

2022 Conference Resolution on *Ukuthwasa*

(*Yearbook 2023*, para. 48, pp.123-124)

***Ukuthwasa* and the Practice of Being a Traditional Healer within the MCSA**

The recent Doctrine Ethics Worship Committee roundtable discussion on *Ukuthwasa* (initiation into an ancestral calling) and the practice of being a traditional healer in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa unearthed a few critical theological and practical polity issues that requires an honest reflection by the church. Amongst other issues the discussion brought to the fore the following:

1. Experiences of ministers and lay members. The few accounts of Ministers who are initiated *Sangomas* or traditional healers reveal that they have experienced a substantial amount of judgement, suspicion and sometimes forced to choose between their Ministerial calling and Ancestral calling. The perceptions of a 'double calling' – ministerial and ancestral – are at large. Methodist societies and leadership do not have enough understanding of how to deal with such ministers as agents of the gospel.

2. No theological position on the existence of ancestors and the practice of initiation into ancestral calling. The MCSA as an institution does not have an expressed theological position on the existence of ancestors and by extension how people relate to their ancestors. As such and depending on one's cultural heritage and theological persuasion, divergent views spanning between separatist and integrationist approaches exist across the MCSA. A further collective of themes that need to be explored have emerged and these include:

- African Christian spirituality and ancestral calling
- Decolonisation of Christian spirituality and African traditional healing practices. Is responding to an ancestral call different from a call into the ministry of word and sacrament? Can they co-exist as part of a response to the same God? Is this a form of syncretism?

3. The practice of ministry. The question of actively living out a ministerial call alongside an ancestral calling carry practical polity and ethical ramifications. There is a need for the MCSA to clarify its understanding of Christian vocation in relation to African traditional healing practice. From this comes a few related questions the church needs to answer, for example:

- What are the practical realities of being a Christian and a traditional healer in a Circuit?
- How should leaders at a Circuit, District and Connexional level respond to ministers and leaders who are initiated *Sangomas* or traditional healers?
- What are the ethical issues involved in practising both as a minister and a traditional healer?

Conference notes and commends the preliminary work done by DEWCOM on *Ukuthwasa* and the practice of being a traditional healer within the MCSA.

However, Conference notes that this work requires theological reflection on the key themes and practical polity issues this work evokes.

Conference further notes with concern the painful experiences of Ministers and members with an ancestral calling.

Therefore, Conference requests DEWCOM to develop a Discussion Document on *Ukuthwasa* and the practice of being a *Sangoma* or traditional healer in the MCSA for discussion at the April Circuit Quarterly Meeting and for report to the ensuing Conference through District Synods.

Conference further encourages Districts, Organisations, and formations to facilitate reflective sessions on the subject to deepen awareness and listening to the experiences of Methodist members who may have an ancestral calling.