation to Conference 2020.

1.3. An understanding of Christian marriage in the MCSA

The Methodist Church in Britain has produced a document titled, *God in love unites us: The Report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group 2019*. The document is attached to this report for noting and reference by Conference. DEWCOM proposes the following as a way forward:

- a) Acknowledgement of the work that was done by the British Conference.
- b) Using the work of the British Conference as a frame of reference for the discussion on Christian marriage in the MCSA.
- c) Referring the document, *God in love unites us: The Report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group 2019*, to the committee on marriage and family life as a discussion document.

Conference is appraised on the divergence of opinion that exists within DEWCOM itself regarding this topic.

1.4. Ordination vs. Commissioning

DEWCOM acknowledges the ongoing work on the amalgamation of the orders of the diaconate and evangelism. This work is located with the General Secretary and EMMU.

1.5. Tendency towards an Episcopal Practice in the MCSA

The current Statement on the Ministry of Oversight reads as follows:

The ministry of oversight in the MCSA is understood to be exercised by an ordained presbyter of the MCSA with the duties and functions afforded to them with reference to the Laws and Discipline of the MCSA, para. 6.18-6.22. As Methodists, serving in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, we concur with Mr Wesley's view as expressed in a letter to Francis Asbury, that the title "Bishop" should not be construed to imply an ecclesiastical office which represents an order of ministry that is superior to, or different in essence from, any other order of ministry, position or role in the life of the church. Resisting the temptation to create a superior and distinct order of ministry, namely episcopacy, the MCSA in 1989 implemented the renaming of the *Office of the Chairman of the District* to that of the *Office of the District Bishop*; and the *Office of the President of Conference* to that of the *Office of the Presiding Bishop* without the change of personal title from *Reverend* to either *Bishop* or *Presiding Bishop*. The terms "Bishop" and "Presiding Bishop" refer to the title of the office and not to that of the individual. By virtue of not being ordained to an order of ministry (specifically episcopacy) that is distinct from and superior to that of presbyter, the presbyter who serves in the Office of the District Bishop or that of the Presiding Bishop, does not occupy this role for life, but may be elected to this office by means of the stipulations

as directed in the Laws and Discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Those who serve in the Offices of the District Bishop and the Presiding Bishop do so as pastors of the pastors, custodians of the doctrines, laws and disciplines of the MCSA, striving for Ecclesiastical unity, both inside the MCSA as well as with the broader ecumenical family. (<http://mcsadewcom.blogspot.com/2012/08/statement-on-ministry-of-oversight.html>)

DEWCOM reaffirms this statement and recommends that Conference creates space for further dialogue in the light of Conference's Statement on theology of Ministry in yearbooks 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 expressing a different view. Thus, a discussion document is being worked on and will be presented to Conference 2020.

2. ETHICS

2.1. Poverty Alleviation

DEWCOM does not have the expertise within the committee to deal with this matter. Further, it should be appreciated that this topic is very complex. To this effect, DEWCOM intends on engaging with NGOs and agencies that do this work. It was decided that we should invite Prof Maluleke to come and offer some perspective on the way forward as well.

2.2. Land Issue

The complexity of this issue should be appreciated as well, particularly in view of the conversation on expropriation of land without compensation that is taking place in one of the member countries of our Connexion. This is an issue that has potential to polarize the nation. One of the complexities that the MCSA should seek to address is what could be done with the land that the church owns.

2.3. Circumcision & Manhood

DEWCOM suggests that the best unit to deal with this matter is the Mission Unit. A mission summit that could address these challenges could be convened, particularly within the boundaries of the Synods most affected. Further, DEWCOM notes with appreciation the work done by the Queenstown Synod YMG in playing an active role in the initiation schools and encourages that Synod to share with the Connexion best practices and lessons learnt from their engagement.

3. WORSHIP AND LITURGY

DEWCOM has arranged and hosted a liturgy writing workshop that was facilitated by Prof. Charlene van der Walt at SMMS. This workshop took place on the 21st to the 23rd of August 2019. It is envisaged that material from that workshop could be published in e-copies and other means that could be possible to make easy access for the Methodist people. DEWCOM wishes to conscientize Conference to the need for translating material produced by the church in many languages that are spoken throughout the Connexion. Many Methodists feel excluded because of language. Conference is requested to make available financial resources for translation

4. RESOLUTIONS TO CONFERENCE 2019

Statement on Marriage

We, the Methodist people in Southern Africa have been on a journey in search for grace and truth with regards to human sexuality, marriage and family life. Our conversation, discernment and common experience have confirmed our commitment to our being a community of love and acceptance that celebrates the unity and diversity expressed in our Methodist spirit and connexional existence.

To recognise the milestones on this journey, Conference 2016 affirmed "A profession of the MCSA's unity and diversity within the context of the Church's conversation on same-sex relationships" (Book of Order 2016:227-228). We also note with appreciation the developments across the global Methodist family and in particular the work done by the British Conference on a Methodist doctrine of marriage¹. In light of this work, DEWCOM proposes that Conference adopts the following statements as contributory to the MCSA's understanding of Christian marriage:

¹ See <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/marriage-and-relationships-2019/>

1. *The Methodist Church of Southern Africa recognises that there is a distinct difference between the legal definitions of marriage (held by the respective countries that comprise the MCSA Connexion) and the religious understanding that the MCSA holds. Primarily, legal definitions of marriage pertain to a form of contractual relationship entered into by individuals, describing the legal nature of their relationship and the accompanying determinations as set out by law. Whilst recognising the legal aspect of marriage, the MCSA believes that marriage is a covenantal relationship between two people, shaped and founded in God's love for them and that this love is expressed as a divine gift to each other.*
2. *Christian marriage is an exclusive relationship between two people who, united through God's Spirit, provide each other with a life-long commitment of love, affection, care, companionship, trust and faithfulness.*
3. *In a context where there are cultural, historical and socio-economic factors that have contributed to the fracturing of the family, there is a need for reconstructive work and pastoral focus on marriage and the emergence of new forms of family life.*
4. *As Methodist people we believe that married life is a vital means of grace for the development of individual, children and the strengthening of human society. The Words of the Methodist Marriage liturgy capture this goal of marriage, "Through such marriage children may be nurtured, family life strengthened, and human society enriched."²*

LGBTIAQ+ Community Task Team

DEWCOM acknowledges with grave concern that for 20 years the "debate" about human sexuality and LGBTIAQ+ persons, in particular, has unfolded within the MCSA without seeking the deliberate input of the LGBTIAQ+ community. As a result, the "same sex debate" has, by and large, been dominated by divergent hetero-normative perspectives that have missed the nuances and dynamics of queer and non-heterosexual identities as well as the complex justice issues that confront the LGBTIAQ+ community in the church and in public institutions (such as, for example, violence towards queer persons, medical rights, adoptive rights, etc).

In addition, DEWCOM wishes to remind Conference of its decision in 2018 that urged us as a Connexion to seek to create safe spaces for LGBTIAQ+ persons within the greater life of the church.

With this in mind, and noting the inherent prophetic nature of the Church to prioritise the voices of marginalised group/s in its journey toward seeking justice, DEWCOM requests the Office of the Presiding Bishop to set up a task team consisting of LGBTIAQ+ persons and allies to listen, pastorally support and advocate for all affected persons.

RESOLUTION TO RESCIND CONFERENCE 2007 RESOLUTION

Civil unions are legally not the private preserve of a particular group of peoples (i.e., heterosexual couples can also decide to covenant within this legal provision). As such, a civil union safeguards the legal determinations (i.e., beneficiaries, medical aid, adoptive rights, etc) of any couple entering into such an agreement. The MCSA has always held its prophetic, justice-seeking voice as one of our intrinsic core values. It is therefore, incongruous for the MCSA to prohibit or impede persons from embracing the full rights and constitutional declarations available to any citizen of any country within the MCSA Connexion. In light of this, DEWCOM requests that the 2007 Conference resolution that prohibits Methodist Ministers from blessing, presiding over and entering into civil unions, be rescinded.

5. Nomination of Committee Members for 2020

DEWCOM recommends the following names for appointment at Conference 2019:

(i) Rev. Mthobeli Matyumza (Convenor and Chairperson), (ii) Rev. Luvuyo Sifo (Secretary), (iii) Rev. Tim Attwell, (iv) Rev. Lauren Matthew, (v) Rev. Raymond Keet, (vi) Rev. Dinis Matsolo, (vii) Rev. Pierre Naude, (viii) Rev. Jenny Samdaan, (ix) Rev. Dr. Roger Scholtz, (x) Rev. Prof. Wessel Bentley, (xi) Rev. Pumla Mtshiselwa, (xii) Mr. Peter Frow, (xiii) Mr. Anele Siswana, (xiv) Rev. Nokulunga Songca, (xv) Rev. Sondlile Nkwanyana, (xvi) Rev. Storia Seitisho, (xvii) Rev. Kym Bishop, (xviii) Rev. Juliet Windvogel and (xix) Rev. Thabiso Mcinga.

² Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (1999) The Methodist Worship Book. Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House.

6. DEWCOM Conference Delegates

DEWCOM nominates Rev. Luvuyo Sifo (Secretary) and Rev. Jenny Samdaan as delegates to Conference 2019.