



The Methodist Church of  
Southern Africa

Address  
*of the*  
Presiding  
Bishop-Elect



*Awakening*  
**prophetic**  
*urgency*  
&  
**AGENCY**

**Conference**  
*East London* **2023**  
20<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> September

Reviving the Church of Christ

# INAUGURAL CONFERENCE ADDRESS

**Rev Pumla Nzimande, Presiding Bishop-Elect**

**20 September 2023**

**East London, Kumkani Hintsa District**

*Awakening Prophetic Urgency and Agency: Reviving The Church of Christ*

## **Greetings**

The Presiding Bishop, the Lay President, the General Secretary, Ecumenical Guests, Bishops, Lay Leaders, Unit Leaders and delegates of the 133<sup>th</sup> Conference of the MCSA, all Methodists, I greet you all in the name of our Lord and redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It is an honour and privilege to stand before you today, to deliver this inaugural address to the Methodist people, as we continue to serve God in the Church and in the world, for the healing of Africa and nations.

## **Our Roots: Southern Africa**

As the world ushered in the revolutionary 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Methodism, born in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England, reached the Southern African shores of the Cape. A South African Conference was established in 1882 which remained under the jurisdiction of the British Conference until the next millennia.

Whilst under the jurisdiction of the British Conference, the race and gender of those who occupied Wesley's seat was reserved for white males. From the Grahams' to the Allcock's, from the Harris's to the Webbs', from the Dugmores to the Pitts; race and gender remained unchallenged.

It was in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, precisely in 1926, that the Southern African Conference attained autonomy from the British Conference and could begin to shape and reshape who we are today. It would however, take another 40 years for the Methodist Church to elect its first Black President of Conference in the person of Rev Seth Mokitimi and another 50 years further on for the MCSA to elect its first woman Presiding Bishop, the Rev Purity Malinga.

## **Resistance**

Of all its landmark moments, starting from the establishment of the Methodist Church in Southern Africa to gaining independence from the British Conference, the election of the 1<sup>st</sup> black president of conference, the election of the 1<sup>st</sup> female Presiding Bishop, as well as the current preparations to induct the 2<sup>nd</sup> Presiding Bishop who is a woman, I am convinced that there was a struggle then to shift from homogeneity to heterogeneity. The struggle to deal with change is evident, yet the work of God must continue no matter the complexity of the challenges. It is my deepest belief that it is a faithful God who selects, equips and commissions the leaders for his Church and he has consistently done so throughout the ages.

We are indebted to the sacrifices made by all who have led this Church through the good and sometimes tumultuous times. Indeed, I celebrate the shoulders upon which I stand, since the inception of the Southern African Connexion. To name but a few, the Storeys', Mgojo's, Baartmaan, Scholtz, Mogoba, Dandala's, Abrahams', Siwas and our current Presiding Bishop, the Rev Malinga. Whilst I salute those who have traversed these paths before me, the idiom which sadly resonates with me states, "Win the battle, lose the war," for indeed we have won many battles as the MCSA and yet we have also lost many wars. What do I mean by this?

## **Win The Battle- Lose The War**

Whereas we attained success in gaining independence from the British Conference, there has been a dismal failure to deal with our colonial heritage and decolonize practices and usages to adapt them to the African Context and reality. Such failure is evident in:

- the gaps between the affluent and poor Circuits
- attire and uniform
- practices around giving
- use of liturgy
- struggles with Connexionalism
- entitlement
- Lack of ownership of our institutions by the broader church

Battles have been won and yet wars have been lost. Indeed, the 1<sup>st</sup> black Minister sat on Wesley's seat in 1964 but have we won the war?

- Are we one and undivided?
- What scars do we carry from our long history of segregation and unequal opportunities?
- How has this affected the pensions of many a black minister?

Battles have been won but wars have been lost when churches remain with a 9am service and a 2pm service along divisive lines with no efforts made towards unity. The scars of segregation are still visible.

Speaking of race, whilst holding on to the ideal of a one and undivided Church:

- What does it mean to be in the minority in this church?
- What does it mean to be white, Indian, or colored?

Speaking of Connexionality,

- What is the cost of originating from Mozambique, Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho and Namibia in a church that is seemingly centered around South Africa?

***Battles have been won but wars have been lost.***

The battle of women in leadership rages on, and there are glimmers of hope as we see more and more women assuming prominent positions of leadership in the MCSA yet the war has still not been won. The war against internalized domination and subordination, the war against unequal treatment and opportunities, the war for respect and dignity for women as image bearers of God remain, and we should never imagine that placing women in senior positions without the support, trust, co-operation, and space to lead makes a difference.

## **My Election**

It is against this backdrop of a myriad of complexities, that we find ourselves in as the MCSA, that my election into the office of the Presiding Bishop transpired. My election into this office is one that brought about a mixture of feelings, thoughts, and deep reflections on my journey in the ministry of the MCSA.

It is one that continues to call me into an even deeper spirituality, prayer life, humility and servanthood because of my heightened consciousness of the magnitude of challenges that we face as the Global Church, and more specifically as the Methodist Church in the Southern African context.

When I was elected on 13 August 2022, and the letter from the PB came into my inbox, I was faced with 2 options, either to accept or decline. The God who speaks to me against all my human reason, understanding and wisdom said, “You have been appointed for such a time as this, this is my Church!” So I accepted.

I do not take the faith and responsibility entrusted upon me lightly, but I remain in awe of the God who continues to use the weak for his glory. I align myself with the writer of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 4:7 and I quote:

***“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.”***

I am humbled by the Methodist people who have ‘*thrown their nets onto the other side*’ in the search for a new leader, and that net found even me. I am strengthened by grace and God’s reassuring voice as I prepare to take on the office of chief pastor and shepherd of the Methodist Church of Southern African. I remain grateful for the prayers, words of encouragement, and congratulatory messages that I have received since my election.

### **Theme: Awakening Prophetic Urgency and Agency**

Vision is defined as the bridge between present and future reality. As one who will lead this church for the next 5 years, it is imperative that I remind us of our vision which is, “A Christ-healed Africa for the healing of nations.” My predecessors, through various initiatives, ventures and themes and the people called Methodist, have sought to give life to this vision.

As a form of reinvigorating our vision, the theme that has been placed in my heart for this time is, “***Awakening Prophetic Urgency and Agency.***” The subtheme that I offer us is that

of, “**Reviving the Church of Christ.**” This is a theme that we will spend time exploring, embodying and applying in every corner of the Connexion until our Mission Congress. I call upon all Methodists, young and old to catch this fire and let it drive us for the next 2 years.

## Awakening

The word awakening is defined as *the act of waking from sleep; an act or moment of becoming suddenly aware of something.* It refers to a *change in perception and such change leads to a higher level of consciousness and understanding.* There are various forms of awakenings including spiritual, moral, intellectual and emotional awakenings. The word presupposes a state of slumber or death, a trajectory that is imminent for the MCSA should the status quo remain.

In the book, “*Autopsy of a Deceased Church,*” Rainer (2014) attributes the death of Churches to the following factors:

- Slow Erosion
- The Past as the Hero
- The Refusal to Look like the Community
- Inward Looking Budgets
- Death of Evangelism and Disciple making
- Lack of Prayer

## Our Symptoms

The MCSA is displaying the symptoms of a dying Church. If we are to look at each of the findings of the autopsy of a dying Church as outlined by Rainer and transpose these onto the MCSA, indeed we will realise that we need an urgent awakening.

1. **Slow Erosion**-The erosion in the MCSA is evident in the gradual collapse of the fundamental pillars of Methodism. Pillars such as spirituality, spiritual disciplines,

small groups, teaching, mission and outreach programmes are under immense threat.

The apathy that exists amongst members, both clergy and laity; the lack of brand pride displayed in our behaviour whilst gathered and when scattered, especially on social media spaces, are all signs of erosion. This phenomenon of erosion in the MCSA is displayed through our irresponsible approaches to disputed issues and the sharing of confidential internal matters, which have processes dedicated to their resolution but end up ventilated in the mass media arena which does not add value to our church and what it represents. Erosion is evident in our blatant disregard for our processes and our discipline. It is time for an awakening.

2. **The Past is the Hero**-Indeed, we are showing this symptom. Our failure to see and respond to our present reality as a post-Covid 19 church has left us holding on to glorified methods that worked in the past and may be self-defeating in the present. There is a need for us to adapt to the new reality and reconfigure our approaches to new challenges.
3. **Refusal to Look Like the Community We Serve**-Changes in the communities we serve happen at a rapid pace. From the racial to ethnic changes, to age related and socio-economic changes; the world around us is evolving at a rapid pace and our current focus cannot remain rooted in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Often times, our worship spaces are not a true reflection of the communities around us and are therefore limited in their relevance to respond to prevailing challenges therein.

I often hear Methodists bragging about being the ‘Woolworths denomination’, “the VW Polo church” and then we want to wear the Christian Louboutin, red sole high heel shoes, which cost no less than R6000 per pair, and yet the people we serve are those on a basic income grant, live below the poverty line and continue to bear the brunt of crushing unemployment in a stagnant economy. How can we, with clear conscience claim to be a church for the poor and marginalised when we have consciously or subconsciously created an elitist Church?

4. **Inward Looking Budgets**-The bulk of our budgets go towards the maintenance of existing structures. We are seemingly reluctant to invest in mission and ministry. For us, mission has been replaced with keeping the lights on and planning and attending big events at expensive venues.

5. **Death of Evangelism and Disciple Making**-We have become a church that is preoccupied with maintaining the activities of organisations and very little attention is given to the spiritual formation of members who choose to not belong to organisations or to evangelising and bringing in new members.
6. **Lack of Prayer**-Prayer is the lifeline of the Church. A Church that doesn't pray is in danger of going cold. Without intentionality in prayer, we are simply a show, a performance, a Potemkin production- a nice façade, lacking substance. It is time to wake up.

## The Prophetic Church

All these indications and many more, are nothing but signs that the MCSA is either sleeping or dying. As a prophet of hope, I would lean towards saying we are sleeping, hence a call for an urgent awakening not only to our reality but also to prophetic urgency and agency. What does it mean to be prophetic?

Being prophetic involves reading the signs of the times and offering a social critique and response that is inspired and guided by scripture and the principles of the Kingdom of God. In the Old Testament, the prophets acted as a mouthpiece for God. They would receive a message from God and proclaim it regardless of the discomfort it brought. The prophet had the role of forth telling and foretelling.

In the New Testament, prophetic ministry becomes one of the functions of the early Christian Church. The word "church" is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, a compound word made up of the preposition, *ek*, 'out' and the verb *kaleo* 'to call.' The church, therefore, is defined as "an assembly" or "called-out ones." The church is KURIAKON which means belonging to God. It is not a human creation. Therefore, the church is a God created assembly of people called out for a particular purpose. That purpose, we learn in scripture, is to spread the gospel and make disciples so that all may be saved.

Bruggeman argues that prophetic ministry is not limited to addressing a particular public issue or crisis at a specific time. Rather, in and out of season, it calls on the prophet to respond to the dominant and resilient crises of the co-option and domestication of Christianity when it is no longer an alternative vocation or counter cultural but sounds, looks,



acts and smells like those aspects of a defined society, embodied in a culture, traditions, politics and economics that we first sought to influence and transform.

The situation that the MCSA finds itself in has imperilled our prophetic witness and credibility. People have lost trust in us as MCSA ministers and members, and we simply have lost our footing.

***“Seyekile ezonto ekufanele ngabe sizenzile, asazenza, senza ezonto ekungafanelekanga ukuba sizenze. Akukho nokuphila kuthi.”***

The MCSA is losing its ability to be an alternative community. Instead of us being the salt and light, we have been co-opted and domesticated. There are people who would rather join a stokvel than the MCSA, because we are a ship tearing itself apart and a house at war with itself. As a matter of urgency, there must be an awakening of prophetic urgency and agency or we will be further domesticated and co-opted and fail to be an alternative community. This calls on us to:

- redefine and reposition ourselves post Covid-19
- refocus on mission
- strengthen our brand
- work towards unity
- eradicate Corruption
- fight against GBV
- correct inequalities and injustice
- live morally upright lives

Being prophetic is in our DNA as Methodists...let us be reminded that we are a people whose heritage is one of contextual, public theology and mission. We come from a rich heritage which addressed public issues such as poverty, the American Revolution, liberty, political power, and the slave trade. All these were concrete expressions that encapsulated the prophetic nature of Methodism.

Because of their way of life, amongst the many names that Wesley and his group of friends were called included the holy club, Bible Monks as well as **supererogationist**. The term is

used to describe action that goes beyond the call of duty. We are those who are set-apart to go beyond the call of duty in mission, ministry and servanthood.

Such is the nature of being prophetic; it involves words and actions that go the extra mile; working beyond the call of duty. It is the opening of doors to those from different economic and social groups, age groups, sexual orientations, race and cultural groups. I concur with the late Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu when he says, “*There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.*” That time is now. With urgency, we need to be a present and visible Church; present at the centre of people’s suffering, pain and struggles. Awakening prophetic urgency and agency is imperative and non-negotiable.

## Urgency

Urgency is defined as “***the condition of being very important and needing immediate attention.***” The opposite of urgency is hesitation, slowness, indecision, and complacency - all of which are enemies of progress. Methodists, the awakening of our understanding of ourselves as a prophetic church, and prophetic individuals is a matter of urgency. Over the decades, I have watched as we lost our sense of urgency as a Church, we have moved from urgency....

- to being negligent in our ministry of presence where agents are absent from their stations,
- to negligence in the submission of compliance documents
- to negligence in the care for each other,
- to negligence in the applications of our polity and regulations,
- to negligence in discipline,
- to negligence in accountability.
- to negligence in implementing our resolutions.

I am reiterating my call for urgency. We are too complacent about too many things. It is imperative for all of us to be involved, take responsibility, be immersed in the life of the church and be pragmatic.

## Agency

Urgent prophetic action requires agency. In sociology, agency is defined as the ability to **“choose and act.”** The church has been given agency as the Body of Christ to act on his behalf but never without him. Agency therefore necessitates the presence of an agent. Whilst paradoxically, the Church is called out of and into the world, we are not only church when gathered but even when scattered individually. We are called to exercise agency and be agents of the kingdom of God.

An agent is described as one who has been “authorized to act for or in the place of another.” Ancient Rabbinic understanding of an agent holds that, “the one sent is like the one who sent him.” There is an expectation, therefore, that as agents of God we would be like the creator in word and in deed. What type of agent are you? The challenges that we face will neither be solved by ministers, Bishops nor the Presiding Bishop. Arise agents, recognise your agency and the urgency to act.

## **Reviving The Church of Christ**

Whilst awakening prophetic urgency and agency will drive the revival of the Church, revival of the MCSA to embody what it means to be the Church of Christ is imperative. I was specific and deliberate in saying, “Reviving the Church of Christ,” because there is a certain standard and criterion of what makes a church a Church of Christ as reflected in scripture.

### **Definition: Reviving**

Whilst spiritual revival is characterised by heightened spiritual activity and may lead to reviving, and may include revivals; this subtheme is not solely about night vigils and spiritual revival, those are of importance but the focus is *reviving*.

Reviving is defined as *restoring to life or consciousness*. Words synonymous with this are resuscitating, reinvigorating - meaning there is life but one is unconscious and resuscitation is needed. The call is for the revival of the MCSA.

### **What Are We To Become?**

The Church of Christ born on Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts is that Church that we must revive. What is clear about the Church of Christ as portrayed in Acts is that it was an ORGANISM

## What Does It Mean For The Church To Be An Organism?

An organism, by definition, is a form of life composed of mutually interdependent parts that maintain various vital processes. A form of life considered as an entity. An organism can grow and reproduce from one or more cells. Organisms grow because they keep on reproducing and yet they stay true to their DNA. The Church in Acts was a living community of spirit-filled and led believers who became known as *people of the way* because they followed Christ, *the way*. All the images used to describe the New Testament Church are living entities....the church is described as...

- The Body of Christ
- A family
- A vineyard
- An army
- A city

Since the Church is an organism, the question, therefore, for the MCSA becomes: "Are the cells still reproducing?" The reviving of our organic nature is integral as we have become too institutional.

Hal Miller compares the institutional Church with a church that is an organism and uses the analogy of a train. He says:

"Institutional Churches are a lot like trains. They are going a certain direction, and they will continue in that direction for a good long time even if all hands try to make them stop. As with trains, the options for turning the directions of institutional churches are limited at best. If a switch or siding is available, the train could turn. Otherwise, it just follows its tracks. So everyone aboard has best hope that he is on the right train headed in the right direction.

Organic churches, like those in the New Testament, are different. They are not trains but groups of people out for a walk. These groups move much slower than trains, but they can turn at a moment's notice. More importantly, they can be genuinely attentive to their world, to their Lord and to each other. Like trains, institutional churches are easy to find. The smoke and noise are unmistakable. Organic churches are much more subtle. They do not announce their presence with flashing lights at every intersection. Organic churches are groups of people walking with God. The trains

pass them all the time and sometimes the people on board cannot wave because the train is moving too fast. “

Indeed, the MCSA in its current state is like a train, facing one direction and finds it very difficult to take a turn. It makes a lot of noise...remember church is us.... the people.... lots of noise but very little action.

The Church we need to revive is:

- One that is attentive to the Spirit, to the world around us and to each other.
- One that does not come with bells and whistles
- One that does not get excited by crowds but one that in active discipleship and discipline in small groups and class meetings
- One that walks with God and is attentive to God.

**I call upon all Methodist to work towards:**

### **1. Reviving The Mission Pillars**

There is a need for us to revive our commitment to the vision of “A Christ- healed Africa for the Healing of Nations” and our mission of “Proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ for Healing and Transformation.” We are to revive a new energy in the implementation of the Five Imperatives of Mission

- Spirituality
- Justice, Service and Reconciliation
- Evangelism and Church Growth
- Development and Economic Transformation
- Education and Christian Formation

This is a call for us to

- Underscore the importance of the mission pillars in their entirety with emphasis on spirituality as the critical foundation
- Resource Mission through Mission Shaped Budgets in all Circuits, Districts and Organisations
- Organisations are mission groups and therefore vehicles for mission within the MCSA and not autonomous, self-governing parallel entities

- Because of the dire situation that we as a church find ourselves in, I propose that we bring the Mission Congress forward from 2026 to 2025. This will allow us to re-group and reposition ourselves as an effective Post-Covid church

## **2. Reviving The Resources Of The MCSA**

The Methodist Church is rich in human resources. It has people with the skills necessary for the advancement of the work of God and the betterment of the Church. Let us be intentional in investing in people to allow space for people to use their gifts. Let us be intentional in electing the right people into leadership and in leadership development. Let us be purposeful in resourcing youth and children's work. Let us invest in relationships, and formation of community.

The MCSA has a huge property portfolio, let us be intentional in making our land work for us. We have the Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary (SMMS) which is a resource to the Church, an institution that we pride ourselves in, yet it is on the brink of collapse. Reviving the church of Christ calls on the MCSA to be instrumental in the restoration of the financial health of SMMS as a valuable resource.

This is a call to:

- Investing in partnerships, collaborative actions and relationship building
- Financial transparency and accountability
- Refrain from paying ministers stipends by local arrangements and that disciplinary actions in accordance to chapter 11 be instituted against the Superintendent and minister in places where such activity persists.
- The MCSA needs to leverage its real estate - both land and buildings - for income generation
- Introduce austerity measures and cut out opulent spending on events
- The MCSA needs to leverage its real estate - both land and buildings - for income generation

## **3. Reviving Our Ear To The Cries For Freedom**

Moltmann asserts:

- That we are suffering from economic exploitation of people by people and we are crying out for social justice.

- That we are suffering from political oppression of people by people and are fighting for the political recognition of human dignity and human rights.
- That we are suffering from cultural alienation of people from people through racialism and sexual discrimination, seeking the fullness of a truly human life in solidarity with one another,
- That we are suffering from the emptiness of our personal life which disappears so meaninglessly among the structures of a techno-centric and bureaucratic society, seeking personal identity.
- Finally, people are suffering, under capitalism, dictatorship, racialism, sexual discrimination and nihilism. We are suffering under the deeply engrained primal fear which makes us so aggressive and inhumane towards other people.

Have we become deaf to these cries MCSA, this is a call to be attentive to the cries around us and respond as Christ would.

#### **4. Reviving Of Order and Discipline**

The early Church of Christ was orderly. Methodists have in past times been known for order and discipline. Whereas the Book of Order assists us in the governance of the Church, it is written from the premise that we are all under the law of God and therefore, there are some basic Christian values that we subscribe to.

It has become extremely difficult to operate efficiently as a Church when at every turn we have to deal with individuals who seek to create and or find loopholes of interpretation to our polity. If the very same book, which is our constitution, is disregarded, then we are heading for anarchy and far should it be it for us to call ourselves Methodist.

Reviving calls us to:

- Governance, compliance, accountability and consequence management are things that begin at society level all the way up, and I call for us to strengthen that area of our collective acceptance of our discipline and compliance. It is time for an awakening.
- Affirm and uphold our constitution as contained in the Methodist Book of Order
- Quarterly Connexional Executive Meetings to monitor the progress of reviving the church and place control measures
- The Connexional Executive will establish a monitoring and evaluation system that will also act as an accountability tool.

## Challenge

The work of reviving begins with individuals, spreads to class meetings, societies, the Circuit, District and Connexion until we have a Christ -healed Africa and all nations are healed as we become servants, heralds and an alternative community.

## Conclusion

I have a dream for the MCSA and it is so well articulated by Frank Viola (2008) in his book, "Re-imagining Church" and he says,

- I have a dream that one day the Church of Jesus Christ will rise up to her God given calling and begin to live out the true meaning of her identity-which is the very heartthrob of God almighty.
- I have a dream that Jesus Christ will one day be the head of his church again. Not in pious rhetoric, but in reality.
- I have a dream that groups of Christians everywhere will begin to flesh out the New Testament reality that the Church is a living organism and not an institutional organisation.
- I have a dream that the clergy/laity divide will someday be an antique of church history, and the Lord Jesus himself will replace the moss-laden system of human hierarchy that has usurped his authority amongst people.
- I have a dream that multitudes of God's people will no longer tolerate those man-made systems that have put them in religious bondage and under a pile of guilt, duty, condemnation- making them slaves to authoritarian systems and leader's accountability and compliance.
- I have a dream that countless churches will be transformed from high-powered business organisations into spiritual families, authentic Christ centred communities where the members know one another intimately, love one another unconditionally, bleed for one another and rejoice with one another unfailingly. I have a dream today.

*Awakening Prophetic Urgency and Agency: Reviving The Church of Christ*

**Amen!**



