



The Methodist Church  
of Southern Africa

# PILGRIMAGE OF RENEWAL

A Theological and Spiritual Companion  
to the Third Methodist Mission Congress

GENERAL EDITOR  
Rev. Dr Sidwell Mokgothu



MISSION



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Third Methodist Mission Congress*

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**The Methodist Church  
of Southern Africa**

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# Charter of the Mission Congress of the MCSA adopted in Mthatha in November 2004

*“Where there is no vision the people perish. Where there is no passion the vision dies.”*

God has given us the vision of “A Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations.” We have been challenged to share more deeply God’s passion for healing and transformation. As members of the Methodist family we came to Mthatha to face this challenge. We found direction as the Holy Spirit inspired us to continue the pilgrimage which has led us through Obedience ‘81 and the Journey to the New Land to the present day.

We recognise the vital importance of the local church and rejoice in the many Circuits and Societies where life-giving mission is taking place. In trust and obedience we commit ourselves anew to the Four Imperatives of Mission in our time – A deepened spirituality as individuals and a Christian community, justice and service in church and society, evangelism and church growth which build up the people of God, empowerment and development which give dignity and new purpose to those who have been deprived.

We resolve to take intentional and sustained action to implement these imperatives in such areas as: The healing ministry; deepening our understanding of African and other spiritualities; co-ordinated programmes of Christian education, information and communication; building meaningful relationships that transcend racism, sexism and all other forms of discrimination; a vigorous response to the crisis of HIV and AIDS; informing our prophetic ministry by research into socio-economic issues; identifying land for sustainable livelihood; sacrificial giving; becoming a church in solidarity with the poor; providing training in evangelism; training ministers for the African context; implementing anti-bias training; becoming a more youth and child-centred church We

invite the people of God throughout Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland, to join us as we put ourselves at God's disposal to carry forward God's mission in this sub-continent:

Let us each renew our personal commitment to Jesus Christ and seek to grow in grace and in love for God, one another and the world.

- Let us ensure that our mission of healing and transformation is holistic, embracing all the imperatives for mission.
- Let us participate in God's mission in ways that are appropriate to our local contexts and in partnership with the wider church and community.
- Let us celebrate our diversity and the gifts God has given to each of us; support each other; challenge each other and pray for each other.
- Finally, we encourage every Circuit to set aside the last Sunday in May to celebrate what God is doing among us and to commit ourselves again to our high calling in Christ.

God bless this Africa which is our home. Give us grace to follow Jesus the healer, Jesus the peacemaker, Jesus the Saviour of the world, Jesus the Lord of all life. Restore us and make your face shine on us that we may be saved.

# The Statement from Mission Congress 2016 Listening Committee Report

## **PREAMBLE**

Members of the Methodist family from Swaziland, Lesotho, Namibia, Mozambique, Botswana and South Africa gathered together at the second Mission Congress of the MCSA from 24 to 27 November 2016 in Pietermaritzburg, under the banner of Methodists Igniting Mission. God spoke to us in song and silence, in pain and tears, in the voices of children and the wisdom of experience, calling us back to the rock from which we were hewn, the stone from which we were cut (Isaiah 51: 1). God spoke to us in voices from beyond the Connexion, reminding us of our unity in mission.

## **WE CELEBRATE AND REMEMBER**

We celebrate a God of reckless transforming grace, who loves the cosmos with a life-giving, self-emptying love. We celebrate a God who faithfully nourishes and nurtures us with water, life, bread and grace. We celebrate a God who is with us always and everywhere, who holds and sustains us, calls and sends us, going with us and ahead of us.

*Xikwembu xikahle* (God is good)

We celebrate a missional God who has blessed us with a brand plucked from the fire, a warmed heart, and a passion for the world as our parish. We celebrate a missional God who has blessed us with a rich diverse heritage of those who have gone before us, and who are now a deep well from which we draw encouragement and inspiration for mission in the present context.

*Xikwembu xikahle* (God is good)

We celebrate a God who speaks to us through children, in unexpected and unconventional places, a God who speaks to us through imagination, and inspires us by the Holy Spirit, a God who re-ignites our collective consciousness and passion to keep the flame burning.

*Xikwembu xikahle* (God is good)

### **WE CONFESS AND REPENT**

As we confess, we lament that we do not express in our lives and our structures the prayer of Jesus in John 17. We are:

#### **ONE AND DIVIDED**

We confess that we are a bruised and divided church, in which some are more equal than others, in which children's voices are not heard, and gender issues are regarded as women's issues only. We confess that we exist in silos, not living out the communion of our community. We confess the lack of integrity in sharing resources justly and fairly, our selective itinerancy, our inability or unwillingness to support transformative missional strides.

***Dilacerai o vosso coração  
e não as vossas vestes como de costume.***

(Rend your hearts and not your garments)

We confess that we are a disobedient church. We are not a listening, feeling presence in the world. We have been playing church, hiding in our warehouses.

We confess that we are a Church more comfortable with rhetoric than action, that we have allowed a disjuncture between the Mission Congress 2004 and the Mission Congress 2016. We are at times dead branches, not abiding in Christ, not bearing fruit.

***Dilacerai o vosso coração  
e não as vossas vestes como de costume.***

(Rend your hearts and not your garments)

We confess that we are a Church which looks but does not see, hears but does not listen, cares but does not engage in transformative healing.

We confess that we are a Church which struggles to respond in life-giving ways to hunger, sexual exploitation, economic injustices, and poverty. We neglect the most vulnerable in our communities: children enslaved into child labour, women and men trafficked into abuse and exploitation – we do not hear this voice when we identify the poor. We confess that we objectify the ‘other’, we stigmatise and discriminate. We confess our failure to re-imagine what is possible as a Church in mission.

***Dilacerai o vosso coração  
e não as vossas vestes como de costume.***

(Rend your hearts and not your garments)

### **WE COMMIT AND RESPOND**

We believe that Christ calls us to listen to people without resorting to ‘quick fixes’. We recognise that this is an intentional process of self-emptying. We believe that Christ calls us to create spaces for all to speak and be heard, ‘flat spaces’ with equal access for all languages and cultures. Christ calls us to ask new questions as we continue to explore and examine the relevance of our mission strategy.

To this, we commit ourselves.

***Gaan uit en maak dissipels van alle nasies.***

(Go out and make disciples of all nations)

We believe that Christ calls us to greater integrity in the use of all our resources. We recognise the necessity to equip laity and ministers alike, through intentional, focused training – including post ordination training for ministers. We believe that Christ calls us to hold one another accountable, as he holds us accountable, for enabling the ministry of all believers.

To this, we commit ourselves.

***Gaan uit en maak dissipels van alle nasies.***

(Go out and make disciples of all nations)

We believe that Christ calls us to radical hospitality, with integrity, for the most vulnerable. We recognise the interconnectedness of ‘soul, soil, society’, and that

asking the question “Is it well with your soul?” must bring to light opportunities for healing, vulnerability, listening and resurrection. We believe that Christ, God-made-flesh, calls us to participate in God’s incarnational mission in our world.

To this, we commit ourselves.

***Gaan uit en maak dissipels van alle nasies.***

(Go out and make disciples of all nations)

We believe that Christ calls us to unity in diversity. As members of the MCSA from Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, we commit ourselves intentionally to living out our Connexionality in practical, meaningful and respectful ways – language, use and distribution of resources, presence, inclusiveness, integration, greater sense of belonging. This should be our culture, our way of being. We believe that Christ calls us to intentional ecumenical and inter-faith relationships, as well as partnering with other life-giving organisations.

To this, we commit ourselves.

***Gaan uit en maak dissipels van alle nasies.***

(Go out and make disciples of all nations)

We believe that Christ calls us to rediscover our prophetic voice and to re-define our prophetic way of being, particularly in education. We believe that Christ calls us to GO GO GO. We believe that Christ calls us to decisive, determined and intentional evangelism.

To this, we commit ourselves.

***Gaan uit en maak dissipels van alle nasies.***

(Go out and make disciples of all nations)

**SENDING OUT: FRANCISCAN BLESSING**

May God bless us with a restless discomfort about easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may seek truth boldly and love deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with holy anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may tirelessly work for justice, freedom, and peace among all people.

May God bless us with the gift of tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, or the loss of all that they cherish, so that we may reach out our hand to comfort them and transform their pain into joy.

May God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we really can make a difference in this world, so that we are able, with God's grace, to do what others claim cannot be done.

What shall our greeting be...

# *The Mission Statement of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa*



## *our Mission*

"God calls the Methodist  
people to proclaim the gospel  
of Jesus Christ for  
Healing & Transformation"

## *our Vision*

"A Christ-healed Africa  
For the healing of nations"

## *Our 5 Imperatives of Mission*



### **Our Continuing Goals Of Transformation Are:**

- a deepening spirituality; a resolve to be guided by God's mission;
- a rediscovery of the priesthood of all believers; a commitment "to be one so that the world may believe";
- a re-emphasis of servant-leadership and discernment as our model for ministry;
- a redefinition and authentication of the vocation of the clergy in the church;
- a re-commitment to environmental justice.

# Foreword

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) has always been a Church on the move—a dynamic Wesleyan movement responding spiritually, theologically and missionally to the evolving contexts of Southern Africa. From its earliest days, through the pain of *apartheid* and into the present complexities of our region, the MCSA has sought to follow Christ with faithfulness and courage. This book, *Pilgrimage of Renewal*, is a theological and spiritual companion for the MCSA's journey to the Mission Congress as both a continuation and a deepening of that journey. It is a sacred companion for a Church once again being summoned by the Spirit to walk together, speaking and listening—toward healing, justice, holiness and hope.

The idea of pilgrimage is deeply embedded in both biblical witness and African spiritual traditions. It is a journey toward transformation—marked by remembering, listening, lamenting, rejoicing, and above all, discerning the movement of God among us. In that spirit, this resource invites the Connexion into a time of spiritual preparation that is as much about the inner life of the Church as it is about its public witness in a broken yet hopeful Southern Africa.

The *Pilgrimage of Renewal* is not a sudden initiative, but the fruit of decades of discernment and recommitment. It builds on watershed moments that have shaped the soul of the MCSA. *Obedience '81*, for instance, called us into radical discipleship in the face of *apartheid*, rejecting neutrality, and affirming mission as a costly engagement with the world. The *Journey to the New Land* imagined a just and reconciled post-*apartheid* Church. The 2003 *Bosberaad* further deepened our self-reflection and honesty, inviting the Church to confront its internal contradictions and spiritual need for transformation.

The Mission Congress of 2004 marked a significant milestone in missional reflection, affirming that mission is not the work of a few, but the calling of every member, Circuit, and District. The 2016 Congress reaffirmed this vision, deepening our commitment to inclusivity, justice and contextual witness. These

gatherings were never ends in themselves, but part of an unfolding pilgrimage—a journey of becoming.

In 2024, Synods across the Connexion engaged in Mission Conversations that were both sobering and hopeful. They revealed a Church aware of its wounds—spiritual, relational, and institutional—and yet yearning for renewal. There was a shared longing to move beyond rhetoric to repentance, beyond analysis to action, beyond lament to a living hope.

Each chapter in this book is written by voices within the Methodist family—ministers, theologians, and leaders who live, serve and lead within our Circuits, Districts, and institutions. Their reflections are grounded in scripture, Wesleyan theology, and the wisdom of African Christian spirituality. Together, these chapters offer spiritual and theological signposts to help guide our collective preparation for the Mission Congress and beyond.

The symbolism of *isivivane/mokolokotwane*—stones gathered from sacred places—serves as a metaphor for our journey: remembering where we have been and anticipating what God is doing anew. Contextual Bible studies along the way have helped us reflect on societal realities as we seek to become an alternative, renewed community.

*Pilgrimage of Renewal* is not a manual—it is a map. It invites deep questions rather than easy answers. It is shaped by voices from across our Connexion and is rooted in the principle of *Sida di a!* (It is ours). This pilgrimage belongs to all of us—there are no holy cows. It is an opportunity to courageously interrogate our faith, witness, and purpose.

Each chapter is a stepping stone—whether remembering our heritage, reimagining Church, embracing discernment or preparing for holy conferencing. This is our rhythm of discipleship: not to drift with the shifts of society, but to shape them through gospel-centred renewal and prophetic witness.

We live in a time of socio-economic instability, moral decay, and spiritual hunger. The Church must offer more than critique; it must embody healing, transformation and hope. But to do so, we must be renewed from within. This

pilgrimage is our opportunity to become a more just, inclusive, Christlike Church—faithful in the present and courageous for the future.

Pilgrimage demands much: humility, listening and walking together even when we disagree. But it also brings joy, clarity and sacred encounter. The contributions in this book reflect the collective wisdom of ministers, theologians, lay leaders and young people. It is a gift to the Church and a gift from the Church to the world.

This is not a book to be read alone or passively. It is a tool for study, a guide for prayer and a resource for communal reflection. It is designed to be used in classes, Societies, local churches, mission groups, leadership formations and among all who seek a deeper encounter with the God who still calls the Church to justice, holiness and transformation.

As you read, may you be inspired. As you reflect, may you be challenged. As you pray, may you be renewed. And as you walk this pilgrimage, may you encounter the living Christ who walks beside us, weeps with us, and leads us forward in grace.

Let us walk this road together—with courage, compassion and conviction. For the sake of the Gospel. For the sake of the world.

For the sake of the *Church* we are becoming—*Many Voices, One Mission*.

*Sida di a!*

**Rev. Pumla P. N. Nzimande**

**Presiding Bishop**

**2025**



## Introduction

# The Pilgrimage of Renewal in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

A Wesleyan approach that  
honours African  
spirituality and context

*Rev. Sva Waqu*

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) has embarked on a transformative initiative known as the Pilgrimage of Renewal, which focuses on spiritual revitalisation, contextual mission engagement and ecclesial reform. This pilgrimage transcends a mere programmatic approach; it embodies a theological and spiritual movement rooted in the rich heritage of Wesleyan theology, deeply influenced by African spirituality, and dedicated to maintaining contextual integrity. As the MCSA looks forward to its 2025 Mission Congress, this pilgrimage signifies a *kairos* moment—a time of divine opportunity—for the Church to reimagine its identity, mission and witness in Southern Africa.

### **Theological foundations: Wesleyan roots**

At the heart of the Pilgrimage of Renewal lies the theological legacy of John Wesley, whose emphasis on personal holiness, social justice and communal discipleship continues to shape Methodism globally (Field, 2015). Such emphasis holds both acts of piety and acts of mercy in tandem. We worship, pray and receive Holy Communion as a way of empowering us to go and serve others. Wesley's theology was inherently practical and transformative, rooted in the conviction that salvation is both personal and social, as inspired by the convicting and transformative Word of God. This is very much in line with the vision of A

*Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of the Nations.* Wesley's doctrine of holiness of heart and life called for a spirituality that integrates faith and action, prayer and justice, personal piety and public witness.

Wesley's understanding of grace—prevenient, justifying and sanctifying—provides a theological framework for renewal. The Pilgrimage of Renewal echoes this dynamic by calling the MCSA to a deeper experience of God's grace that leads to transformation at both individual and communal levels. As James Mwita (2021) argues, Wesleyan theology in Africa must be reinterpreted in ways that speak to the lived realities of African Christians, emphasising liberation, healing and communal flourishing. This Pilgrimage is very much about the public witness of the MCSA. The Southern African context is still contending with the eroding and corroding effects of the *apartheid* years that were layer upon layer of colonialism. The time has come for Africa to develop their own narrative for Africa to be healed. Prayerfully, the MCSA is invoking the power of the Holy Spirit to descend. It is the time for the manifestation of the old song, "*If you believe, and I believe, the Holy Spirit will come down and Africa will be saved.*" This Pilgrimage of Renewal is our communal prayerful life for Africa to be saved as we discern together.

## **African spirituality and the Pilgrimage**

African spirituality, with its emphasis on community, ancestors (forebears), sacred symbols and the interconnectedness of life, offers a rich resource for the Pilgrimage of Renewal. The MCSA's use of the *Isivivane/Mokolokotwane*—a sacred pile of stones representing collective memory and commitment—demonstrates a profound integration of African symbolic theology into Methodist liturgical life. Each stone, inscribed with the name of a Society or Circuit, becomes a tangible sign of unity, prayer and shared purpose.

This is not merely an abstract theology for the Wesleyan family, nor can it be limited to Wesleyans in Africa. The life and ministry of John Wesley were rooted in the efforts and influence of his mother, Susanna Wesley, whose strong impact shaped her sons' spiritual development. It is also part of African culture to honour our mothers, who have profoundly influenced us as today's disciples. We stand on the shoulders of these giants of faith. The concept of *Isivivane/Mokolokotwane* intricately acknowledges their contributions to our lives and the

life of the church as passed on to us. We strive, in turn, to leave our own legacy for future generations.

This incorporation of African spirituality is not a syncretistic compromise but a contextual embodiment of the Gospel. It affirms that God speaks through African cultures and that renewal must emerge from within the spiritual soil of the people. As Mokhutso (2025) notes, the MCSA must continue to decolonise its theology by embracing its African identity and resisting the residual dominance of Western ecclesial models. These are not just the days of the stones, but the memory that the stones evoke in each of us, and collectively as a Church, so that with gratitude as Africans we can build on the hopes and dreams of our forebears despite our shortcomings.

### **Contextual integrity: theology in Southern Africa**

The Pilgrimage of Renewal is deeply contextual. It arises from the recognition that the MCSA, like many mainline churches, faces symptoms of institutional decline: inward-looking budgets, loss of evangelistic fervour and disconnection from local communities. The 2023 Conference identified these challenges and called for a prophetic reawakening—a return to the Church’s missional vocation in the face of poverty, inequality and social fragmentation (The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2023). This decline is evidenced by the membership decline over the years to a startling 369 263, as recorded in the 2024 statistics (The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2025). Such decline must call for the integrity of examining the context. There can be no room for denialism. The “kingdom” is falling. With such a fall there cannot be any sacred spaces to remain unexamined. The social examination, as John Wesley undertook regarding slavery, alcoholism and economic dynamics that were at play must be employed even today if Methodism is to remain an agency for healing and transformation in Southern Africa.

Contextual theology, as practiced in the MCSA, insists that theology must be done from below (Haddad, 2016), listening to the moans, groans, hopes and wisdom of the people. The pilgrimage process is intentionally participatory, involving Society-level conversations, District gatherings, and a bottom-up approach to agenda-setting for the 2025 Mission Congress. This method reflects the Wesleyan principle of conferencing—discernment through communal

dialogue—and aligns with African communal decision-making practices. The economic decay for instance, has exposed the MCSA's seemingly immovable belief that God cannot operate outside the outdated British model of financing church life. It is essential to draw upon the works of Sachs, Pandey and Kumar (2015), which suggest that sustainable development entails more than merely achieving economic growth; it necessitates a profound recognition of the systemic inequities that permeate our global society. These systematic inequities require the dismantling of the systems, no matter how denominational they seem. This can certainly be the MCSA's approach to restorative justice.

### **The Pilgrimage as a process of discernment**

The Pilgrimage of Renewal is structured as a multi-year journey of spiritual discernment. In 2023, the church's focus was on *awakening prophetic urgency*; in 2024, the emphasis shifted to *becoming an alternative community*; and in 2025 the church will gather in our Mission Congress to set a ten-year agenda for mission and ministry. This process is not merely strategic, but deeply spiritual, grounded in prayer, worship and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Each phase of the pilgrimage invites Methodists to reflect on three core questions: What is God doing among us – the *Missio Dei*? What is God calling us to become – the *Missio Ecclesia*? Thirdly, what does mission look like in our context today? These questions echo Wesley's own practice of spiritual examination and communal accountability (Jones, 2002), adapted to the Southern African context, as context needs to be honoured in order for the renewal to be sustainable.

### **Renewal through mission and justice**

The Pilgrimage of Renewal is not just inward-looking. It also calls the MCSA to re-engage with its prophetic mission in society. As Bentley (2014) observes, the Church's role in post-apartheid South Africa remains critical, especially in addressing ongoing injustices such as economic inequality, gender-based violence, and political corruption. The pilgrimage thus seeks to revive the Church's commitment to justice, peace and reconciliation.

This missional renewal is grounded in the Wesleyan conviction that “there is no holiness but social holiness” as deduced by Outler (1985) from John

Wesley's Sermon number 39, *Catholic Spirit*. This also resonates with African communal ethics, where the well-being of the individual is inseparable from the well-being of the community – “I am because we are.” The MCSA's renewed focus on mission includes practical initiatives such as community development, youth empowerment and ecumenical partnerships. This paradigm will enable Methodists in Southern Africa to follow in the footsteps of John Wesley and turn the “world into a parish.” It is in such a parish that the walls will no longer surround the table of grace. Rather, the table of grace will challenge the myriad of injustices that need to be confronted by grace for the renewal of society to be attained. Youth unemployment, drug and substance abuse, unabated moral decay, collapse in education and health systems, gender-based violence and femicide are just some of the stones of these walls of injustice that need to tumble and crumble.

Leadership plays a vital role in such a pilgrimage. Each District, Circuit, and Society has been encouraged to appoint Mission Congress facilitators and champions who will guide the process, inspire participation and ensure theological depth in the conversations. These leaders are tasked with translating the Pilgrimage into meaningful liturgical and spiritual practices, ensuring that worship becomes a space of renewal and discernment.

The use of contextual liturgies, African symbols and inclusive language reflect the MCSA's commitment to a theology that is both faithful to its Wesleyan roots and responsive to its African context. This liturgical renewal is not cosmetic, but sacramental—it embodies the Church's journey toward becoming a more just, inclusive, and Spirit-led community.

## **Challenges and opportunities**

The Pilgrimage of Renewal is not without challenges. Institutional inertia, theological divisions and socio-economic pressures can hinder the process. However, the pilgrimage also presents profound opportunities: to reimagine the Church's identity, to deepen discipleship and to become a more authentic witness to the Gospel in Southern Africa.

As Kumalo (2020) argues, the MCSA must listen to the muted voices within its own ranks—women, youth, rural congregations—and allow these voices to shape

its theology and mission. The pilgrimage provides a platform for such listening, creating space for the Spirit to speak through the whole body of Christ.

## Conclusion

The Pilgrimage of Renewal in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is a bold and hopeful response to the challenges of our time. Rooted in Wesleyan theology, enriched by African spirituality and committed to contextual integrity, it offers a model of ecclesial renewal that is both faithful and innovative, inviting and sustainable. As the Church journeys toward the 2025 Mission Congress, it does so not as an institution seeking survival, but as a Spirit-led community seeking transformation — for itself and for the world it is called to serve.

## Group reflection questions



1. How can the MCSA balance its Wesleyan theological roots with the call to embrace African spirituality without compromising either?
  - Follow-up prompt: What are some examples of successful integration of these two traditions in your local context?
2. In what ways can the church practically respond to the socio-economic challenges that need to be confronted by the table of grace (e.g., poverty, youth unemployment, gender-based violence) highlighted in the Pilgrimage of Renewal?
  - Follow-up prompt: How can your Society or Circuit become an “alternative community” that embodies justice and healing?
3. What does “contextual integrity” mean for your local congregation, and how can theology be done “from below” in your setting?
  - Follow-up prompt: Are there voices in your community that need to be heard more clearly in shaping the Church’s mission?
4. The Pilgrimage of Renewal is described as a spiritual journey of discernment. How can your church cultivate a deeper culture of prayer, worship, and communal listening to the Holy Spirit?
  - Follow-up prompt: What practices or liturgies could be introduced or revived to support this?

5. Reflecting on the metaphor of the *Isivivane/Mokolokotwane*, how can your community honour the legacy of past generations while building a renewed future for the church?
  - Follow-up prompt: What “stones” would you add to your community’s sacred pile, and why?

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## Chapter 1

# Remembering the journey milestones of renewal

*Mr Xhanti Thobela Mhlubulwana*

Stripped to its essence, the Christian life is a holy pilgrimage which we make in order to be remade, both spiritually and physically. A life of faith, in the Church and in individual believers is a perpetual movement towards deeper unity with God and with one another. Likewise, renewal is a kind of constantly renewing faith, hope and purpose on a personal and communal level, rather than a one-time occurrence.

This chapter asks the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) to consider its own historic journey, highlighting significant turning points that have influenced its current process of revitalisation. These significant events tell the story of the church's history, while offering theological underpinnings and impetus for the forthcoming Mission Congress of 2025.

### **Pilgrimage and Renewal in scripture and theology**

The biblical narrative richly theologises pilgrimage and renewal as intertwined themes. The Exodus journey of the Israelites is foundational, a people led by God from bondage, through the wilderness, toward the Promised Land (Exodus 13:21-22). This journey teaches reliance on God amidst uncertainty and hardship, calling the community to obedience, repentance and renewed communal identity. It invites trust in divine guidance and perseverance through trial.

Similarly, Pentecost (Acts 2) marks a pivotal pilgrimage moment for the early Church. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the disciples transitioned from fear to bold proclamation, becoming a commissioned community sent to all nations. The event of Pentecost models renewal as both spiritual and communal, rooted in

prayer and openness to God's empowering presence.

The leadership of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1–2) provides a practical biblical framework for leadership in renewal. Nehemiah's burden for a broken community, dependence on prayer, clear vision, strategic collaboration and resilience in the face of opposition offers enduring principles for the MCSA's pilgrimage today. Renewal demands leaders deeply burdened for the Church, anchored in prayer and committed to collective restoration.

### **Tracing historic milestones of renewal in the MCSA**

The MCSA's rich history spans more than 200 years, deeply rooted in Wesleyan spirituality, a vital strand within Methodism's heritage. The "Pilgrimage of Renewal" Journey toward the 2025 Mission Congress aims to catalyse spiritual renewal centred on Wesleyan principles, awakening all Methodist Societies to holistic discipleship that aligns head, heart, hands and habits in the Wesleyan way. This emphasises holiness of heart and life, echoing the historic journey of Methodists who have continually sought transformation through personal and communal holiness.

Wesleyan spirituality is characterised by a dynamic interplay of personal piety, worship as a life-offering, mission as identity, and stewardship as spiritual formation. It honours John Wesley's Aldersgate experience, foregrounding God's transformative grace as well as personal holiness as foundational to Christian living. Our pilgrimage seeks to rekindle this passion through thematic emphases such as "warmed hearts" (spiritual disciplines and heart-transformation), "sacred rhythms" (worship as whole-life obedience), "faith working through love" (mission as outworking of inner renewal), and "graceful generosity" (stewardship as joyful discipleship).

This renewal is not a mere return to tradition but an active pilgrimage. It is an ongoing journey inviting believers to deepen intimacy with God, engage missionally in their contexts, and to embrace stewardship with grace and joy. By fostering spiritual vitality and renewing commitment to Wesleyan principles, the pilgrimage aspires to reawaken the MCSA, equipping it for contemporary

witness and service in the 21st-century post-COVID-19 world marked by wars, inequality, poverty and unemployment.

### **The 1958 “One and Undivided” statement**

An early and very significant milestone was the 1958 Conference declaration we have titled the “One and Undivided” statement. Amid apartheid’s enforced racial segregation, the MCSA boldly committed to transcending racial divisions. This theologically grounded and missional stance affirmed unity in Christ against prevailing social divisions. It was a prophetic witness that refused to mirror societal brokenness, embodying God’s inclusive Kingdom (Reign).

This foundational commitment laid the groundwork for subsequent renewal efforts, reminding the Church that its mission must be holistic, inclusive and justice-oriented.

### **Obedience 81: Repentance and unity amid apartheid**

In July 1981, the Obedience 81 Conference marked a watershed moment during *apartheid*’s height. Convened as the largest and most representative gathering in the MCSA’s history, it embodied sacred repentance and recommitment. The Conference confronted painful divisions and acknowledged failures in obedience to Christ’s call for unity and justice.

Obedience 81 called the Church to healing, unity and empowerment by the Holy Spirit to live out an undivided vision, actively opposing *apartheid* and systemic injustice. It deepened the Church’s understanding of mission as both proclamation and transformative action, integrating spiritual renewal with social engagement.

### **The 1990’s Journey to the New Land**

The political watershed of the 1990’s, marked by the unbanning of liberation movements, release of political prisoners including Nelson Mandela, return of exiles, and Namibia’s independence, prompted new questions for the MCSA: How can the church move beyond protest theology to active participation in national, regional, and continental reconstruction?

The Journey to the New Land Conferences (1992, 1995) responded with six calls to the church:

1. Deepened spirituality for all members;
2. Mission-focused life and work beyond institutional maintenance;
3. Rediscovery of the priesthood of all believers;
4. Genuine unity “so that the world may believe”;
5. Servant leadership as a model for decision-making;
6. Freedom for ordained Ministers to focus on preaching, teaching, and spiritual guidance.

These calls represented a renewed vision of the church as a pilgrim community moving forward with hope, humility, and commitment to transformation in church and society.

### **Rediscovering the priesthood of all believers**

The theology of the priesthood of all believers is foundational, affirming that every Christian, regardless of occupation or ecclesiastical status, is a priest before God. Rooted in Scripture, this doctrine challenges hierarchical distinctions that separate clergy from laity, emphasising that all believers share in Christ’s priesthood (Hebrews 7; 1 Peter 2:5-9).

Christ, the eternal High Priest of Melchizedek’s order, fulfilled and abolished the old Levitical priesthood, granting believers direct access to God through Him (Hebrews 7; Ephesians 3:12). This access confers privileges to pray boldly and offer spiritual sacrifices, praise, thanksgiving, repentance, justice and love (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15).

With these privileges come responsibilities, proclaiming God’s excellences, acting as prophetic witnesses, and serving as agents of reconciliation, embodying Christ’s message of redemption (1 Peter 2:9; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20). This doctrine empowers Christians to view daily work and public engagement as priestly acts, integrating faith and vocation.

Neglecting this truth risks spiritual decline and diminishes the Church’s transformative impact. Reviving this teaching encourages believers to live fully into their royal priesthood, bringing renewal to church and society. In the MCSA

context, it complements the call for ordained Ministers' freedom to focus on spiritual leadership and oversight, while enabling all members to serve within their vocations and spheres of influence.

### **The Mission Congresses: 2004, 2016, and beyond**

The 2004 Mission Congress in Mthatha crystallised the church's pilgrimage of renewal into formal mission imperatives. It reaffirmed the vision of "A Christ-Healed Africa" and adopted four imperatives: Spirituality; Evangelism and Church Growth; Justice Service and Reconciliation and Human and Economic Development and Empowerment. A fifth imperative was added later, namely Education and Christian Formation. The 2004 Congress emphasised intentional action in healing ministries, cross-cultural relationships, HIV/AIDS response, and youth engagement.

The 2016 Mission Congress in Pietermaritzburg deepened this journey by confessing divisions and failures, committing to radical hospitality, prophetic witness, and unity in diversity. It reminded the Church that renewal is ongoing, requiring repentance, listening, and courageous action. The Congress concluded with a Franciscan blessing, urging Methodists to embrace discomfort for easy answers, anger at injustice, tears for the suffering, and "enough foolishness" to believe in transformation.

These congresses have been shaping the Church's theological language, missional identity, and practical initiatives, providing a foundation for the 2025 pilgrimage.

### **Spiritual implications and practices for the Pilgrimage of Renewal**

The journey of renewal is deeply spiritual, historic process. The MCSA's pilgrimage calls for:

- **Prayerful dependence**, following Nehemiah, beginning with prayer and seeking God's empowerment.
- **Repentance and confession**, honestly acknowledging failures to receive healing and renewal.

- **Commitment to unity**, living out the “One and Undivided” vision through reconciliation, inclusion and respect.
- **Living the priesthood of all believers**, empowering every member to participate actively in mission, ministry and leadership, rediscovering spiritual gifts and vocations.
- **Incarnational mission**, engaging the world with compassion, justice and service, embodying Christ’s love tangibly.

Practically, this entails communal rituals such as Circuit and District prayer walks reflecting the Exodus journey, communal liturgies of repentance during key seasons, shared study groups exploring church history and mission, and celebration Sundays commemorating progress and renewing commitments.

### **Contextual insights: the African and Southern African reality**

The MCSA’s renewal journey unfolds within complex socio-political realities, *apartheid’s* legacy, poverty, HIV/AIDS and inequality. African Christian spirituality, emphasising community, healing and holistic salvation (“soul, soil, society”), enriches the church’s pilgrimage. The MCSA’s commitment to justice and service responds faithfully to these contexts, embodying a pilgrimage of hope rooted in God’s transformative power amid brokenness.

### **Conclusion: lessons for the 2025 Pilgrimage**

The MCSA’s journey through renewal movements, formative conferences, and mission congresses reveals a dynamic and faithful response to God’s call amid challenging contexts. Milestones like “One and Undivided,” Obedience 81, the Journey to the New Land, and the Mission Congresses shaped a church committed to holistic mission encompassing evangelism, spirituality, justice, empowerment and education.

As the MCSA approaches the 2025 Mission Congress, these foundations call for renewed courage, unity and spiritual depth. The pilgrimage is both remembrance and forward movement, trusting that the God who led Israel through the wilderness continues to lead the church into a future of hope and transformation.

Let us rise up and build, as Nehemiah proclaimed, with prayerful dependence,

collaborative spirit and courageous faith, embracing our call to be a church renewed and renewing the world in Christ's name.

## Group reflection questions

To nurture communal engagement, the following reflection questions and ritual suggestions may be used in Societies, Circuits and Districts:

### Reflection questions:

1. What “broken walls” or divisions do we need to rebuild in our church and community today?
2. How can we embody the “One and Undivided” vision in our local context?
3. In what ways does the legacy of Obedience 81 challenge our current attitudes and actions?
4. How are we living out the six calls from the Journey to the New Land, especially the rediscovery of the priesthood of all believers?
5. How can understanding the priesthood of all believers transform our engagement in daily work and church participation?
6. What spiritual practices can sustain us on this pilgrimage of renewal?



### Communal rituals

- Opening and closing prayers anchored in Nehemiah 1:3-4 and Psalm 126:1-3;
- Confession and lament liturgies inviting collective repentance and healing;
- Covenant renewal ceremonies affirming mission and unity;
- Sharing testimonies and storytelling celebrating the church's history and hopes.

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## Chapter 2

# Pilgrimage as a spiritual practice

## A sacred journey of encounter, transformation and covenant renewal in biblical narrative and African tradition

*Rev. Roxanne Steyn*

Most of us have had to undertake a significant journey at some point in our lives—whether joyful, uncertain or deeply challenging. Some relish in the thrill of new paths, others hesitate at the thought of leaving behind the familiar. I confess that for me, the most dreadful part is packing the bags. The weight of the bags mirrors the internal questions: *Where am I going? Why? What will I need?*

Yet that's the strange thing about sacred journeys. You often don't know everything at the start. Pilgrimage, unlike a casual trip or holiday, invites us to pack differently. It demands discernment, intention and spiritual openness. This pilgrimage is a spiritual movement, a sacred passage that unfolds across geography, through time, and deep within the soul. As the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) invites us to a Pilgrimage of Renewal we are not simply being called to walk—we are being called to be transformed. As Hilaire Belloc once remarked, "We wander for distraction, but we travel for fulfilment." (Belloc, 1923 p. 57). His reflection reminds us that sacred journeys are not merely escapes from the ordinary, but movements toward deeper meaning and transformation. We are being called to a pilgrimage of renewal. This sacred pilgrimage is not just about a destination—it is a deep spiritual practice embedded in both biblical narrative and African tradition, shaping us through encounter, transformation and covenant renewal.

## The language of journey: a Methodist heartbeat

We Methodists are no strangers to poetic declarations. Our ecclesial identity is laced with vision-filled language— “a Christ-healed Africa for the healing of nations,” “to proclaim the Gospel for healing and transformation,” “a revived church,” “awakening prophetic agency.” Now, the call before us is a “Pilgrimage of Renewal.” As beautiful as the phrase is, its truth lies not in the poetry—but in the walking, for these are not idle slogans, they are spiritual signposts that mark the path we walk. This chapter invites us to explore *pilgrimage as a spiritual practice* that draws deeply from our biblical heritage, our African worldview and our Methodist ethos.

## Pilgrimage: a sacred framework

To understand pilgrimage as a spiritual practice, we must recover its fullness as a journey that is physical, internal and symbolic. It’s a pattern that recurs throughout Scripture and is richly resonant in African traditional spirituality.

In the biblical witness, pilgrimage is one of the oldest metaphors of faith. Abraham’s journey from Ur to Canaan becomes the foundational narrative for faith, not merely because of where he ends up, but because it is *storied space*, what Walter Brueggemann calls “the interlocking of time, place, and event” (Brueggemann, 1977 p.185). Abraham’s altars built at Shechem, Bethel, Hebron and Moriah become more than geographical points; they are sacred encounters. They reveal a God who walks with, speaks into and reshapes human lives in motion.

Then we have Jacob—a deeply flawed yet profoundly chosen figure. Jacob’s pilgrimage begins not out of obedience, but as a fugitive. He flees from the wrath of his brother Esau after deceiving his father. And yet, on the road to Haran, in a place he did not plan to stop, he has a divine encounter in a dream—a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending. He wakes up declaring, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it!” (Genesis 28:16 New Revised Standard Version Anglicised). Later, years down the road, God calls him to return to Bethel—the site of that first encounter. This act of return is a form of pilgrimage, a holy circling back. What makes Jacob’s pilgrimage particularly poignant is its cyclical nature. He leaves as a deceiver

and returns as one who has wrestled with God and been renamed, Israel. His transformation does not occur in a single moment but through a series of sacred events that shape his identity, his family and eventually an entire people.

In African spirituality, journeys are never simply about reaching a physical location. Movement is sacred, communal and deeply tied to memory, healing and belonging. A journey is not just yours—it is ours. This collective spirituality is rooted in the African understanding of *ubuntu*, where personhood is formed through relationship. In many African communities, rites of passage such as *ulwaluko* (Xhosa male initiation), *umemulo* (Zulu female coming-of-age ceremony), and traditional initiation schools (*lebollo*, *bojale*, *bogwera*) mark communal pilgrimages into identity and purpose. These rites involve the entire community—elders, spiritual leaders, siblings, neighbours and ancestors—all participating in the formation and transformation of the pilgrim (Mtuzze, 2003; Soga, 1931; Masoga & Kiazolu, 2023; Mndende, 2006). The journey is both symbolic and real—a transition through physical space and communal memory where the individual is redefined and re-membered into the people.

There is no individual healing without communal restoration. A person returns from pilgrimage not just changed for themselves but as one who can now bless the community. In African traditional spirituality, healing and transformation are always relational and participatory—what happens to one, happens to all. The African worldview, grounded in the ethic of *ubuntu*, rejects the modern Western myth of the lone traveller. Pilgrimage is therefore a collective act, both in the walking and in the welcoming back. Identity is co-constructed through communal affirmation, and transformation is sealed by restoration into the community (Magesa, 1997; Mndende, 2006; Mbiti, 1990; Masoga & Kiazolu, 2023).

In this context, *isivivane* becomes especially powerful. Literally meaning “a pile of stones,” it refers to stones placed by pilgrims to mark a sacred place. But it is more than a marker—it is a communal altar. Each person adds their stone to the circle. As Young and Vosloo describe, “The circle is an archetypal symbol of unity and equality... where no stone is higher than another” (2002 p. 100). Within this circle, memory is preserved, struggle is honoured, and the presence of God is invoked.

This practice echoes what we see in the Exodus journey, where God's people move together through wilderness and into promise. According to Levine (1989), they travel not only to escape Egypt, but to encounter God on the way. The festivals of *Pesach* (Passover), *Shavuot* (Weeks/Pentecost), and *Sukkot* (Booths/Tabernacles) become annual pilgrimage feasts to remember where they came from, whom they met, and what they are called to be (Exodus 12; Leviticus 23:4-44; Deuteronomy 16:1-17).

In these cycles, we begin to see that pilgrimage is not linear. Spiritual journeys often move in circles. We return to familiar places—Bethel, Zion, our ancestral homes, not to repeat, but to see with new eyes. Valerie Lesley Valter-Painter describes this as *spiralling pilgrimage*, where each return through familiar terrain brings deeper insight. “We spiral again and again to familiar places from new perspectives,” she writes, showing how transformation often unfolds in layers, not leaps (Valter-Painter 2000 p. 36). It is through such repetition that God engraves lessons on our bones. The soul's learning is rarely instant—it is layered, storied and hard-won.

This circling, this remembering, is at the heart of renewal.

## **Renewal: the Spirit breathes again**

Renewal is more than revival. It is a reconstitution of purpose, of community, of mission. It is what Ezekiel sees in the valley of dry bones—scattered fragments coming together again through the breath of God. It is what happens when prophetic imagination meets divine action. God says: “I will put my Spirit in you, and you shall live” (Ezekiel 37:14 NRSVA).

For us in the MCSA, this pilgrimage of renewal is not only about lamenting where we have failed—it is about listening for the rattle of bones, the beginnings of life, the coming together of the Church again. And as in Ezekiel's vision, it is not enough for the bones to come together; God calls the prophet to take two sticks—symbols of a divided people—and unite them in his hand. This is renewal as reconciliation. Renewal as remembering what was broken and bringing it back together under one name, one Sovereign (King), one God.

Our current calling is to make this pilgrimage *visible*. To walk together carrying

our stones. To form circles of listening, healing and courage. To carry one another's burdens, to speak prophetic words, and to allow God to breathe again into our institutions, our congregations, and our hearts.

Lastly, pilgrimage is allegorical. All of life is a journey. Christian spirituality invites us to see ourselves as nomads of grace, pilgrims on the way to God's future. John Wesley famously described salvation as "a way, a road, a journey" (Maddox, 1994). Thus, pilgrimage names our whole existence. Pilgrimage as a spiritual practice affirms that the Church does not merely sit in place—it is a people on the way. And we are being asked not to just speak about the journey, but to take it seriously, with every stone, every step, every circle, every breath.

We are pilgrims. We are being transformed. And we are being renewed.

## Conclusion

To walk the road of pilgrimage is to enter a sacred rhythm—one that invites us to leave behind the familiar, encounter God along the way, be transformed in community and return with new eyes and a renewed heart. This pilgrimage of renewal is not a solitary task but a shared commitment. As we carry our stones and circle back to sacred places, may we also carry one another in faith, hope and love—trusting that God who walks with us will breathe life again into dry bones and lead us into new beginnings.

## Group reflection questions

1. What part of your spiritual journey feels like a wilderness? Where do you long for renewal?  
*(Invite participants to reflect personally and consider how their individual journey connects to the church's journey.)*
2. Have you ever experienced a 'return' to a place or season in life that felt transformed the second time around? What changed in you?
3. In what ways does your community embody (or struggle to embody) the spirit of pilgrimage—moving together, listening, renewing?
4. What might it mean for us as a church to carry our 'stones' together—to name what has died and what God is reviving among us?



## Communal ritual: the circle of stories – walking the sacred journey together

Purpose: To honour the stories of each person, deepen communal bonds, and affirm the presence of God in the shared journey of renewal.

### Materials:

- A large open space where a circle can be formed (indoors or outdoors)
- A candle to symbolise God's guiding presence
- A length of rope, ribbon, or cord (forming a visible circle on the ground)
- Small pieces of cloth or card and pens

### Instructions:

Lay down the cord or rope in a large circle. Place the candle in the centre. This represents God's light in the midst of the church.

#### 1. Entering the Circle

As each person steps into the circle, they name aloud (or silently if preferred) a *word of longing or hope* they carry for the Church. They then take a piece of cloth or card and write that word on it.

#### 2. Sharing the Journey

Once all are in the circle, the facilitator invites 2–3 people to briefly share a story from their spiritual journey—a moment of wilderness, transformation or homecoming. This honours the African oral tradition, where community is formed through the telling and listening of lived stories.

#### 3. Prayer and Naming

Participants tie their cloth/card onto the rope, forming a physical chain of the church's prayers, hopes and callings. A communal prayer follows:

*God of our ancestors and of our journey,  
You who were with Abraham, Sarah and Jacob,  
Walk with us now.  
Bind our hearts as you bind these names,  
And make us again your people of promise and renewal. Amen.*

#### 4. Departing the Circle

As participants leave the circle, they are invited to dip their hand in water (symbolising baptism and renewal) and make the sign of the cross or simply touch their heart as a sign of commitment to the pilgrimage ahead.

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## Chapter 3

# Cultivating the spirituality of listening and discernment

*Rev. Luvuyo Sifo*

The 2025 Pilgrimage of Renewal by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) is themed, *One Mission, Many Voices: Speaking and Listening Together* (MCSA, 2025). This theme underscores the diversity within the Methodist community, acknowledging that participants come from various geographical, cultural, contextual, philosophical, social, political, relational and experiential backgrounds. The diverse expectations regarding how renewal should manifest necessitate careful discernment and intentional moments of listening and engagement among the participants.

This chapter explores the cultivation of spiritual listening and discernment, activities which are essential for the Pilgrimage of Renewal. Discernment, in this context, is described as prayerful attentiveness to God, the people of God and the world that God loves. It involves both individual and communal acts of observing silence and solitude, followed by reflection on what is being heard or picked up from these acts. Thus, the chapter posits that listening and discernment are creatively intertwined, forming a crucial part of the Pilgrimage of Renewal.

### **Discernment and listening in the Bible**

The Bible is filled with many texts that underscore the necessity for careful discernment and active listening. One of those is 1 Kings 3:9, where King Solomon petitions God for a discerning heart to govern God's people and to distinguish between right and wrong. From Solomon's plea, it can be deduced that cultivating a spirituality of discernment begins with a humble admission of one's lack of wisdom. A Pilgrimage of Renewal undertaken by a denomination that operates across the borders of six sovereign states: Namibia, Botswana, the Kingdom of Eswatini, South Africa, Mozambique and Lesotho (MCSA

*Yearbook*, 2025) requires God's wisdom, without which individual and collective discernment is not attainable. In the past, the MCSA has proven beyond reasonable doubt that, without collective discernment, no transformation is possible. For instance, without careful discernment and active listening to God and one another, some of the milestones that the MCSA has achieved in the past could not have been possible. In no particular order, these include, the 1958 resolution of being *One and Undivided*, the ordination of women into presbyteral ministry, the Obedience '81 Conference and statement, the Journey to the New Land process, the Mission Congresses that have taken place since 2004 (MCSA, 2025), the active involvement of children in the life and ministry of the Church, the legislation of inclusivity of women and youth in leadership structures of the church, the conversation about LGBTIAQ+ matters within the church (Bentley, 2012; MCSA *Yearbook*, 2025).

The conversations listed above, and those continuing to take place within the MCSA currently indicate that, for the denomination to drive a healing and transforming agenda, it cannot adopt an attitude of complacency because of its glorious past, or even the "brand" it has become, hence the need for discerning God's will as we continue our journey. Were we to choose complacency, the MCSA would be risking stagnation and thus becoming irrelevant. A discerning heart is needed if difficult conversations are to be engaged in, and courageous implementation of resolutions taken, is to follow. Discernment assists in holding the spaces in which conversations happen with integrity and God-honouring decency.

In the age of social media influence and Artificial Intelligence (AI), a church denomination whose mandate is to proclaim the gospel of healing and transformation has the burden of demonstrating to the world why it should continue operating. What does it offer to the world that is different from what is already on offer out there? The Pilgrimage of Renewal will potentially lead the MCSA towards preservation, and possibly mitigate the risk of the Church becoming extinct. Extinct, not in the sense that it would cease to exist, but extinct in the sense that it would fail in accomplishing its mission mandate, and be rendered irrelevant. An undiscerning church community would certainly prove Mr Wesley right when he said:

*I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out (Wesley, 1786).*

Cultivating a spirituality of discernment includes prayer, searching the scriptures, observing solitude and silence, partaking in the worship of the people of God, receiving Holy Communion regularly and holy conferencing (MCSA, 2024). Through these means God speaks mysteriously, convicting the participants of their need for God and assuring them of their beloved-ness. Participants gain wisdom, which is the ability to think and act using intellectual, spiritual, emotional and social knowledge. They also gain experience, understanding, common sense and insight through which they exercise unbiased judgement and compassion. Our reading of the Bible indicates that these are attributes which Solomon was endowed with. This gives us hope too, that like Solomon, we can be gifted with wisdom when we are willing to be discerning.

Another story that attests to the need for listening and discernment in the Bible is the story of the young Samuel, which is found in 1 Samuel 3:1-10. Samuel had to learn to listen to God from a very young age. Even though he had not known God's voice from the beginning, he had to be mentored in skilfully listening and responding appropriately to God. Furthermore, Samuel had to learn to distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of his mentor, Eli. From Samuel's story, it becomes evident that listening is both personal and communal. At both levels, listening takes the form of attentiveness to God, to each other and to the world that God loves. People on a Pilgrimage of Renewal should, as a matter of necessity, heed the call to listen upwardly, inwardly, and outwardly.

Listening upwardly involves paying attention to God's divine whispers, sifting through the many noises that vie for our attention, and minding the source of our inspiration. Listening inwardly involves paying attention to one's inner thoughts (one's conscience or one's gut feelings). This requires nurturing the inner person so that the internal spiritual reservoir is always attuned to God's promptings. Listening outwardly entails paying attention to one's surroundings and creation,

minding the context, and paying attention to the lived experiences of others. Listening intentionally in these ways attunes people to God's voice and will. For Christians on a Pilgrimage of Renewal, the ability to listen attentively becomes their spiritual stethoscope through which they can hear the heartbeat of God and, as a result, be able to diagnose what is wrong with themselves, and what is wrong in the world.

Michael D. Waters created a cartoon called Shepherd's Voice, accessible at <https://www.joyfultoons.com/gallery/nggallery/page/6> that depicted someone who was wondering why he did not hear from the shepherd (Jesus) any more. Based on John 10:27, where Jesus says his sheep hear his voice and they know him, the individual is wondering whether the shepherd has stopped calling or speaking. The cartoon shows the listener surrounded by distractions; a television set he is watching, the radio playing in the background, a computer he is busy on, earphones with music playing, and the fascination with the book he is reading. As a result, he cannot hear the voice of the shepherd who is trying to catch his attention.

A church community undertaking a Pilgrimage of Renewal should take stock of the things distracting it from hearing the voice of the Shepherd. Individuals in the community should ask themselves these questions:

- When last did I hear God?
- What did I hear from God?
- What impact did what I heard from God have on:
  - Myself?
  - Those close to me?
  - The ministry of God's people?
  - The society at large?

When one does not hear from God as much as is preferable, one should ask the following questions:

- What could the possible reason/s be for not hearing God?
- What is the impact of not hearing from God on...
  - Myself?
  - Those close to me?

- The ministry of God’s people?
- The society at large?
- What am I going to do to be ready to hear from God again?
- On a scale of 0-10, how hungry (longing) am I to hear from God?

When individuals and communities take these questions of reflection seriously and attempt to answer them honestly, they begin to cultivate a spirituality of listening and discernment, which leads to life-transforming outcomes.

Listening is crucial for a people who are on a Pilgrimage of Renewal. We listen not only to God, but also to our mentors and leaders, to one other and creation. To this end, in the MCSA, all Candidates for local preaching and ministry are expected to demonstrate their ability to listen to God and to clearly articulate what they have heard. The community of the faithful is then allowed to test what the Candidates have heard, and affirm it before the Candidates are approved to exercise their call. Through intentional and purposeful listening, God’s people discover God’s will in the most unexpected and surprising ways. Samuel had to listen attentively, intentionally and cautiously. This is the same manner in which a people on a Pilgrimage of Renewal ought to listen. Listening attentively requires alertness, aroused senses and seriousness. Listening intentionally requires deliberateness, purposefulness, wilfulness and proactivity on the part of the listener. Listening cautiously requires carefulness, discernment and watchfulness on the part of the listener.

## Conclusion

This chapter has delved into the importance of listening and discernment within the context of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa’s Pilgrimage of Renewal. Discernment was described as prayerful attentiveness to God, the people of God and the world that God loves. Reference was made to biblical stories of King Solomon and young Samuel as a means of providing a foundation for understanding the spiritual practices of listening and discernment.

Prayer, scripture reading, silence, worship, Holy Communion, and holy conferencing were posited as means of cultivating discernment and helping participants gain wisdom and align with God’s will. It was argued that effective listening involves attending upwardly to God, inwardly to conscience, and

outwardly to others and creation. This would enable the diagnosis of personal and communal issues through spiritual attentiveness.

A shepherd metaphor was used to illustrate how contemporary distractions can drown out God's voice. Individuals and communities were urged to reflect on their level of attentiveness and hunger to hear from God.

## Group reflection questions



1. For us together to learn to discern God's direction for us, Philippians 1:9-10 makes reference to some components of a discernment process when we are together seeking God's ways. Discuss what components do you notice in the verses, that will help us with collective discernment?
2. Talk together about what you believe John Wesley meant when he said: "*having the form of religion without the power*". Reflect on whether you can see that issue at work in churches today. Why do you think, power is lost?
3. The chapter speaks at length about the discipline of listening. Think, individually, about these questions below, and share with the group, what you feel ready to share with them:
  - a. Whose voice do you hear most often during the day?
  - b. Whose voice do you ignore most often during a normal day?
  - c. Who do you wish, would listen to you?
4. Whose voices should we seek out, when we as a Church want to discern God's direction, together?
5. Whose voices do we, in our Society/Circuit, ignore when we gather to discuss?
6. What stops us from hearing God's voice?
7. Listening is more than hearing. To listen is to be fully present, it is about sacrificing your own priorities or built-in prejudice. More, even, listening is intent to enter into the experience of the other – be it God, or the one who is hurting, or the community.

With that description of listening, who have you not been listening to?

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## Chapter 4

# African Christian community

*Mrs Jessie Paremore-Hikwa*

### **The human touch of pilgrimage: a journey of the soul**

Pilgrimage, at its heart, is a journey of the soul, a human experience that transcends mere travel, to become a profound encounter with the sacred. It is a practice deeply rooted in faith, tradition and a universal longing for something more. For centuries, people from various cultures and religions have embarked on these transformative journeys, seeking connection, meaning and a deeper understanding of themselves and the divine. This chapter will explore the essence of pilgrimage, its multifaceted nature, and its enduring significance in human lives.

### **The call to journey: reasons for pilgrimage**

The motivations behind undertaking a pilgrimage are as diverse as the individuals who embark upon them. Often, a pilgrimage begins with a call —a deep-seated desire or yearning that stirs within the heart. This can manifest as a conscious awareness of faith, the need to mark a life transition, or a deep desire to honour a loved one.

**Marking transitions:** Pilgrimages can provide a unique opportunity to cross the threshold from the activities of family life to the more mellow days of life together. Retirement and other major life changes are also often marked by journeys of this kind, offering a chance to seek spiritual direction for the years ahead.

**Honouring loved ones:** The death of a loved one can lead individuals to embark on a pilgrimage to pay tribute to their life.

Praying for a need: A pilgrimage can also be an act of prayer, a way to seek divine intervention or express gratitude. Pilgrims may visit shrines and sacred sites to offer prayers and seek blessings.

The shared experience of hardship and devotion fosters strong bonds, creating a sense of unity within the pilgrim. Regardless of their reason, pilgrims often find that their journeys lead them to unexpected places, both literally and figuratively.

## **Elements of a meaningful pilgrimage**

True pilgrimage integrates educational, spiritual and communal elements. It is not just about visiting a place; it's about immersing oneself in the experience.

Educational component: Learning about the history, culture and significance of a site provides a deeper appreciation for the journey.

Spiritual enrichment: Pilgrims often seek spiritual transformation by celebrating Holy Communion and other rituals at sacred sites, and participating in silent reflection.

Community building: Pilgrimages facilitate the development of community through group meetings, conversations and shared experiences.

These elements combine to create an environment conducive to personal growth, reflection and a strengthened connection to faith.

## **The power of the pilgrim community**

Pilgrimages often involve a shared journey with others, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Pilgrims encounter fellow-travellers, often forming lifelong friendships. Shared rituals and acts of worship strengthen the bonds of the community, offering comfort, support and a shared sense of purpose.

The communal aspect of pilgrimage transcends individual backgrounds, connecting people to a greater spiritual community. They encounter the beauty of different cultures, customs, and expressions of faith. This shared experience creates a sense of unity and understanding that can be transformative.

## Conclusion: the enduring legacy of pilgrimage

Pilgrimage remains a powerful and enduring practice across diverse faiths and cultures. It offers a unique opportunity for spiritual growth, connection and transformation. Whether it's the *Hajj*, the *Camino de Santiago*, or a journey to a local shrine, pilgrimage provides a space for reflection, renewal and a deeper understanding of the human experience. The pilgrim-community, bound by shared faith and purpose, offers support, companionship and a sense of belonging. As individuals embark on these sacred journeys, they find not only a connection to the divine, but also a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

### Group reflection questions

1. Richard Gillard wrote a song in 1977 which expresses our communal pilgrimage:  
We are pilgrims on a journey  
Fellow travellers on the road  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load.<sup>1</sup>  
What does this verse of the song say to you about the community of pilgrimage?
2. Have you ever gone on a journey that turned into a pilgrimage for you? What made it a pilgrimage? Who did you share it with? How did it take on a spiritual dimension?
3. What Old and New Testament stories can you think of, that we can describe as pilgrimages? What lessons do you pick up as you reflect on those stories, for the pilgrimage your congregation or group is on?



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<sup>1</sup> Gillard, R. (2020). *The Servant Song*. Retrieved at: <https://artandtheology.org/2020/07/11/the-servant-song-by-richard-gillard/> on 28 July 2025



## Chapter 5

# The concept of Church

## Who are we?

Mr Peter Frow

### The Anatomy of the Church

Ephesians 4:1-16 gives the clearest picture of the anatomy of the church to be found anywhere in the New Testament.

The passage refers to two kinds of unity: the unity of the Spirit (verse 3) and the unity of the faith (verse 13).

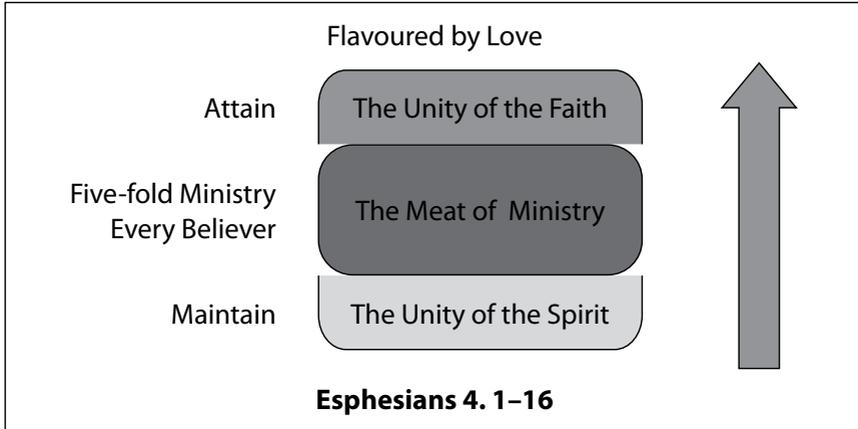
The unity of the Spirit is something which we have together with other believers by virtue of being born of the Spirit. (John 3:5-8) We need simply to *maintain* it as it can be fractured if we allow resentment and offence to mar relationships.

The unity of the faith is something we don't yet have: we have yet to *attain* it.

The entire passage is structured around these two kinds of unity and how we progress from one to the other.

Between these two we find what may be termed *the meat of ministry*. This is what every believer is to be engaged in as we each play our part in moving ourselves collectively towards *maturity in Christ*.

The structure of the Ephesians passage thus looks a bit like a hamburger:



Key points to notice are:

The overall direction is *upward*.

- ...until we *attain* to the unity of the faith (v 13 English Standard Version)
- ...we are to grow *up* in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ (v 15 ESV)
- ...*builds* itself up in love (v 16 ESV)

The unity of the Spirit is the foundation from which effective ministry must proceed: If there is relational discord in the body this will hamper the effectiveness of the ministry. It's rather like a rocket being launched off a defective launch pad. The result is unlikely to be successful. Sometimes the unity of the Spirit may require considerable maintenance to restore its soundness. This is one of the reasons we pray the Lord's Prayer which contains the sentence, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." It is also the reason for passing the peace during worship services.

Regarding the *meat of ministry*, everyone gets to play: The five-fold ministry is not to do all the work, the role is to "equip the saints for the work of service." There should be no sharp boundary between clergy and laity.

The five-fold ministry is as follows:

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

These should be seen as components within a healthy church, rather than as actual persons.

Apostles: Literally 'sent ones.' This can include the following:

Wise master builder	1 Corinthians 3:10
Foundation layer	1 Corinthians 3:11
Church planter	1 Corinthians 4:14,15
Teacher of sound doctrine	Galatians 1:11,12

Prophets: Can be simply preachers who proclaim the Gospel message (*kerugma*) 1 Corinthians 1:21. It can also mean someone who exercises the charismatic gift of prophecy to bring a 'now' word of encouragement and sometimes correction or direction to the body.

Evangelists: Those with a particular gift of leading unbelievers to faith in Christ. They should also be equipping other believers to do likewise.

Pastors: Those with a gift of caring for the believers, particularly those in need, and nourishing them and sanctifying them by 'the water of the Word'. (Ephesians 5:26)

Teachers: Whereas a preacher will proclaim the Word of God leading to conviction and changed behaviour, the teacher explains the Word leading to greater understanding. Jesus' ministry to his closest followers was teaching, not preaching. For example, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5,6 and 7).

**Note:**

The aim of these important ministries is collectively to equip the believers for the work of ministry and to move them upwards towards greater maturity in Christ.

If either a local church or a denominational church such as the MCSA is weak in any of these five areas this will weaken the growth, health and witness of the church. We will comment further on this below.

## Unity of the faith

Unity of the faith is equated with Christlikeness or maturity in Christ (verse 13 ESV):

*“until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God and to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”*

An essential component of spiritual maturity is knowledge of sound doctrine: (verse 14 ESV)

*“so that we will no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.”*

The last two verses of the passage give the *modus operandi* of the church—the “how”. Written in the present continuous tense this brings a dynamism and energy to what could otherwise be an inanimate structure. It is rather like Ezekiel saying, “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live”. (Ezekiel 37:9 ESV)

Key phrases in Ephesians 4 are:

Speaking the truth in love.

Growing up unto Him who is the Head.

Being joined together by every ligament with which it is provided.

When each part is working properly.

Making bodily growth.

Upbuilding itself in love.

The flavour, the stock-in-trade of the church is *love*: we speak the truth in *love*, we upbuild one another in *love*.

The other keynote of the church is *truth*, which includes sound doctrine, for we worship the one who is the *Truth* and the Father seeks those who will worship Him in Spirit and *truth*.

## Conclusions and application to the MCSA

It will be good to do an audit on individual Societies and the Connexion as a whole as regards the strength of each of the five-fold components.

We are good at raising up preachers, but we are not so strong at teaching. Preaching from a lectionary text is good because it allows one to cover the entire sweep of the canon, however it is no substitute for systematic exposition of a book or for teaching on the central doctrines of our faith. The emphasis of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) is discipleship and teaching.

Opportunity should be given for the exercise of the charismatic gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 14:1-5; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21)

Local churches: *Speaking the truth in love we grow up...* (Ephesians 4:15 ESV): It is through constructive, respectful engagement with other believers that we grow up to Christlike maturity. Forums should be provided for this to take place. We can be greatly enriched by the testimony and perspective of other believers. The potential of class meetings and home groups should be maximised in this regard with structured teaching material and opportunities for discussion. The Alpha course, for example, is an excellent resource.

The church in the locality: *Speaking the truth in love we grow up...*: Our ministers should be encouraged to join gatherings of clergy (used to be called fraternal) and other inter-church forums, so as to promote fellowship and engagement, thereby enabling a united ecumenical witness to the community. The most authentic gathering are those which include a diverse mix of mainline and independent/Charismatic churches most of whom share a high view of Scripture and a common orthodoxy.

The Church Universal: A Christ-healed Africa for the healing of the nations. This remains a mantra worth embracing and re-affirming. To do so is to acknowledge our apostolic mandate to take the magnificent Gospel with which we are entrusted, *to the nations*. It will deliver the MCSA from being an inward-looking testimony.

## Group reflection questions



1. Are there particular areas in your church where the unity of the Spirit needs maintenance?
2. What is the difference between an overseer (or bishop) and an apostle? (ref 1 Corinthians 12: 27-31; Ephesians 4:11-12 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7)
3. Evaluate your local church as to the relative strength of each of the five-fold ministries on a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is the strongest.
4. What ministry role are you as a group, and as individuals fulfilling within your local church?
5. Come to a consensus as a group as to the main characteristics of a mature Christian.
6. What forums are there for you to “speak the truth in love” in your local church and in the wider church?

## Appendix

### Ephesians 4. 1–16 outline

- 1, 2 Paul urges us to walk worthy of our calling
- 3 Eager to maintain the Unity of the Spirit
- 4-6 A basic creed
- 7, 8 God’s gracious distribution of gifts
- 9,10 Parenthesis: How Satan’s kingdom was plundered in order to secure the gifts that are distributed
- 11 The five-fold ministry gifts
- 12 These key gifts are given to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ
- 13 The goal of all ministry: to attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – maturity in Christ
- 14 Holding fast to sound doctrine is a key component of spiritual maturity
- 15, 16 The modus operandi; “Speaking the truth in love...”

## Chapter 6

# The *Ecclesia* as sacred space and public witness

Rev. Obusitswe Tiroyabone

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) discerns the call of God to renew ourselves, to revive the work of God in Southern Africa, and to restore the reputation of the Methodist movement in the six sovereign states of our Connexion. Discerned in this call is for the Methodist people to journey in a pilgrimage of renewal. At the core of this pilgrimage is a realisation that the MCSA needs to revive its call to be an *ecclesia* that is not only realised as a sacred space, but also as a centre of public witness. Indeed, as we renew ourselves, it is on the basis that the prophetic agency of the church needs to be awakened. This chapter discusses the concept of *ecclesia* as a foundation of the Methodist Church, as a point of departure. Following this foundation, a focus is shifted to the *ecclesia* as a sacred space for the people called Methodist and then follows on how this *ecclesia* can then feed into the world through public witness.

### The *ecclesia*

The word *church* as we have it today comes from the Greek word *ecclesia*.<sup>1</sup> Whilst the focus of this paper is not discussing the etymology of the word *ecclesia*, it serves present purposes to ponder on this word. The word *ecclesia* is translated to mean an assembly. Other translations of *ecclesia* include a gathering, a meeting, a congregation or a coming together in church to which believers belong—the living Church. The Methodist Church is defined in these terms. We are a Church because we are an assembly of the people of God. In the pilgrimage of renewal, we strengthen our understanding that our identity is that of an *ecclesia*.

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<sup>1</sup> Greek: ἐκκλησία

The root word of *ecclesia* is *ekkaleo*<sup>2</sup>, which means to call out, to summon, to invite. Thus, those who are called out come together to form an *ecclesia*, a group or an assembly of those that are called out. The Church then becomes a sacred place of those who were part of the community in which they live. As a result of being called out of the secular community, we then form part of a new community that does not operate like the usual community. We are called out of the community to come and form a community that is contrary to that which exists. By design, the Church is called to be the opposite of what the world is, and what the world does. When God created the Israelites as a people, it was the will of God that they exist as an alternative community, a community unlike the community amongst which they lived. We are thus called to be unlike the world, to be a direct contrast to the world. Nuancing the discipleship movement as an alternative community, Jesus prayed: “They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world” (John 17:16 NRSVA).

However, it is not only those that are called out of community, but it is those that having been called out, obeyed the call to come and be part of the assembly. This is because there are others who have been called out but did not obey the call to come. The call to come (from Jesus the head of the *Ecclesia*) is heard addressed to all people in Matthew 11:28–30 (NIV): *Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* To receive this call from Jesus, to hear it, and to obey it means to come and form a part of the alternative community which is the *ecclesia*. To be part of this alternative community is to live a life of holiness. It means embracing the *ecclesia* as a sacred space.

## **The *ecclesia* as sacred space**

The New Testament speaks of the Church using the word *Ecclesia* for those who were called out and for those who believed. Thus, they were first called out from

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<sup>2</sup> Greek: ἐκκαλέω

the world, then, having believed and obeyed, became part of the *ecclesia*. This means that it is not in just being called out that we become part of the *ecclesia*, but we must believe as well. Believing results in being part of the *ecclesia* as a body of people who believe and are therefore holy.

Wesley was very concerned with holiness for the Methodist people, to the extent that he formulated the Methodist Covenant Service to ‘increase spiritual temperature’ of the Methodists. To be holy gives us the opportunity to be part of the communion of saints. Thus, the *ecclesia* is not just an alternative community, but in its identity as alternative, it is a communion of saints. Being regular worshipers who according to Wesley’s Methodist Rule of Life, ‘attend upon all the ordinances of God’, paves the way for us to belong, and be included in the communion of saints. We do this by observing God’s law: ‘I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.’<sup>3</sup>

The Church or the *Ecclesia* is then also defined as the communion of saints. Because of this nature, the Church then becomes a spiritual bond. The Church, as such, is both visible and invisible. The saints who are alive and the saints who have gone before us form part of this *ecclesia* that is the communion of saints, identified by holiness. To be part of this *ecclesia*, and to present it as an alternative community, we are then called to emulate holiness. When we speak of saints we speak of the core of the *ecclesia*: the Church militant (Christians alive today) and the Church triumphant (those who have died in the faith). The word ‘saint’ comes from the Greek word (*h*)*agios*<sup>4</sup> which means someone who is holy, sacred, consecrated to God, dedicated to God, worthy of reverence, pure from guilt or moral pollution.

Because of these holy people forming the *ecclesia*, so long as there are saints who have communion, the Church exists. That communion may be in faith, in love, in obedience to a common Lord. It may have its origin in something deeper still: in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, even the Spirit of Christ, by which every member is united to Christ, and all the members are joined in one body. This is a union far more real, a communion far more intimate, than subsists between the members of any visible society. The *ecclesia* as a sacred space then becomes

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<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 11:44a NIV

<sup>4</sup> ἅγιος

essential for renewal. In this pilgrimage of renewal, we are called to restore the holiness of the communion of saints as a sacred space.

## The *ecclesia* as public witness

This word *ecclesia* is a word the church borrowed from the Greek assemblies who would gather in public, being called out from amongst the people to participate in the transaction of business. The Greeks would select a few from amongst themselves to an assembly for business transactions on behalf of others, but in public. Thus, from its foundations, the *ecclesia* is created to be an alternative group that performs its functions in the public sphere. The work of the *ecclesia* is not only transparent but is performed in public so that other people may see the works of the *ecclesia* and believe. The Methodist Sesotho hymn (95)<sup>5</sup> written by F. Coillard, asserts this aspect aptly:

<i>Lefifing le letsho-letsho</i>	In the deepest darkness
<i>Le mofuteng o khopo,</i>	And amongst a crooked generation
<i>Ikhetheng lona ba Jesu,</i>	Sanctify and distinguish yourselves, the Jesus followers
<i>Khabang ka khalalelo</i>	Be clothed in (God's) Glory
<i>Le khanye, le eme qhoeng,</i>	Be holy, and stand out on the pedestal
<i>Le bonesetse tsela,</i>	And brighten the world
<i>'Me e mong ea lahlehileng,</i>	That when the lost generation sees you
<i>A ka bona, a phela</i>	May receive light from you and receive life

Being an alternative community means having an alternative consciousness, a consciousness that is fuelled by one the MCSA's mission pillars: the pillar of justice and service. As Methodist people we are reminded in this pilgrimage of renewal that Wesley did not only engage with the poor for purposes of charity, but rather, he confronted the structures that caused the poor to be poor. As we renew our *ecclesia*, we are called to re-imagine it as Wesley intended it to be: an alternative community. Methodism was conceptualised as an alternative community, a counterculture. The Methodist movement was intended to be an alternative community with an alternative consciousness. It is an identity that is contrary to the royal or imperial consciousness and community and, therefore,

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<sup>5</sup> With own translation

created and sustained by prophetic imagination. We are called to be an alternative community that goes beyond dignity and justice to heal the marred identity of those who have been marginalised. That is at the core of what it means to be an *ecclesia* that embodies public witness.

Within the prevailing socio-economic conditions and the heated political climate in Southern Africa, the *ecclesia* that is the Methodist people is called to awaken her prophetic agency in order to speak truth to power in all the sovereign states of our Connexion. The renewal project requires that the presence of the Methodist movement throughout the Connexion should be strengthened and felt. Wesley bequeathed to the Methodist Church, the gift of the '*ecclesiolae in ecclesia*'. This phrase means 'little churches within the Church'. It was a phrase Wesley used during the renewal project in Britain. For Wesley, these little churches included mostly the Class Meetings, the bands and the Societies. Our Class Meetings, Societies and Circuits are meant to be little alternative communities.

### **Conclusion: The call of the Methodist people in the pilgrimage of renewal**

In this pilgrimage of renewal, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa has a unique call to minister to a wounded, yet hopeful Southern Africa. The sovereign states of our Connexion are confronted by a myriad of socio-economic and political challenges. The poor and the marginalised, the excluded and those Wesley called 'the outcasts of [people]' look to the *ecclesia* to hear if there be any message that comes from God. Our call as Methodist people is to renew the hope of the people who struggle. Our renewal project demands that we raise prophetic agency, and that we do so, urgently.

As Methodism spread scriptural holiness throughout 18<sup>th</sup> century England, the Methodist people went into the homes of the poor, they smelt the smell of poverty, they walked in the mud that the poor lived in. The Methodist pioneers did practical works of mercy that changed the lives of ordinary people. As a 21<sup>st</sup> century *ecclesia*, we hear God's call to re-imagine the effecting of God's mission in the changing landscape of mission and ministry. We are in a new *ecclesia*, and she requires new ways of doing mission. As we re-imagine the *ecclesia* as both

sacred space and public witness, we will be able to renew ourselves, revive the work of God in Southern Africa, and restore the dignity and the reputation of the Methodist movement.

## Group reflection questions



1. What is the reputation of our Society in our particular geographical setting?
2. Are we as individuals living holy lives? Substantiate your answer. If this question was asked of others, *about* us, would the answer still be the same?
3. What does it mean to live a holy life?
4. How can we hold one another accountable for holy living?
5. Do we as a Methodist Society speak truth to power? Give examples, whether you agree that the answer to this question is in the positive or in the negative.
6. How can we confront the structures of oppression in Southern Africa as the Methodist Church? Which structures of oppression are most urgent for us to be addressing?

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## Chapter 7

# The heart of renewal

*Rev. Dr Sidwell Mokgothu*

In every age, the Church is called to return to the source of its life: the Triune God who continually renews, restores and redeems. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), in embracing the Pilgrimage of Renewal, is responding to this divine summons, to be made new, both individually and collectively, in the image of Christ, for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Renewal is not a peripheral concept in Christian faith; it is a core spiritual dynamic rooted in the Gospel, central to the life of the early Church, and deeply resonant with African spiritual traditions of healing, restoration and harmony.

This chapter explores the biblical foundations, theological dimensions, and African spiritual resonances of renewal as a sacred journey of transformation.

### **God as the source of renewal**

The scriptures consistently reveal God as One who renews creation, covenants, communities and persons.

The very creation is an act of God bringing life and order out of chaos. It was when the earth was a formless void and there was just darkness that God created with the refrain; "Let there be..." which was constantly followed by the affirmation; "and God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1). The Pilgrimage of Renewal is in itself a moment for Methodists to speak into being, life-giving interventions that shall at the end lead to God affirming that it is good.

There is a sense in which the Methodist Church is in many ways like Ezekiel's valley of dry bones. Like Ezekiel, God is looking for people who shall be compliant and cooperative with the Holy Spirit's leading in putting them in the valley in order to prophetically breathe life into the bones (Ezekiel 37).

There is a possibility for those of us who are leading this process to think that it shall be driven according to our will. It is to such that God, who through the Prophet Isaiah alerts us; “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” (Isaiah 43:9 NRSVA)

God’s renewal manifests even stronger in the wilderness and desert where there is no life. Whenever God renews, God invites God’s people to see and appreciate what God is doing; “...See, I am making all things new.” (Revelation 21:5 NRSVA). It is everything that constitutes the Methodist Church that has to be renewed. God does not pick and choose like we will want to do.

### **True renewal is the conversion of the heart**

The Church is both a mystical body and a structured institution. Therefore, a comprehensive and holistic Pilgrimage of Renewal must address the transformation of the institutional church’s constitution, polity, leadership, finance systems, governance structures and culture. These are important because they are not meant to be just a rigid bureaucracy but to serve mission. The MCSA must interrogate how its systems, structures, and cultures align (or do not align) with the values of the Gospel, the needs of the people, and the call of God in a changing world.

Whereas the Pilgrimage is about the renewal of the polity, the structures and culture of the Methodist Church as an institution, Christian renewal is primarily an inside work. It is the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of the believers.

The Pilgrimage must be challenging to Methodist leaders and members – clergy and laity – to subject themselves to the renewal of self before the external processes. True renewal is about personal conversion. It begins with a turning—a *metanoia* marked by David’s contrite heart and a penitential prayer to God; “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10 NRSVA). It leads to the restoration of the original divine image of God in human beings.

## Wesley's religion of the heart

John Wesley bequeathed to the Methodist Church religion that moved from the head to the heart. His vision was a passionate insistence that true religion is not merely external and structural, intellectual and logical or ceremonial aesthetics. It was instead the inward transformation by the love of God. Wesley's understanding of this holiness of the heart was the workings of the Holy Spirit at a deep personal level of each follower of Christ. (Harper, 2017; Reinert, 2024) Thus for Wesley, the most important question was not "What is Christianity" but "Who is a Christian?" (Clapper 2010 p. 3)

Aldersgate on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738 was for Mr Wesley, the personal manifestation of this religion (Dean, 2014 p. 37). It was a sacred moment of conversion that was marked not with a sense of duty but a burning fire that shifted him from "role-playing" church to a living faith. Thus, he could boldly declare; "I felt my heart strangely warmed" (Wesley, 1738). A heart strangely warmed is a heart that is marked by a personal encounter with the living Christ that moves us from a rule-based religion to deep relationships marked by love, peace and forgiveness.

For the MCSA, this legacy is vital: a renewed heart-religion calls us to deep personal renewal that overflows into acts of justice, mercy and mission to the poor. Our Pilgrimage of Renewal, therefore, is not just an inward self-satisfying and glorifying busyness but a recommitment to God's transforming love in every aspect of life.

## The new creation

Of all the apostles, it is St Paul who in the New Testament understood the renewal as an act grounded in Christ. It is he, who knows the person that was Saul, compared to the one who was transformed to be Paul, who appreciated very much this renewal in God. For Paul renewal finds ultimate expression in Christ; "So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17 NRSVA)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most powerful sign of God's renewing work in the world. It is not simply the reversal of death, but the beginning of a whole new creation. In the resurrection, God does not merely restore life—God

transforms it. As such, resurrection is the ultimate act of renewal, and it is the foundation of the Church's hope, mission and spirituality. May our churches become sites of resurrection renewal—where the broken are made whole, the discouraged are lifted, and the Church itself is reawakened to its calling.

## Conclusion

Renewal is God's gift and invitation. As the MCSA journeys through this Pilgrimage, may we open ourselves to the Spirit's renewing power—returning to our first love, reclaiming our mission, and becoming, once again, a Church that is alive with grace, ablaze with love, and bold in witness.

## Group reflection questions

1. How does the concept of renewal align with your personal understanding of spiritual transformation?
2. Reflect on the significance of John Wesley's "heart strangely warmed" experience. How can this personal encounter with Christ inspire Methodist people at this time?
3. When you translate the concept of an individual who experiences a heart strangely warmed to the experience of a community like a Mission Group or Circuit Quarterly Meeting, what would you call it, and what would it look like, do you think?
4. How can the Methodist Church ensure that its institutional structures and culture aligns with the values of the Gospel and the needs of the people in a changing world?



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## Chapter 8

# Leadership on the Pilgrimage rekindling the Methodist ethos and fire

*Rev. Dr Vusi M. Vilakati*

### **Burning Hearts, Walking Fire**

*This sacred journey burns with holy fire*

*A divine flame calls us to lead*

*With urgency, humility, and hope*

*With courage that ignites the dawn*

*True leadership dances with fire*

*It speaks with the land*

*It moves with the Spirit*

*It walks with the people*

*The future demands prophets of fire*

*Who ask bold questions*

*Who listen with burning hearts*

*Who act with unquenchable light*

## The sacred call: a new era of leadership

Across the land, beneath vast skies and along ancient rivers, a divine fire stirs and calls. It moves through fractured systems and forgotten places. It draws us into a sacred pilgrimage of renewal, imagination and hope. This call rejects control and embraces covenant. It cultivates fidelity in the face of fragmentation and humility where power once silenced. Leadership in this moment refuses to manage. It listens, enacts and disrupts with prophetic clarity. It roots itself in land and Spirit and moves with the longing to restore what breaks. It trusts that the Word speaks beyond settled prose. It births new worlds through faithful disruption.<sup>1</sup>

Leadership thinkers affirm what our elders carry in breath and ritual. Change takes root when leaders read the moment, hold tension, and awaken collective courage.<sup>2</sup> Innovation rises. Resilience deepens. Integrity holds. In the aftermath of the pandemic, institutions that moved with agility and embraced co-creation found renewal, while others faded. Yet the most enduring transformation remains spiritual. It flows not from efficiency or control, but from moral clarity, generational wisdom, and fierce communal hope.<sup>3</sup>

Methodism came to Africa as a flame seeking new air. It encountered a Spirit already singing in sacred rhythms. Wesley's hymns merged with African melodies and gave voice to a living theology. In Southern Africa, this faith is refined in the crucible of resistance and in the daily endurance of life in fields, mines, kitchens and construction sites. It rises from the copper mines of Selebi-Phikwe, the textile mills of Maputsoe, the sugar estates of Marromeu, the fishing harbours of Walvis Bay, the jazz-soaked streets of Sophiatown, and the highland homesteads of Hlathikhulu. It speaks in mother tongues. It marches in defiance. It remains rooted in quiet acts of courage. Scripture no longer rests on the page. It walks

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<sup>1</sup> Brueggemann, *Lament That Generates Covenant*.

<sup>2</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*.

<sup>3</sup> Marques and Dhiman, *Leading With Diversity, Equity and Inclusion*.

among the people. It breathes through solidarity and nourishes a spirituality of liberation and joy.<sup>4</sup>

Leadership today listens more than it commands. It leans into uncertainty without fear. It lifts a vision rooted in repair. It moves from nostalgia to narrative, from fatigue to fire. It sees land as sacred, community as covenant, and truth as a call that still echoes through the soil.

### **The pilgrimage we forgot: reclaiming sacred memory**

Leadership without memory forgets not only where it comes from, but who it serves. The past is not a still archive. It is a living spring that sings through scripture, story and sacrament. To return to sacred memory is to awaken moral imagination and sharpen ethical resolve. In seasons of forgetting, communities drift and convictions dull. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa carries a legacy written in Circuits of struggle, compassion and daily resistance. It formed teachers, prophets, evangelists and freedom dreamers.<sup>5</sup> But where memory is neglected, rituals thin. Stories wither. Movements frighten.

Storytelling restores coherence. It holds the fragments together when the centre buckles.<sup>6</sup> *Practising remembrance as a spiritual discipline* grounds leadership in more than plans or metrics. These leaders do not curate nostalgia. They *steward testimony with humility and intent*. They reflect deeply. They lament wisely. They listen to the grief beneath the silence. *They turn history into horizon* with the courage to be reshaped by it.<sup>7</sup>

So, the question stands, not as an exercise in reflection but as a summons to action. How are we weaving sacred memory into worship, into strategic planning, into mentoring and preparation. What testimonies still wait to rise from silence and burn again in the body of the church? *Spiritual*

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<sup>4</sup> Sibeko, *African Spirituality and Methodism: A Survey of Black Members of the Thaba-Nchu Methodist Church*.

<sup>5</sup> Dlamini, *Contested Memory: A Contribution to the Story of the Emergence of Methodism in Umlazi*.

<sup>6</sup> Kampmann and Pedell, *Using Storytelling to Promote Organizational Resilience*.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, Minor, and Brashen, *Spiritual Leadership*.

*reflection becomes a furnace for coherence and conviction.*<sup>8</sup> It is through this rhythm that leaders discern, communities renew, and the future becomes habitable.

### **Pilgrimage of the soul: cultivating inner resilience**

No renewal is sustainable without inner renewal. The most enduring leadership flows from cultivated souls. In seasons of turbulence, *grounded leaders become non-anxious presences*. They do not react from fear. They anchor institutions through storms of transition with stillness and clarity.<sup>9</sup> Neuroscience affirms what ancient spirituality has long known. *Consistent practices of silence, prayer and embodied awareness* foster emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, and neural integration.<sup>10</sup> Methodist spirituality, shaped through the Rule of Life, Class Meetings, and prayer bands, offers time-tested frameworks for soul formation. These are not relics. They are rhythms of resilience.

*Inner resilience is not stoicism*. It is the fruit of grace. Leaders who nurture inner disciplines create space for God to rewire their instincts. They lead not by charisma, but by depth. They radiate peace, not performance. They embody *spiritual authority rooted in surrender*. In the MCSA context, resilience also means facing burnout, financial anxiety, and community trauma with honesty and hope. It means *reclaiming Class Meetings as soul circles*—spaces of mutual holding, healing, and accountability.<sup>11</sup>

To lead from the soul, leaders must practise emotional regulation, engage in theological reflection, develop spiritual routines, cultivate inner stillness and resist the cult of busyness.<sup>12</sup> These are not optional extras. They are the scaffolding of sustainable leadership.

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel, *A Spiritual Rhythm That Could Give Your Leadership Reflection and Insight*.

<sup>9</sup> Ruderman, Clerkin, and Fernandez, *Resilience That Works*.

<sup>10</sup> Siegel, *The Mindful Therapist*.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson-Guffin, "Spiritual Resilience: My Sister's Keeper Table Talk."

<sup>12</sup> Arora and Mandal, "Spirituality and Happiness: A Neuroscientific Perspective."

## **Pilgrimage of shared grace: building covenantal communities**

Leadership is not a solo journey but a communal rhythm. The early Methodist movement flourished through shared grace, mutual accountability and practical divinity. Today's renewal must restore trust and rebuild community. African values of *Ubuntu* remind us that leadership is relational and interdependent. Covenant is not control but communion. When churches become spaces of psychological safety, collective discernment and mutual care, innovation flourishes.<sup>13</sup>

Facilitative leadership models—especially those drawing from participatory governance and communal discernment—emphasise presence over position, listening over command. They create scaffolding for others to lead. Theologically, this means recovering the Body of Christ as a living ecology of gifts, where every voice matters. It also means reimagining meetings as liturgies of discernment, not performances of hierarchy.

Research affirms that high-trust environments correlate with mission clarity, adaptive capacity and institutional health. Leaders who build trust do so by telling the truth, holding tensions, sharing power, and embodying grace.

## **Pilgrimage of prophetic urgency: dreaming boldly**

Prophetic leaders do not manage decline. They summon fire. They resist despair and dare to imagine otherwise. Their imagination is not idealism but resistance, a holy refusal to normalise injustice or numb the soul. Brueggemann calls this the prophetic task: to energise communities with alternative vision and dismantle the royal consciousness that deadens desire.<sup>14</sup> Boesak<sup>15</sup> insists that true hope is revolutionary, born not in ease but struggle—a refusal to resign, and a decision to live as if liberation is already unfolding. The prophets of Israel and the apostles of Acts were

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<sup>13</sup> Edmondson, “*The Fearless Organization*”

<sup>14</sup> Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*.

<sup>15</sup> Boesak, *Dare We Speak of Hope?*, 51–53.

dreamers of divine disruption. They named injustice, invoked courage and embodied a future not yet seen.

To lead with such fire, leaders cultivate habits that stir imagination and compel action. They engage in theological reflection, artistic encounter, embodied witness, and bold experimentation. They lead with clarity, trust, and symbolic power. Buckingham<sup>16</sup> notes that transformational leaders obsess over clarity and unleash strength through emotional resonance. Senge<sup>17</sup> affirms the power of symbols and stories to reframe crisis as creative opportunity. Kouzes and Posner<sup>18</sup> call for challenge and shared values as the crucible of credibility. Kotter<sup>19</sup> sees urgency and vision as the fuel of enduring change. And Boesak reframes urgency itself as *Kairos*, a decisive moment when the church must risk everything for justice. These leaders do not wait. They walk into the fire and call others to follow.

### **Pilgrimage of Spirit, fire and mission: energising movement**

Missional leadership begins with spiritual agility. Leaders develop habits of silence, theological imagination, and prayerful attentiveness that attune them to the movement of the Spirit. This habit equips them to lead through ambiguity without becoming reactive or rigid. Acts 2 reveals that the Spirit births mission through disruption, not order. Roxburgh<sup>20</sup> describes this posture as one of spiritual receptivity, where leaders relinquish control and open themselves to divine creativity. Through practices such as contemplative prayer and guided reflection, leaders allow space for imagination to be stirred, vision to be reformed, and presence to deepen.

Leaders develop spiritual agility, adaptive practices, and apostolic formation. Peer dialogue and reflective feedback foster continuous

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<sup>16</sup> Buckingham, *Love and Work*.

<sup>17</sup> Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*.

<sup>18</sup> Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*.

<sup>19</sup> Kotter, *Leading Change*.

<sup>20</sup> Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*.

learning in communities. Heifetz and Linsky<sup>21</sup> highlight the need to remain steady amid change while encouraging growth, and McKinsey<sup>22</sup> notes resilient organisations embed learning and reward innovative action. The Wesleyan tradition stresses vocational clarity, disciplined prayer and experimentation. Early Methodist leaders succeeded through both doctrine and mission-driven habits. Modern leaders must cultivate inner formation to lead with conviction, creativity and compassion.

### **The unfinished pilgrimage: embracing uncertainty**

The journey of leadership is unfinished. It unfolds in tension, in waiting, and in the vulnerability of risk. Leaders who flourish amid uncertainty do not seek control. They cultivate courage. Liminality is not endured but embraced as sacred space. Theology names this space through eschatological hope. We lead not by certainty but by promise. The Kingdom is both already and not yet. Leaders who are at home in ambiguity avoid reactivity and develop reflexivity. Their strength lies not in answers but in faithful presence.

Research on adaptive leadership identifies five practices that enhance effectiveness in uncertain conditions: holding steady, maintaining focus, engaging multiple perspectives, learning in action, and practicing humility.<sup>23</sup> In Southern Africa, where political volatility, economic uncertainty and ecological fragility mark daily life, the church must become a crucible of resilient hope. It must shape leaders who steward sacred dialogue, where diverse voices are welcomed and silence is honoured as an act of reverence.

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*Uncertainty is not the enemy. It is the womb of  
revelation. God meets leaders in wildernesses.  
Wisdom comes to those who listen. The future belongs  
to those who wait with fire.*

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<sup>21</sup> Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*.

<sup>22</sup> McKinsey & Company, "The State of Organizations 2023."

<sup>23</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*.

## Pilgrimage practices: principles, habits and questions for renewal

Leadership in the Church is a sacred journey. It is a return to what is holy, a renewal of vision, and a response to the Spirit's call. In seasons of complexity and hope, we are invited to live with moral clarity, spiritual depth and communal courage.

This is not a manual but a map. A prayerful framework shaped by six pilgrimage themes, distilled into five principles and five practices. Rooted in African and Methodist wisdom, these are invitations to discernment and action.

This journey must be embodied. In our decisions, our prayers and the communities we build that remember, resist, reimagine and renew. Let the table be your mirror and compass. Where are you grounded. Where are you being called to grow, to heal or to return.

## Pilgrimage leadership: principles and habits

Theme	Leadership principles	Habits / practices
1. The pilgrimage we forgot	Anchor identity in sacred memory	Tell stories from church & community, history
<i>Reclaiming sacred memory &amp; context</i>	Cultivate deep contextual awareness	Organise local memory walks or storytelling events
	Honour past struggles & generational legacies	Mark anniversaries & shared rituals
	Reflect on God's faithfulness over time	Use devotionals that tie to community milestones
	Embed remembrance into leadership rhythms	Include testimonies in all meetings

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Leadership principles</b>	<b>Habits / practices</b>
2. Pilgrimage of the soul	Nurture spiritual & emotional depth	Keep daily prayer & journaling practice
Soul of persons, church, society	Embrace vulnerability with strength	Share personal highs/lows in safe spaces
	Lead from reflective, embodied presence	Schedule quiet retreats
	Recognise stress and respond with grace	Build peer support circles
	Ground decisions in prayerful discernment	Begin meetings with silence & prayer
3. Pilgrimage of shared grace	Build trust and mutual accountability	Hold relational covenant circles
<i>Covenantal communities &amp; social ties</i>	Model honest, transparent leadership	Use small groups to deepen bonds
	Shape culture with symbols & rituals of unity	Celebrate milestones together
	Share power, raise new leaders	Rotate roles, mentor emerging leaders
	Centre communities in hospitality & belonging	Host open tables, inclusive meals
4. Pilgrimage of prophetic urgency	Speak truth with courage & clarity	Facilitate tough conversations with love

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Leadership principles</b>	<b>Habits / practices</b>
<i>Imagination, critique &amp; justice</i>	Invite bold Spirit-led dreaming	Run “dream sessions” with all ages
	Challenge injustice with hope	Align budgets to just causes
	Make room for playful imagination & creative risk	Encourage art, music, spoken word
	Balance critique with building new possibilities	Start pilot justice projects
5. Pilgrimage of Spirit, fire & mission	Move with urgency guided by discernment	Pray over new initiatives before acting
<i>Mobilising for mission &amp; witness</i>	Activate everyone’s gifts	Map gifts, invite participation
	Build a flexible, learning culture	Review & adapt regularly
	Encourage small experiments	Pilot quick outreach ideas
	Commission & bless others openly	Hold sending prayers in worship
6. The unfinished pilgrimage	Hold uncertainty with grace & hope	Journal personal learnings & share insights

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Leadership principles</b>	<b>Habits / practices</b>
<i>Leading through liminality</i>	Stay adaptable & willing to improvise	Try new methods on a small scale
	Trust God's timing amid change	Reflect scripturally on patience
	Lead with humility & openness to correction	Invite feedback from all levels
	Normalise learning from failure	Share stories of "fails" & lessons learned

## Group reflection questions

A journey of change begins when we ask powerful questions. These are not questions that confirm what we already know. They are the ones that disrupt comfort and awaken courage. When we listen with care to lived experience and remain open to mystery, questions become sacred ground. They reveal. They invite. They spark something new. They begin a revolution. They awaken a journey. They kindle renewal.



The following questions are offered not to bring closure but to open the path.

1. The pilgrimage we forgot
  - a. What sacred stories or struggles must we remember to shape the future with clarity and faith?
  - b. How can we cultivate practices of remembrance that renew identity and mission?
2. Pilgrimage of the soul
  - a. What habits can root our leadership in spiritual depth rather than performance?
  - b. Where do we need healing or rest to lead with greater compassion and courage?

3. Pilgrimage of shared grace
  - a. What builds deep trust and shared accountability in our communities?
  - b. How can we become spaces of belonging that honour difference and mutual care?
4. Pilgrimage of prophetic imagination
  - a. What bold vision are we afraid to name or follow?
  - b. How might creativity and art open new space for courageous discernment?
5. Pilgrimage of Spirit, fire and mission
  - a. Where is the Spirit stirring movement and momentum in our midst?
  - b. What is one courageous act we are called to take in alignment with our mission?
6. The unfinished pilgrimage
  - a. How do we lead with faithfulness when the path is uncertain?
  - b. What might God be asking us to release so we can step into what is yet to come?

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## Chapter 9

# The Mission Congress as holy conferencing

*Rev. Michel W Hansrod*

As an African people, the concept or idea of conferring or conferencing has been an integral part of life in dealing with issues, business or matters that face communities. It would normally be the *Induna* (Chief) who would call together the community. In this gathering the people would assist the *Induna* through conversations to make decisions for the good of the community, and such gathering is regarded as a deeply spiritual space, and the decisions made would belong to the people.

From its earliest beginnings the Church has held councils/conferences — important gatherings which helped shape the Church to reach consensus, restore peace and develop a unified Christian faith and Church. The first such council is known as the Jerusalem Council, detailed in Acts 15, which is widely recognised and accepted as foundational for the early Church. Amongst dealing with other significant doctrinal matters, such as whether the Gentile converts should be baptised and follow Mosaic Law, it also considered the church's process of discerning doctrine and resolving disputes. The Jerusalem Council is the only council mentioned in scripture. History teaches us that there were seven ecumenical councils held between 325 CE, known as the first Council of Nicaea, through to the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 CE. Each of these, over the centuries, sought to guide the Church universal on theological issues, matters of dispute and seeking to maintain the unity of the Church. Significantly, we hold our Mission Congress in the same year as the Church celebrates the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nicaea Council. 20 May 2025 was the anniversary of the first Nicaean Council.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, was deeply influenced by the Puritans and their beliefs, not least the fact that his parents, Samuel and Susanna, both came from a Puritan background. He was most profoundly influenced by the Puritans in understanding practical Christian living, worship and spiritual disciplines. Wesley adopted their emphasis on holiness as well as living a disciplined life, emphasising the importance of experiencing God's grace, which became key features of the Wesleyan Holiness movement.

Amongst the spiritual disciplines of the Puritans was the *practice of conference*. For the Puritans it was important that followers of Jesus should work on the state of their hearts through various spiritual disciplines. A major tool against backsliding was to speak to one another about the things of God as the disciples did in Luke 24:34 where they comforted one another through the pain of the loss of their leader, and experienced their hearts rekindled. John Bunyan a non-conformist preacher of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and author of the seminal *Pilgrim's Progress*, attributes his conversion and growth as a disciple to a "holy conference" between a group of women he stumbled upon talking about the work of God on their hearts, their sinfulness, the temptations they were facing, need for Christ and how they were refreshed by words of scripture.

There is no doubt that the spiritual discipline of the Puritans served foundational in Wesley's own understanding of *Christian conferencing*. From a cursory reading of Wesley's writings, it is clear that the term *holy conferencing*, widely used in Methodism, was not directly used by him. Instead, Wesley spoke of *Christian conferencing*.

It is important to understand how Wesley used the term as a general concept and how it functioned as a practice. It is noteworthy to recognise that when using the term, he referred to how Christ-followers ought to speak to one another, and located this practice within his understanding of social holiness or communal formation. This was the method of Methodism. It is in the *Large Minutes* (John Wesley's compendium of the published and unpublished Minutes of Conference which became known as *Large Minutes*), that the concept of holy conferencing is listed as one of the five instituted means of grace; the other being prayer, searching the scriptures, the Lord's Supper and fasting. Whilst never clearly defining holy conferencing as such, instead he lists a number of questions such as

Are we convinced how important and how difficult it is to order our conversation right? Is it always in grace? Meet to minister grace to the hearers? This is typical of Wesley's way of conferencing.

It is further noteworthy that in his sermon number 8, *The First Fruits of the Spirit*, Wesley states that “*they who walk in the Spirit are also led by him into all holiness of conversation*” (Wesley, 2013).

It is clear that when Wesley talked about holy conferencing as an instituted means of grace (meaning a privileged position because it was instituted by Christ in scripture), he placed supreme value on this concept in Christian living especially in regard to the communal formation of the disciples through the bands and class meetings, as well as in gatherings he held with his local preachers, referred to as *conferences*.

Immediately following Wesley's list of instituted means of grace he lists the *prudential means of grace*. Here, he describes amongst others, the class meeting. Importantly, Wesley instructed that all these gathering should be started and ended with prayer and should be filled with holiness of conversation as required in holiness of life. Kevin Watson in a blog entitled *Holy Conferencing: What did John Wesley mean?* comments that in understanding Wesley's sermon, “*First Fruits of the Spirit*”, that holy conversation is the result of being led by the Holy Spirit, which he asserts that we bring with us to difficult conversations, it is something God does for us and in us. (Watson, 2013).

For centuries Methodism has used this means of grace like the early church, to gather its people, whether in small groups such as the class meetings, local church councils, conventions and conferences. It is a space that we are called to so that we watch over one another in love, connect with others, seek truth, relate to one another and discern God's direction for us and the Church.

The space becomes sacred. Bishop Sally Dyck's resource on Holy Conferencing emphasises that “Holy Conferencing is what we call the spirit and principles that guide us to be caring in our conversations – that is what makes them Holy... this is based on the premise that how we talk to and about each other is as important as the decisions we make together... it calls forth a deep spiritual maturity and helps us to relate to and even love one another in spite of our differences.” (Dyck, 2012).

We once again gather as the people called Methodist in Southern Africa, the African spiritual heirs of John Wesley. We gather, deeply rooted in our African and Wesleyan Spiritual foundations as called together by God through our church leaders to an *Indaba* for guided holy conversations, discernment and seeking God's direction for our beloved church.

With over two hundred years of rich history of holy conversations, we have gathered in 134 autonomous Conference gatherings, including the 1958 Conference held in Pietermaritzburg which formulated our confession to be a *one and undivided Church*, the renewal movement during the 1960's into the 1970's, the Obedience '81 Conference, the Centenary Conference in 1982, the Journey to the New Land Convocation in 1993, the First Mission Congress in 2004 and second in 2016. In each these, the Church was guided by holy conversations held even amidst divergence of views and understanding of doctrines, in developing our mission and vision, our missional imperatives, structural changes and the general missional direction of the Church.

Learning from our rich heritage we should, in preparation for, during and after our Pilgrimage of Renewal gathering, recognise that what we are doing is an instituted means of grace. We should:

1. Recognise that it is God who is inviting us to gather through our leaders.
2. Seal it in prayer both in preparation, during and after the gathering. The centrality of prayer cannot be over-emphasised and should guide every conversation and decision to be made.
3. Be sensitive and guided by the Holy Spirit. For Wesley holy conversations was the result of being led by the Holy Spirit. It was, he intimated, something we bring with us to difficult conversations; it is something God does for us and in us.
4. Be open to recognise the image of God in all fellow-pilgrims as well affirm the isiZulu greeting, *Sawubona* being a greeting of "I see you" so that we offer respect to one another.
5. Be open to listen deeply and listen before speaking, to understand the views of others.
6. Ensure that in our conversations we talk about issues and do not address people defamatorily.

7. Recognise that we may not always agree, but as Wesley advocated, we can agree to disagree as he advises in his 34<sup>th</sup> sermon, *A Catholic Spirit*, “Give me your hand” with various variations which include “If your heart is where my heart is, give me your hand”. (Wesley, 2013).

It is important that as we look forward to bringing into one space all the holy conversations we have held in our small groups, Societies, Circuits, organisations and Synods, to recognise that it is a faith exercise, a place of growing each other and to challenge each other spiritually and relationally and in the process of holy conferencing can discern God’s call to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in this the 21<sup>st</sup> century and for the next decade and more.

### Group reflection questions

1. Wesley describes the means of grace being holy conferencing, prayer, searching the scriptures, the Lord’s Supper and fasting. Which of these means of grace have you found most valuable to you, and which do you need to give more attention?
2. Can you think of a gathering or a workshop or conference you attended, that you might describe as holy conferencing? What was it about the gathering that made you feel that it was a means of grace to you and others?
3. This chapter, above, gives seven points to ponder on and activate as we prepare for the Pilgrimage of Renewal Congress. Which of these stir you to deeper thought and action? Discuss.



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## Chapter 10

# Children and youth as pilgrims

*Rev. Phezile Koekoe*

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa affirms that children and youth, through baptism, are affirmed and marked into God's family, the Church (MCSA Laws and Discipline 12<sup>th</sup> Edition 1.11). Though their membership is confirmed at a time that they can answer for themselves, they are an integral and unquestionable part of the Body of Christ and full participants, for example, in the sacrament of Holy Communion (MCSA Laws and Discipline 12<sup>th</sup> Edition 1.33-34). Their presence in the Pilgrimage of Renewal is not symbolic or marginal—they are fellow-travellers and bearers of promise.

Children and youth bring unique insights to the spiritual disciplines of the Pilgrimage.

When Pope Benedict XVI visited the tomb of St. James in Santiago de Compostela, Spain in 2010, he said, *To go on pilgrimage is not simply to visit a place to admire its treasures of nature, art or history. To go on pilgrimage really means to step out of ourselves in order to encounter God where he [God] has revealed himself [Godself], where his [God's] grace has shone with particular splendour and produced rich fruits of conversion and holiness among those who believe. In Christian pilgrimages, such as those to Santiago de Compostela in Spain or Lourdes in France, participants not only embark on a physical journey but also enter into a spiritual communion with fellow believers. Each step taken along these routes becomes a shared act of devotion, weaving together personal narratives into a collective tapestry of faith.*<sup>1</sup>

The ultimate goal of every pilgrimage, is to lead all its pilgrims to a transformational experience that renews pilgrims' relationship with God,

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<sup>1</sup> (L'Osservatore Romano: Holy See News Paper. Weekly Edition in English 10 November 2010, page 4)

pilgrims' relationship with one another and pilgrims' relationship with the world around them.

Biblical narratives always portray pilgrimages as all-encompassing, all-welcoming, all-inclusive experiences for the communities who were embarking on a pilgrimage. Both adults and children, irrespective of gender, would form part of the pilgrimage. No one would be left behind in a community that is embarking in a pilgrimage. "The Israelites journeyed from Ramesses to Sukkoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children".<sup>2</sup>

It is critical for the MCSA to ensure that all her members are part of the Pilgrimage of Renewal, both adults and children, irrespective of gender, people with sexual orientation that is non-heterosexual, including gays and lesbians, bisexual and asexual people, liberal and conservative people. All voices, all opinions, all ideas matter and are valuable in this pilgrimage. No one must be marginalised or excluded because of their age, gender, sexual orientation and social philosophy.

All pilgrims matter, especially children and youth. As this Pilgrimage seeks to revitalise the present and future missional approaches that will bring about transformation in the life of the church, it is the current generation of children and youth that will be affected most by the outcomes of this Pilgrimage. It is therefore imperative for their voices to be intensified in this process. This Pilgrimage of Renewal of the MCSA must be intentional about actioning the 2004 MCSA Mission Charter declaration, *We resolve to take an intentional and sustained action: to become a more youth and child-centred church.*<sup>3</sup>

## **Jesus: a model for an intergenerational approach to pilgrimage**

Children and youth ministry finds its genesis and inspiration from the life, teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus' ministry becomes a model for us as we engage in children and youth ministry. If we are to be true and faithful to our call to ministry, we ought to emulate Christ 's ministry which was holistic in its nature, form and approach. We find throughout the gospels that Jesus loved

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 12:37 (NIV)

<sup>3</sup> *Charter of the Mission Congress of The MCSA*. Adopted in Mthatha in November 2004

children and youth, he valued spending time with them, reaching out to them, embracing them and he embraced their sense of worth in the society.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus was always found among those who were least, rejected and condemned in society. He was always with those who were on the margins and periphery of society, those who were always excluded and rejected by societal standards and norms. So, children and youth were always excluded in the society, but Jesus' ministry brought a paradigm shift that was all- embracing and all-welcoming. Jesus touched the untouchables, reached out to the unreachable and embraced the outcasts.<sup>5</sup>

*Then the people brought little children to Jesus, for him to place hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."*<sup>6</sup>

In the busyness of Jesus, he created time to be with children and youth, he always enabled space to interact with children and youth. His ministry was child- and youth-centered. Children and youth ministry wasn't, therefore, a secondary ministry or a distraction from his earthly ministry; it was his ministry, one he treasured and gave his full attention. Jesus prioritised children and youth in his ministry, he gave them his full attention.

*When Jesus had again crossed over by the boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and alive." Jesus went with him.*<sup>7</sup>

Jesus supported the holistic growth and development of children and youth, he was very compassionate with children, he was empathetic towards children, he always sought to realise justice for children and youth in all situations.

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<sup>4</sup> Nel, M. (2004) *Youth Ministry: An Inclusive Missional Approach*. p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> Nel, M. (2004). *Youth Ministry: An Inclusive Missional Approach*. 65

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 19:13-14 (NIV)

<sup>7</sup> Mark 5:21-23 (NIV)

## **Pilgrimage as an intentional moment for enabling transformative approaches to faith formation and development of children, youth and young adults**

American philosopher Dallas Willard says, *Spiritual formation for the Christian basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.* In other words, spiritual formation majors on the processes and practices that enable people to become more Christlike. To this end, the prevailing spirit of the emerging spiritual formation movement is one of optimism and encouragement, offering a promising path for the future of children's ministry.<sup>8</sup>

David Bosch reminds us that for us to be able to become an effective missional witness, we need first to embody missional living, which is striving towards embracing of the posture, thinking, behaviours and practices of Jesus Christ in our daily life experiences. This is a radical approach to life because it calls for a person to embody unconditional and inclusive love for all people, and to pursue for justice at all times and in all circumstances.<sup>9</sup>

In today's fast-paced world, traditional methods of faith formation often fall short of engaging young minds and hearts. Most of our clergy, Local Preachers, Children's Ministry Practitioners and all those who are involved in the process of faith formation and development of children and youth are finding it challenging to connect with the younger generation. It's clear that we need innovative approaches to make faith formation more relevant and impactful. Faith formation is essential for nurturing a deep and lasting connection with one's spiritual beliefs. Yet, the conventional methods may not resonate with the current generation. The need for change is pressing, as the spiritual landscape evolves and the expectations of children, teens and youth continue to shift.

The Mission Congress must be intentional about embracing new strategies, about creating dynamic learning environments that captivate and inspire children and youth. It's time to rethink how we approach faith formation, using creativity and modern tools to make it a transformative journey for all. In today's fast-paced

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<sup>8</sup> Willard, D. *Renovation of the heart: Putting on the Character of Christ.* p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Kritzinger, J.N.J. , Saayman W. & Bosch, D.J.: *Prophetic Integrity, Cruciform Praxis.* p. 189.

world, it's vital to rethink how we engage in faith formation and development of children and youth. Traditional methods alone might not capture the hearts and minds of our children and youth. This Mission Congress must ask a question, what can we do to make this journey more exciting and meaningful?

### Group reflection questions

1. What are the traditional models of faith formation and development, that we are using to as Methodist people?
2. What are some of the reasons we are not open to new transformative approaches to worship and discipleship?
3. How have these traditional approaches evolved?
4. What new approaches can we employ that are transformative for faith formation and development of children and youth as the MCSA?



## Pilgrimage must advance human and economic empowerment activities for sustainable development of children and youth

Human and economic empowerment is a pathway to poverty alleviation and sustainable economic development and a critical component for the sustainable development of children and youth. Human and economic empowerment, in essence, is the process through which people gain access to resources, opportunities and skills necessary to actively participate in and contribute to the economy of society. In the context of our Connexion, this empowerment has the potential to alleviate poverty, reduce inequality, and foster sustainable economic development.<sup>10</sup>

All the member countries of our Connexion's youth comprise a significant portion of the population. With high levels of unemployment and poverty, particularly among young people, empowering this demographic economically is vital for countries' socio-economic transformation.

Southern Africa faces one of the highest youth unemployment rates globally, with the average of over 50% of the youth either unemployed or not engaged in formal

<sup>10</sup> Lutatinisibwa. K. *The Role of African Youth in Socio-Economic and Political Transformation*. P. 78.

education or training. This situation not only exacerbates poverty but also limits the prospects for social mobility and economic growth. Unemployment is particularly high among black Southern African youth, who often face systemic barriers to employment, including inadequate access to quality education and skills development opportunities. Furthermore, the economy's slow growth and the lingering impacts of *apartheid* policies have left many young people trapped in poverty.<sup>11</sup>

Without meaningful economic opportunities, young people are at risk of remaining marginalised, contributing to a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. Human and economic empowerment is thus essential for addressing these challenges. Empowering young people economically enables them to break free from poverty and become active participants in their country's economy, driving innovation and contributing to national development. Youth, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, often face multiple barriers to employment, including a lack of access to education, social networks and capital. Economic empowerment strategies that provide youth with the necessary skills, mentorship and financial support can significantly enhance their ability to secure employment or start their own businesses. This Mission Congress must be intentional about developing strategies that will make a meaningful contribution in confronting, dismantling and responding to the scourge of poverty and unemployment, gender-based violence and femicide and drug and substance abuse, as these are contributing factors to the continuing decreasing social and economic cohesion in our communities.

### Group reflection questions

1. What are the current socio-economic challenges facing our young people in the Church and society?
2. Do we have a role to play in alleviating those challenges as the Church. If we have a role, what role can we play?
3. What are some of the measurable and attainable interventions that can be employed for realisation of human and economic development?



<sup>11</sup> De Lannoy. A. Youth unemployment and the search for meaningful pathways to employment

## Conclusion

The Pilgrimage of Renewal in MCSA must be intentional about building a transformative intergenerational church, which involves embracing diversity, fostering inclusion and creating opportunities for different age groups for worship, discipleship, leadership, missional engagement. By so doing we will experience holistic transformation and growth as the church. By fostering relationships across generations, the church can become a stronger, more vibrant community that reflects the wholeness of the body of Christ. As the apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12, each of us is an essential part of the church, which collectively forms the body of Christ. The church, as the body of Christ, highlights the importance of diversity within unity, where each member's unique gifts and perspectives as well as the contribution of each generation can enrich the church community.

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## Chapter 11

# Psalms of Ascent singing on the way

*Rev. Dr Matshedesho Molale*

Psalms 120 to 134, traditionally known as the Songs of Ascent, form a distinctive liturgical and spiritual collection within the Hebrew Psalter. These fifteen psalms were likely recited or sung by Israelite pilgrims as they journeyed to Jerusalem for the three major annual feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16). More than mere travel songs, they articulate a theology of pilgrimage—a spiritual journey characterised by longing, struggle, community, anticipation and ultimate communion with God. This *worship on the way* narrative reflects a sacred rhythm, intertwining the physical ascent to Jerusalem with the inner ascent of the soul toward God.

### **Worship begins in dislocation**

The collection starts with dislocation and lament. Psalm 120 depicts the worshipper in Meshech and Kedar—distant, hostile lands that symbolise exile and moral dissonance. This sense of alienation becomes the beginning of worship: “I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me” (Psalm 120:1, New International Version). Worship, therefore, arises not from comfort but from disruption, and the ache for peace amid a world of deceit and conflict (cf. Brueggemann, 1984).

This echoes the spiritual dislocation often experienced in modern Christian life. Just as the pilgrim laments falsehood and conflict, so does the Church today cry out amidst injustice and confusion. The path towards spiritual wholeness begins when one recognises the pain of separation from God and seeks divine reorientation.

### **Invoking the divine presence**

The second step of the ascent is invoking God’s presence. Psalm 121 echoes with the confidence of the traveller looking to the hills, questioning, “Where does

my help come from?” The answer resounds: “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:2 NIV). This divine assurance empowers the worshipper to progress toward communion.

Setswana Hymn 13 echoes this plea and response in indigenous theological terms: *Modimo wa Boikanyo, Re ikanya mo go Wena, O gorigele borraetsho mo dinageng tsa lenyora* (Setswana Hymns, 2024). It affirms that the presence of God must accompany every spiritual journey.

Psalm 122 celebrates the joy of entering Jerusalem, the communal centre of worship. “Let us go to the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122:1 NIV) is a cry of delight, not just in location but in spiritual alignment with God’s people.

## **Worship in the tension of the journey**

The middle section (Psalm 123–126) reflects the tension of worship in the “already-but-not-yet” reality. Psalm 123 appeals for divine mercy amid scorn, while Psalm 124 recalls past deliverance. Psalm 125 affirms trust in God’s enduring protection, and Psalm 126 considers restoration, blending memory and hope: “Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy” (Psalm 126:5).

These psalms embody the reality of worship amid struggle. Worship is not escapism but resistance; it sustains hope by anchoring believers in memory and anticipation. Brueggemann (1984) describes this as “the liturgy of the in-between”—a space where God is not always immediately visible, yet the community of faith continues to trust, remember and anticipate.

This is particularly relevant to the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) as it faces ecclesial transformation and healing in post-*apartheid* South Africa. As Molale (2018, p.181) notes, “all people are invited on a journey to develop a meaningful relationship with Christ.” This journey requires both realism and hope, lament and anticipation.

## **Daily life as sacred journey**

Psalms 127–129 shift the focus to everyday life, grounding worship in ordinary human effort. Psalm 127 teaches that without God’s presence, all human labour is in vain: “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain” (Ps. 127:1

NIV). Psalm 128 celebrates the blessings of family and fruitful labour, showing how God's presence sanctifies the mundane. Psalm 129 remembers perseverance in affliction, encouraging faithfulness despite opposition.

This suggests that worship is not limited to formal rituals. Rather, daily toil, family life and community resilience become acts of sacred participation in God's mission. African theology affirms this integration of life and spirituality. *Ubuntu*—the interconnectedness of all life—grounds worship in the sanctuary and the soil of shared human experience (Battle, 2009).

### **Confession, covenant and trust**

Psalms 130–132 delve into confession, covenantal remembrance, and childlike trust. Psalm 130's cry "Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord" is a classic penitential psalm, emphasising worship as repentance and hope. Psalm 131 offers a posture of humility and surrender: "I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother" (v. 2 NIV). Psalm 132 recalls God's covenant with David, rooting worship in divine faithfulness and historical memory.

These psalms invite the worshipper into deeper intimacy with God through self-surrender and remembrance. Worship becomes a transformative act, both confession and covenant renewal.

### **Culmination in community and blessing**

The final two Psalms, 133 and 134, celebrate communal unity and perpetual praise. Psalm 133 extols brotherly (familial) unity as sacred and life-giving, "like precious oil poured on the head," a metaphor rich with priestly and communal symbolism. Psalm 134, the final ascent, is a benediction and call to continuous worship in the sanctuary: "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord" (v. 2 NIV).

The journey thus ends not only at the temple but in the unity of God's people. As Moltmann (1993) argues, eschatological worship points toward the final reconciliation of all things in God. The Psalms of Ascent conclude with the image of a gathered, praising community, unified by divine grace.

## **Worship as corporate and missional renewal**

Corporate worship becomes central to ecclesial renewal. Molale (2018) asserts that corporate worship in the MCSA serves as a redemptive response to historical wounds. It is through collective song and prayer that the church reimagines its identity and mission. According to Letsosa (2005, p.1), worship connects Christians on earth with the saints in heaven—a divine encounter that transcends time and place.

The Mission Congress of the MCSA must recognise this communal, missional dimension. It is not merely a conference but a spiritual pilgrimage—a return to the ecclesiology rooted in Psalms 120–134. Here, the mission is not an event but a lifestyle of communal worship, healing and transformation. As Molale (2018, p.183) affirms, *Missio Dei* is not a church programme but God’s mission, which the church participates in as a vessel.

## **Lessons from colonial worship and the need for contextual theology**

A critical reflection on church history reveals how worship was manipulated under colonial and *apartheid* ideologies. As Marumo (2018, p. 7) observes, “The elements of this epistemological foundation were foreign to the local congregation... because the missionaries did not bother to bring the locals on board.” Worship was often disconnected from African worldviews and community life.

Van Huffel (2023a, p.101, in Marumo, 2019) reinforces this by highlighting how *apartheid*’s racial theology fostered chromatic segregation in worship: “One can worship God in their own space,” a notion that fractured the unity of the church. The Mission Congress must, therefore, become a space of healing and contextual renewal, restoring worship as communal, inclusive and grounded in African identity.

African philosophy, particularly the idea of *ubuntu*, offers a path forward. Worship is not individualistic but communal — “I am because we are.” The Psalms of Ascent illustrate this beautifully: the journey to Jerusalem is never solitary. It is undertaken in solidarity, reflecting the collective spiritual yearning of a covenant people.

## Recovering song and prayer as spiritual resources

In reimagining worship, the church must reclaim song and prayer as theological tools. As Marumo (2019, p. 13) argues, the *Te Deum* remains relevant in postmodernity. It draws together suffering and joy, history and hope, transcendent majesty and immanent grace. It proclaims, even in a fragmented world, that “Christ did not fail on the cross; He triumphed.”

This affirmation aligns with Psalm 126, which links weeping and joy. Worship must give language to suffering while holding fast to divine promises. In doing so, it becomes a source of resilience, healing, and hope essential for both Christians and non-Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Conclusion

The journey outlined in Psalms 120–134 is profoundly missional and communal. It begins in distress and culminates in unity and perpetual praise. For the MCSA, the Mission Congress represents not only an administrative gathering but a spiritual ascent—an opportunity to revisit the foundational role of worship in ecclesiology, healing, and mission.

This pilgrimage, shaped by African philosophical thought and contextual spirituality, reminds us that the journey to God is never walked alone. It is collective, relational and embodied. Worship is not confined to sanctuaries; it is the heartbeat of the pilgrim soul. It is in the cry, the climb, the memory, the labour, the lament, the praise. As the psalmist ascends toward Jerusalem, so must the church ascend toward healing, justice, and reconciliation.

## Group reflection questions

1. Which one of the Psalms of Ascent gives words to where you are at, presently? Give a word or a verse that speaks your heart.
2. Again, looking at the Psalms of Ascent, which portion would you use as a prayer for/of the Church right now?
3. Reflect together on how have the songs of Ascent informed and reform your understanding of God?



4. How has worship in song informed/shaped your journey of faith?
5. Share a hymn or song that has encouraged you on your journey. As a group, you are invited to sing one or more of the songs you spoke about, together.

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## Chapter 12

# Grief and grieving during a pilgrimage

*Rev. Nozipho Mcineka*

Many people find the idea of grief during a pilgrimage troubling. Part of the difficulty lies in how we have come to understand grief and the grieving process. At times, grief is depicted in a negative and doom-filled manner, which is limiting and rigid.<sup>1</sup> Also, grief might only be associated with death as the physical cessation of life. Grief, in essence, is a response to the loss of someone or something treasured. This intricate reality presents a plethora of emotional, spiritual, and psychological tapestries of responses entwined into the fabric of our human experience; experiences that can be crippling with pain, anxiety, confusion, guilt, anger and fear of the unknown. Lewis, in his autobiography *A Grief Observed*, describes grief as a sensation akin to fear.<sup>2</sup> Over the years, having experienced the death of family members, friends, and perhaps other life valuables, I have come to understand grief as a journey of personalised experiences. This journey is nuanced and unique with each experience of loss.

While grief is understood as a personalised experience, there are elements of grief that can be deemed communal and/or shared. Grief can also relate to non-human losses, highlighting its complexity. The terms ‘grief’, ‘mourning’, ‘bereavement’, and ‘sorrow’ are interconnected but have distinct meanings.<sup>3</sup> Sociologists look at grief as a social emotion, emphasising the need for a sociology of grief to

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<sup>1</sup> Boelen, P. A., Van den Bout, J. & Van den Hout, M. A., (2003). The role of negative interpretations of grief reactions in emotional problems after bereavement. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, Volume 34(3–4), pp. 225-238.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, C. S., (2017). *A Grief Observed*. s.l.:e-artnow.

<sup>3</sup> Boelen, P. A., Van den Bout, J. & Van den Hout, M. A., (2003). The role of negative interpretations of grief reactions in emotional problems after bereavement. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, Volume 34(3–4), pp. 225-238.

understand its multifaceted nature and the evolving perceptions surrounding it.<sup>4</sup> While presenting as multifaceted, grief has a history that reflects the past and the reality that grief evolves. Grief, in its nature, is dynamic, it is not a fixed state; it symbolises a winding gorge with diverse landscapes. Kubler-Ross, in the book *On Grief and Grieving*, details five stages of grief as responses to loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These are part of the framework and tools to help frame and identify what we may be feeling.<sup>5</sup> It is not easy to navigate or even identify which stage you are in, due to the heaviness of grief. It can be extremely overwhelming at times. This article presents a brief understanding of grief and grieving during a pilgrimage, a theological perspective of grief on a pilgrimage, reflections on healing reforms and approaches, pastoral and scriptural considerations for the pilgrims, and concludes with a set of questions for group discussions and engagements.

### **Theological perspective of grief on a pilgrimage**

Grief is a journey of understanding, not a destination of hopelessness. As people on an exodus, pilgrimages are seen as transformative experiences. This is when the physical act of travelling to sacred sites mirrors the inner quest for understanding and reconciling with grief. This physical act of travelling takes into consideration the diversity of the community. Embracing grief along a pilgrimage should never appear to exclude certain aspects of the community. This embrace of grief along a pilgrimage has to be relevant. A contextualised response acknowledges that meaning and reality are determined by comprehension, which in turn is shaped by culture, history, contemporary considerations, and concerns of social location.

During a pilgrimage, grief can manifest in different ways, sometimes as an overwhelming sorrow, and at other times as a profound sense of peace and acceptance. This duality can be viewed through theological lenses, where grief is not just an individual experience, but part of a broader narrative of suffering,

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<sup>4</sup> Jacobsen, M. H. & Petersen, A. (eds.), (2020). Towards a sociology of grief – historical, cultural and social explorations of grief as an emotion. In: *Exploring Grief; Towards a Sociology of Sorrow*. London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 1-19.

<sup>5</sup> Kubler-Ross, E., (2005). *On Grief & Grieving Finding the Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss*. New York: Scribner

hope and redemption found in many spiritual traditions. Matthews speaks of solidarity of silence and presence in grief,<sup>6</sup> while de Gruchy suggests the notion of standing together through grief.<sup>7</sup> We see this in Job 2:13 where his friends sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw his suffering was great.<sup>8</sup> While this passage affirms the silence as one of the appropriate responses to grief, also recognises the value of the presence of others as companions in grief.

The pilgrimage serves as a communal experience, enabling individuals to share their burdens and find support among fellow travellers. This act of companionship symbolises the shared human experience of loss, allowing us to acknowledge it collectively. On this pilgrimage, we must accept losses of lives, voices, relationships, trust, cultural identity, vision, theological emphasis, stewardship, prophetic witness, *ubuntu*, spirituality, economic factors, history and ethical reforms, to name a few. Weeping over such is essential, as we recognise and acknowledge our losses as a community on a pilgrimage, and we mourn collectively.

Lamentation, as an expression of grief, encompasses prayerful utterances of profound sorrow conveyed through spoken words, hymns, and poetry.<sup>9</sup> It serves to articulate the unvoiced, and in so doing, it names traumas, injustices and fears through tears and emotion rather than mere explanation.<sup>10</sup> These include the traumas endured by individuals who suffer abuse and neglect within the church. Deeply rooted issues such as harmful traditional practices, exclusion, poverty, stigmatisation<sup>11</sup>, and patriarchal dominance contribute to fractured relationships, even within religious institutions. The Church, as the body of Christ, remains

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<sup>6</sup> Mathews, J., (2019). Led through grief – Old Testament responses to crisis. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, 5(3), pp. 621-642

<sup>7</sup> de Gruchy, J. W., (2013). *Led Into Mystery: Faith Seeking Answers in Life and Death*. London: SCM Press.

<sup>8</sup> Hendrickson Bibles, (2017). *NRSV Bible with Apocrypha*. Eleventh Edition ed. China: Hendrickson Publishers.

<sup>9</sup> Lane, R. A., (2015). *Imprisoned grief: a theological, spiritual and practical response*. [Online] Available at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

<sup>10</sup> Mathews, J., (2019). Led through grief – Old Testament responses to crisis. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, 5(3), pp. 621- 642

<sup>11</sup> Oduyoye, M. A., (2018). *African Women's Theologies, Spirituality, and Healing: Theological Perspectives from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*. New York: Paulist Press

indivisible and grounded in the unity of the Triune God, serving as a Christian witness to the world.<sup>12</sup> It should be a sanctuary where people of all ages, genders, educational qualifications, cultural experiences, and social status are recognised, embraced, and treated with grace and dignity. The erosion of these qualities within the church brings about profound sorrow, and we must grieve this loss together.

## Reflecting on healing reforms and approaches

Recognising the reality of time feels both interminable and provisional when we struggle with meaning after loss. Lewis likened himself to a halved ship, continuing to move forward despite losing a vital part.<sup>13</sup> It expresses the complex notion of finding balance amidst profound loss, capturing both the weight of grief and the bitterness and disappointment that comes with it.<sup>14</sup>

- **Healing through biblical reflection:** Scripture as a source of healing and wellness for all affected by grief and suffering, presents God revealing a compassionate and hopeful image,<sup>15</sup> made manifest as love for the sorrowful. This love forms the basis of new life, bringing hope and healing to the one who receives it.
- **Healing through narrative and spirituality:** Oduyoye believes that “narrative theology” for healing, assists individuals to embark on a process<sup>16</sup> of healing, as interlocutors of own plight and grief. This offers a nuanced realisation of healing and spiritual wholeness.
- **Grief in worship** is a form of expression of sorrow; Psalms have over time been regarded as an expression of various experiences. These are liturgical hymns seeking justice and relief from a challenging situation. **Turning to God for profound need and profound trust.** Some psalms in the biblical Psalter are **prayers prompted by individual experiences** such as illness or attack

<sup>12</sup> Dyrness, W. A. & Kärkkäinen V.-M., (2003). *Global Dictionary of Theology*. Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, USA.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis, C. S., (2017). *A Grief Observed*. s.l.:e-artnow.

<sup>14</sup> Mathews, J., (2019). Led through grief – Old Testament responses to crisis. *Stellenboch Theological Journal*, 5(3), pp. 621-642

<sup>15</sup> Oduyoye, M. A., (2018). *African Women's Theologies, Spirituality, and Healing: Theological Perspectives from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*. New York: Paulist Press.

<sup>16</sup> Oduyoye, M. A., (2018). *African Women's Theologies, Spirituality, and Healing: Theological Perspectives from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*. New York: Paulist Press.

by enemies, psalms originating at the communal level, especially concerning catastrophes such as famine, drought or threat by political enemies.<sup>17</sup> These represent a form of **a conversation with God** (Psalm 22:1, Psalm 137).

- **Charting the way for collective mourning and healing** requires a communal approach that is inclusive and embracing. **Rituals observed along the journey**, like prayer, meditation, the lighting of candles and the collection of stones (*Isivivane*) provide sacred spaces for processing grief, connecting with the reality of what has been lost and forging ahead.

## Pastoral Considerations

As mentioned above, dealing with grief is not easy, especially if people are on a pilgrimage, because of the dynamic nature of a journey.

- Sharing pastoral approaches and interventions to assist on a journey makes for good *padkos*.
- Embrace and understand grief as journeying along a winding path, with unpredictable turns. This encourages new insights about those on the journey and establishes relationships, showing that painful experiences can yield deeper connections with loved ones and even deeper faith realised (Psalm 34:18, 2 Corinthians 7:10).
- Spiritual guidance as response to grief, offers prayers of comfort and hope, using scripture to interpret pain and also find healing.
- Certain Psalms are useful on such a pilgrimage, as offering relief from unrelenting sorrow (see Psalms 22, 28, 42–43, 51, 77, 142, 44, 74, 79, 80, and 83).
- Offering a listening ear and presence, helps to alleviate fear to face memories that bring both joy and pain as vital pieces of the journey.
- Focus on positive faith-strengthening recollections (Deuteronomy 6:12 & 8:2) as encouragement for the future.
- Facilitation of meaning-making conversations, contemplations on life, death and what lies beyond (2 Corinthians 4:18, Romans 8:28). It is important to note that these are not exhaustive; needs-based approaches may be established.

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<sup>17</sup> Mathews, J., (2019). Led through grief – Old Testament responses to crisis. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, 5(3), pp. 621-642

## Final thoughts

The theology of grief during a pilgrimage invites pilgrims to embrace their pain in conjunction with their faith, modifying the journey into a sacred act of love and remembrance that nourishes the soul and opens the heart to healing. This becomes a journey of hope as we look up to God, the giver of life and new beginnings.

## Group reflection questions



### The role of pilgrimage:

1. In what ways does pilgrimage serve as a transformative experience for individuals experiencing grief?
2. How can the physical journey of a pilgrimage reflect an inner quest for understanding loss?

### Community and grief:

3. What role does community play in the grieving process during a pilgrimage?
4. How does the concept of lamentation function as a communal response to grief?
5. How can we apply the concept of lamentation in our own lives to express unspoken sorrows or injustices?

### Theological perspectives:

6. How does the text frame grief within the context of hope and redemption?
7. What are some cultural or historical aspects of grief that resonate with your understanding of loss, and how do they shape our perspective as a community?
8. What insights does the story of Job provide regarding companionship in grief?

## Navigating Grief:

9. What challenges, if any, do we face when identifying the stages of grief we are experiencing during this pilgrimage?
10. How can we foster an inclusive approach to grieving during a pilgrimage that acknowledges the diversity of community experiences and backgrounds?
11. How do culture and social context influence the understanding of grief, according to the article?
12. What practical steps can we take to support fellow travellers in mourning within our community?

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## Chapter 13

# *Isivivane* building memorial altars with stones

Rev. Mogomotsi Diutlwileng

### **Genesis 12:1–9 & Joshua 4:1–11**

*Each of you choose a stone and lift it up onto your shoulder—one stone for each tribe. The stones will always be a sign to you. Someday, when your children ask you, ‘Why are these stones so important?’ tell them... These stones will serve as a memorial for Israel forever. (Joshua 4:5b–7 The Passion Translation)*

*Then Yahweh appeared before Abram and said, ‘This is the land I will personally deliver to your seed.’ So, Abram erected an altar there to Yahweh, who had appeared before him. (Genesis 12:7 TPT)*

In 2024, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) chose *Isivivane*—a sacred stone memorial—as its guiding symbol. This was no arbitrary choice. It echoed a deep reservoir of meaning found in African spirituality and ancient biblical tradition. As theologians like John S. Mbiti (1991) and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001) remind us, such symbols are not just objects—they are carriers of memory, theology, identity and belonging.

*Isivivane* speaks to the heart of our faith journey, calling us to remember, to ground ourselves, and to reconnect with the divine and with those who have walked before us. Through this chapter, I invite you into a reflection that brings together the African spiritual imagination, archaeological insight, biblical narrative and theological depth. Together, we will explore *Isivivane* not just as a symbol, but as a sacred act of faith, healing and memory.

## The literal meaning of *Isivivane*

In its most basic sense, *Isivivane* is a Zulu term referring to a pile of stones laid at a site of spiritual or cultural significance. These places are often found along ancient paths—near mountains, rivers or places where life-changing events occurred. Each stone placed there tells a story. These are not random stones; they are sacred markers of journeys taken, decisions made, prayers whispered and promises kept.

Take the *Isivivane* at Freedom Park in Pretoria, for instance. It is not just a structure—it is a living tribute to those who gave their lives in the fight for freedom in South Africa. Its design invites silence, reverence and deep reflection. Standing there, one feels the invisible weight of sacrifice and hope.

## African cosmology and *Isivivane*

In African cosmology, stories, rituals, and symbols are the threads that hold together generations. As Mbiti (1991) once said, “Africans are notoriously religious.” Every object, every gesture, every word spoken in ritual has meaning. Oduyoye builds on this by emphasising that African theology lives in the body, in ritual, in story—passed from grandmother to child, from elder to initiate.

*Isivivane* fits right into this sacred rhythm. It is a ritual in stone—each one carrying memory, spirit and lesson. The act of placing a stone is not just symbolic; it is a spiritual transaction. It says, “I was here. I walked this path. I remember.”

These sites are often consecrated through traditional African rituals like *ukuphahla*, *mpha-badimo*, or *mophaso*. Every time people return, they do not just see stones—they hear the stories again, they relive the moments, and they pass on the spirit.

## Symbolic and cultural significance of *Isivivane*

- Collective effort and unity  
Each stone added represents one person’s offering—small or large, all are welcome. No one builds an *Isivivane* alone.
- Remembrance and ancestral reverence  
It honours the ancestors. It whispers gratitude. It pleads for protection, direction and blessing.

- Sacred ground and reflection  
It marks a place where heaven and earth meet—a space to pray, to listen, to breathe, as in Bethel, a place Jacob marked with a stone and declare that it was the gate of heaven (Genesis 28:19)
- Ubuntu and shared responsibility  
It reminds us: “I am because we are.” It holds our shared past, our interconnected present, and our collective hope.

## Contemporary resonance

Today, *Isivivane* is not only a physical structure—it lives in our language, politics, and acts of remembrance.

- Nation-building: We say, *Sonke sifake isivivane sakithi*— “Each of us contributed a stone.”
- Honouring heroes: Memorials use the symbol to celebrate those who sacrificed for freedom.

In all these ways, *Isivivane* continues to hold memory, identity, and spirit together. It is as relevant now as ever.

## Archaeology and the testimony of stones

Memorial stones are not only spiritual—they are historical artifacts too. Across Africa, archaeologists have uncovered rock art, cave inscriptions, and altars that speak to the inner life of ancient people.

David Lewis-Williams (2002), in *The Mind in the Cave*, calls San rock art a “window into the spiritual world.” These are not doodles—they are prayers, stories, encounters with the divine.

Peter Mitchell’s (2005) work confirms this: from cave walls to sacred stones, we find traces of how early Africans understood God, nature and themselves.

These artifacts:

- Preserve history (like the Rosetta Stone did for Egypt),
- Reveal belief systems (rituals, myths, and gods),
- press identity (what mattered, what was feared, what was celebrated),

- Map ancient movement and exchange,
- Offer clues to environment and time.

So, these stones... they speak. And they speak sacredly.

## **Biblical and theological roots**

*Isivivane* is not just African—it is biblical too.

In Joshua 4, after crossing the Jordan River, God tells the Israelites to build a stone altar. Why? So that when their children ask, “Why these stones?” they will remember the God who made a way.

In Genesis 12, Abram builds an altar after God promises him the land. The altar becomes a physical “Amen” to God’s faithfulness.

Both stories remind us that memorial altars are not just about the past—they are anchors for the future. They say, “God was here. And God is still here.”

## **Psycho-emotional power of *Isivivane***

There is something profoundly healing about *Isivivane*.

For many, especially Africans shaped by displacement, oppression and loss, placing a stone becomes a way of reclaiming dignity. It says: “My ancestors mattered. Their strength flows in me. I am not alone.”

It affirms identity. It encourages resilience. It binds the wounds of forgetting.

## **Spiritual and sacramental meaning**

Beyond psychology, *Isivivane* touches the soul. It is sacramental. It is an outward sign of an inward grace.

To “re-member” is not just to recall—it is to put back together what life, trauma, or time has torn apart:

- Reconnecting with stories of faith,
- Reweaving the journey across generations,
- Finding healing and wholeness in sacred memory.

This is what *Isivivane* does—it gathers scattered pieces and makes us whole again. It says: the God of our mothers and fathers is still with us. And we are still walking the path.

The Setswana Methodist Hymn 13, *Modimo wa boikanyo*, captures this beautifully. It praises God’s guidance across generations and begs for the same grace today: “In the same word that led them, lead us.”

That is *re-membling*—bringing the past into the present to shape the future.

## The MCSA Pilgrimage and *Isivivane*

As the MCSA journeys toward Mission Congress 2025, building *Isivivane* altars across the Connexion is more than symbolic. It is a spiritual act of remembering, healing, and integrating.

As Pipa Marschall (2010) reminds us, memorials are not just about loss—they are tools of identity and transformation.

*Isivivane*:

- Celebrates the faith of past Methodists,
- Declares trust in the God who spans generations,
- Inspires renewal and integration today,
- And invokes God’s ongoing presence.

This is our *Isivivane*. And we place our stones in trust, in worship and in hope.

## Group reflection questions

1. What moments from our Methodist journey—stories of faith, struggle, hope or transformation—would you place symbolically on the *Isivivane* altar as we move toward Mission Congress 2025?

*Think of those turning points in our life together that should never be forgotten—moments that shaped us, challenged us, or gave us renewed strength. What memories must we carry with us on this next stretch of the journey?*



2. How does the image of *Isivivane* call us, as a Connexional church, to heal from our wounds, reconnect with our roots, and recommit ourselves to God's mission in Southern Africa today?  
*In what ways does this symbol invite us to pause, reflect, and realign—both spiritually and communally—with the vision of being Christ's hands and feet in our region?*
3. How can memory, identity and spirituality help guide our journey of renewal—and shape the kind of witness we want to offer the world beyond 2025?  
*What stories do we need to remember? What parts of our identity must be reclaimed or reimagined? And how can our spirituality breathe new life into our mission?*
4. As we prepare for Mission Congress 2025, what kinds of spaces—physical or spiritual—can we build that function like *Isivivane*: places of remembrance, unity, and encounter with the holy?  
*Could these be sacred gatherings, worship rituals, or even quiet moments of storytelling and reflection? What would it look like to create spaces where people can lay down their “stones” and feel connected to something larger?*
5. What practical steps—rituals, actions or communal events—can help us embody our shared faith, live out *ubuntu*, and recognise the continuing presence of God in our mission today?  
*Let us think creatively and faithfully: What practices could unite us across Circuits and Districts? What small acts of remembrance or service could ground us in our purpose and send us forward with courage?*

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## Chapter 14

# Pilgrimage beyond the Mission Congress

*Rev. Ralph Afghan*

A Mission Congress is never meant to be a summit reached, but rather a sacred threshold crossed, marking the Church's commitment to a pilgrimage of faith aligned with God's call. Each Congress initiates a new phase in the journey, one that links motion with meaning and provides space for the communal discernment of the gathered people.

This movement draws the Church toward becoming an alternative community, a kingdom-minded people, and a prophetic presence in the world. At the 2016 Congress, as recorded in the Listening Committee's report, we celebrated and remembered; confessed and repented; committed and responded. We rediscovering our prophetic voice redefining our calling to be decisive, determined and intentional. Now, as we approach the Mission Congress 2025, a deeper challenge arises: can we embody what we declare? Will we be faithful stewards of the Spirit's movement after the Congress has ended?

Pilgrimage beyond the Mission Congress is not a linear process. It involves negotiation, compromise, and even loss. The true pilgrimage begins not at the point of assembly, but at the moment of departure into everyday life. This conversation will be explored from the lens of public theology, through an inductive bottom-up approach, drawing insights from the lived experiences of the Church; and focusing on the Church who is called to be a community of incarnational witness, where word and deed cohere.

### **Spiritual formation and institutional transformation**

In the context of the MCSA, spiritual formation is the journey of growing in faith and discipleship. It involves cultivating a deepening relationship with God,

while remaining committed to both spiritual and contextual transformation. This transformation is expressed through the practices known as the ordinances of God: prayer, fasting, reading of scripture, fellowship, and participating in the sacraments.

Theologically, we are reminded that the God of the Gospel is a calling God, who draws both individuals and communities into alignment with God's will. This journey is not about acquiring religious knowledge alone, but it is about experiencing an inner transformation that produces Christ-like character and witness. Such formation invites us to disengage from habits and powers that dehumanise and disrupt communal values.

Discipleship, then, is not a simple church programme; but it requires breaking old cycles and forming new habits that draw us closer to God. True spiritual formation involves more than memorising facts about God; it is about surrendering to the Spirit, allowing our motivations, desires, and affections to be made new. This formation must lead to institutional transformation, the intentional and theological reconfiguration of the Church's missional structures and practices, and to align more faithfully with the Gospel.

What should this transformation look like?

- Dismantling hierarchical and exclusionary leadership models,
- Equipping congregations for holistic mission for spiritual, social, and economic transformation,
- Becoming a vibrant, just, mission-oriented contextual Church,
- Creating spaces of belonging, healing, and justice for all.

Spiritual formation is not optional. It is a spiritual act of obedience to Christ's call to build the Kingdom of God in the here and now.

## Reflective Questions for Spiritual Formation

1. In what ways is my personal spiritual formation, through prayer, scripture, sacraments, and community, challenging me to break habits and thought patterns that uphold injustice, exclusion or complacency in the Church and society?

2. How are we, as a Church community, reimagining and restructuring leadership, mission and worship to reflect Christ's call to be a vibrant, just and healing presence in our Southern African context, rather than sustaining systems that hinder the Spirit?

## **Becoming what we proclaim**

The 2004 Mission Charter of the MCSA serves as a blueprint for the Church to act as agents of healing and transformation. However, while the vision is compelling, it is in the implementation where we often fall short. This is an opportunity for the church to become a particular community with its purpose to hear and translate the gospel in a specific setting and the discipline of becoming culturally bilingual, learning the language of faith and how to translate this into the language of its context.

If we are serious about our prophetic witness and our commitment to intentionality, I suggest:

- Aligning church life with justice and mission: Following Christ means engaging the world's suffering and injustice with compassion and courage. The Church must embody God's call to transform unjust systems.
- Reflecting gospel values in structures and leadership: Structures should empower, not exclude, and reflect Christ's servant-hearted mission in both spirit and practice.
- Practising contextual mission at the grassroots: Mission begins with the gifts already present in our communities.

The Mission Congress is not the destination, and there is a danger in confusing spiritual experiences with spiritual maturity. We must move from a theology of event to a theology of incarnation, from moments of inspiration to habits of transformation. "Becoming what we proclaim" calls the Church to move to embodiment, to practice, and to transformation.

## **Sustaining local renewal, leadership and missional practices**

Renewal is always local, whilst the Mission Congress provides direction; the real change must take place in Societies and Circuits. Knowing that no two contexts

are the same, the sustaining towards local renewal must be both theologically grounded and contextually responsive. Missional leadership ignites and drives change, starting with the inner transformation of the local Society that is open to their environment: sensing it, and responding to it.

The renewal process calls for a commitment to adapt to its unique and localised needs; sensing it, responding to it, learning from it, and always seeking to change and evolve. This renewal becomes learning systems in a cycle of adapting and changing. The Church, as a complex and living system, is inherently responsive to change, often moving between moments of stability and disruption. Sustaining renewal, therefore, requires embracing this creative tension as the Spirit's invitation to ongoing transformation that reflects the humility and hope of Christ.

In the MCSA, local leadership formation must move from positional authority to spiritual influence. While leaders are called to embrace their location, they need to recognise their limitations and not operate in the certainty of their own knowledge and skills but rather under the reign of God.

The church needs adaptive leaders who can navigate complexity and uncertainty, grounded in Christ and open to the Spirit's new movements and to discern God's intended purposes through relevant contextual missional practices, such as:

- Dwelling in the Word – How can we be attentive to the Spirit through listening to the Word and one another?
- Dwelling the world – What is God already doing and what are we noticing in the world around us?
- Hospitality – How can those we receive change us into a new community they help form?
- Community spiritual discernment – Thinking about issues in the light of Christ and how we give extra attention to any aspect when we make decisions.
- Community engagements – Participating in local events, partnering with local community organisations, and addressing social needs.

These are *holy habits* which together aid discernment of the activity of God within your local church and community. The apostle Paul reminds us in Galatians 6:9 (American Standard Version), “Let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” The MCSA has an opportunity

for such a time as this; to lament for the past mistakes of no urgency and silent agency; to hope in ordinary virtues of honesty, trust, tolerance and forgiveness; to becoming more human as an alternative community and not estranged from the God who calls.

## Guarding the flame: sustaining renewal beyond the congress

This Mission Congress holds the potential to change, encourage and ignite prophetic urgency in the local church. Yet, any church carries the risk of dissipation and gradually fades back into the routines of institutional maintenance. It is important that each local church and organisation establishes systems of continuity, practices that ground the Mission Congress's vision in the rhythms of local faith communities and leadership formation.

Proposed pilgrimage practices for sustained renewal

- Post-Congress Sunday (annual Connexional practice): Each year, on an agreed date, all Circuits and Societies observe a *Post-Congress Sunday*. This becomes a sacred act of liturgical recommitment across the Connexion, featuring testimonies of transformation, covenant renewal prayers, and spaces of accountability.
- District Pilgrimage reports (annual narrative reflections): These stories of struggle and growth, innovation and resilience, should be shared Connexionally to inspire cross-learning, solidarity and accountability.
- Pilgrimage Rule of Life (rhythms of discipleship): Adaptable rhythm that holds individuals, leaders, and communities in spiritual formation and missional practice accountable.

This *Rule of Life* roots the Pilgrimage in lived discipleship, forming a community that is both reflective and active, faithful to God and responsive to the world.

## Group reflection questions

1. How is my personal and communal spiritual formation helping us to embody the values of justice, humility and compassion in the everyday life of the Church?



2. In what ways are our local church structures and leadership styles reflecting, or resisting, the Gospel's call to inclusivity, accountability and servant leadership?
3. How can our local congregation move from hosting spiritual events to cultivating spiritual habits that foster sustained transformation?
4. Are we developing leaders who are spiritually grounded, contextually aware, and open to the Spirit's disruptive renewal?
5. What concrete steps can we take to embed the vision of the Mission Congress into the rhythm of our local church life, through practices like pilgrimage reporting, covenant renewal, and community engagement?

## Conclusion: the Church as a pilgrim people

Pilgrims are people with purpose, and at this Mission Congress the church has been entrusted to live out this vision with courage, creativity and passion. Every part of the MCSA can experience a burning-bush moment, because we are on holy grounds. Even though the path ahead is uncertain, it is sufficient that Christ walks with us. "He accompanied them, but they were unable to see him." (Luke 24:16 ASV). May the celebration of community, the cries for justice, and the breaking of bread, open our eyes.

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# PILGRIMAGE OF RENEWAL

*A Theological and Spiritual Companion  
to the Third Methodist Mission Congress*

This theological and spiritual companion book for the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) is helpful not only to the Methodist Church, but to all who are interested in the mission of the Church in a Southern African context. The book is written as the MCSA undertakes a Pilgrimage of Renewal, with the 2025 Mission Congress as highlight.

This sacred journey invites the Church into reflection, repentance, recommitment and hope. The book, rooted in scripture, theology – especially Wesleyan theology – and African Christian spirituality, is intended to guide local congregations, Circuits, Districts, and individuals in a unified journey.

The aim of the book is to accompany the Methodist Connexion in spiritual and theological preparation for the Mission Congress and beyond; to provide an accessible resource for prayer, study and reflection during and after the Pilgrimage; to deepen communal identity and missional imagination through shared theological language; to affirm and integrate African Christian spirituality and lived experience in shaping renewal.

**Pilgrimage of Renewal: A Theological and Spiritual Companion to the Third Methodist Mission Congress** will be of benefit to Ministers, Deacons and Evangelists as well as lay leaders, youth, young adults, Methodist organisations, ecumenical partners and students across the sub-continent.

