

June 6, 2018

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE CONGREGATIONS

TO: The Congregations of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas

FR: The Representative Session of the 39th Connexional Conference

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou Who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou Who hast by Thy might lead us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee.
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee.
Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand,
True to our God, true to our native land.

James Weldon Johnson

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We greet you in the name of our Lord and only Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Introduction:

The 39th Connexional Conference of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas assembled from May 23 – 31, 2018 in the industrial yet bucolic City of San Fernando in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. As always, our meetings took place within a framework of worship and warm fellowship as we shared our lives and worked on issues facing the church and our communities. We met under the theme, "**Facing the task Unfinished: Imagine**". This theme was used in our daily morning devotions and guided us in our discourse over the ten-day period.

Congratulations:

At Conference, we appointed the following to serve as Connexional Officers for the next triennium: The Rev'd Everalde Leeanah Galbraith, Connexional President /Bishop, Mrs. Yonette F. Greaves, Connexional Vice President, The Rev'd Glenna Spencer, Connexional Secretary and Mr. Quincy Bourne, Treasurer of Connexional Funds. We inducted into office, Rev'd Everalde Galbraith as Bishop of the MCCA at a moving service at the Ste Madeleine Methodist Church on Sunday 27th May 2018. Mrs. Yonette Greaves was also inducted into office at a service on Thursday, May 31, 2018, at the San Fernando Methodist Church. We ask your prayers for them and their family as they lead.

We give thanks to God for the six years that Rev'd Otto O. Wade presided as the Connexional President/Bishop. We greatly appreciate his invaluable contributions and sterling leadership and wish him well as he proceeds into Superannuation.

The Conference thanked the Rev'd David Goff for his service to the Commission on Ministry over the past six years and bid welcome to the Rev'd Patmore Henry, the new secretary.

We rejoice that in every generation the Lord calls new men and women into ministry and it was our delight and great joy to have accepted individuals as Ministers in Training. They would, therefore, begin the process of formation for the ministry of the church from September 2018. We also celebrated with those who will transition from college into circuits as Probationers. We ask you to offer prayerful support to them as they settle into circuit work. We note and congratulate the eleven (11) persons who have been received into Full Connexion as Ministers. We pray God's blessings upon them as hands are laid on them having been set aside for this important ministry of the word, sacrament and service. We encourage congregations to continue to nurture and encourage young men and women to respond to the call to the full-time ministry of the church. The conference also notes the present position of the training fund. The current situation of indebtedness of the MCCA to the UTCWI must occupy our attention at present and in the foreseeable future. A temporary solution to clear the immediate debt has been reached by requesting a \$200.00 US contribution from 800 members from across the Caribbean.

We give thanks to God for those ministers who were ordained to their particular forms of ministry during the past triennium. Further, we take note of those seven (7) ministers who Superannuated during the same period and trust that they will find their new role in the life of the church both beneficial and spiritually uplifting.

Commendation:

We commend you members and friends of the Methodist Church for your faithfulness in fulfilling your calling to serve the Lord, especially since "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). These times pose significant challenges for all of us, but we are assured that it is a privilege to keep our eyes on our Saviour Jesus Christ and to persevere in our ministries by the power of Almighty God and by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

So many of you are a part of families and communities that are torn by violence. Our faith is being consistently tested by the prevalence of violence which affects our Connexional area. As a Church (MCCA) we have an obligation to respond. The prevalence of violence in our homes, our schools and streets, our nations and world is destroying the lives, dignity and hopes of many of our people. Fear has had both a paralytic and polarizing effect on our communities. To compound the issue, the celebration of violence in much of our media, music and even video games is poisoning our children. Verbal violence in our families in our communication and within the mainstream media perpetuates this culture of violence. Pornography assaults the dignity of women and contributes to violence against them. The social fabric of our society is being torn apart by this culture of violence that leaves young people dead on our streets and families afraid in our homes. Our society seems increasingly desensitized to human loss and suffering. We are cognizant of the context in which many of you have to live, therefore, be assured of our continual prayer as you seek to remain faithful to God.

Natural Disasters:

We stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters whose lives were interrupted by the passages of several major tropical storms in 2017 and were saddened by reports of loss of life, injuries and devastation caused by hurricanes Irma and Marie, especially in the Leeward Islands, Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands. Many of our territories may have been demolished but certainly not destroyed. We bless God for the resilience

and spiritual fortitude of those who have been affected and the generosity and empathy of those who responded by offering material and humanitarian assistance.

We, therefore, ask you to continue to do all you can to lift up the human, moral and spiritual dimensions during the ongoing economic crisis in the world in general and our region in particular. Widespread unemployment, underemployment and pervasive poverty are diminishing human lives, undermining human dignity, and hurting children and families. Let us be challenged to use our opportunities as pastors, teachers, and leaders to focus public attention and priority on the scandalous levels of poverty and unemployment and underemployment in our society

Financial Sustainability

The global economic crisis has had an undeniable impact on the countries of our region. ... The economic uncertainty of the MCCA has become a crisis of Connexional (global) proportions. Our confidence in a sovereign God releases us from fear and enables us to live boldly. As the people of God, we commit ourselves to doing the right things regardless of the cost. We must take seriously our trust to be faithful stewards, convinced that all things belong to God. We encourage individuals and churches to choose to follow biblical teachings in the management of our finances. We must reach out to help one another, as well as the "stranger" who is in need. Few will escape the widespread, possible long-term effects of the current economic crisis and it is undercurrents. However, Methodists must prayerfully seek to be positive witnesses for Jesus Christ and exemplars of people upheld by His provision and promises. Our passion is to spread hope and holiness that transforms culture. Our prayer is that God will enable us to do so faithfully and fearlessly.

Condolences:

We extend condolences to families of ministers and members who died during the last three years. May the Lord cradle you in His mighty, gentle arms. May you feel tangible evidence of His constant presence with you. Most of all, may He grant you the strength to remember and to believe now more than ever, that we walk by faith, not by sight and ALL things MUST work together for the good of them that love the Lord and are the called according to HIS purpose. We love you; you are in our hearts and prayers always. As part of our Conference activities, a Memorial Service was held to remember the fifteen (15) ministers who departed this life since our last Conference namely Rev'd Dr S. Wilfred Hodge, Rev'd Jennings G.E. Martin, Rev'd William A. Faux, Rev'd. J. Oswald Thorbourne, Rev'd. John Stubbs, Rev'd. Cecil O Weekes, Rev'd Myrna A. Lake, Rev'd. Hillgrove G. Hamilton, Rev'd Herwin McLean, Rev'd Arnold Dennis, Rev'd Stanley Record, Rev'd Harold A. Gill, Rev'd Erma D. Rose, Rev'd Moise L. Isidor, Rev'd Luis V. Veagra and Rev'd Shelia Maitland.

Looking to the Future

As we look ahead it is wise to pause and reflect upon the importance of our youth and the need to invite and challenge them to take an active role in the Church.

Throughout our Conference area, there are many young people who must be commended for their faith in God and commitment to and enthusiasm for His Church. The presence of these young people is a blessing. However, despite all this potential, there is still the pain. Some young people are overwhelmed by the world, feel isolated, and are afraid of the future. It is to these young people that the words of Jesus are truly significant, Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28-30). Our youth need to know that no matter what struggles or problems they face that they can always turn

to Jesus and to their faith community. We need to ensure that our Youth Ministry is designed to help our young people deepen their relationship with God, build self-esteem, serve others, develop leadership skills, make significant friendships and enjoy life. Youth ministry ought not to be about programmes; instead, it should be the entire Faith community responding to the needs of young people, helping them to develop as Methodist Christians and inviting them to participate more fully in the life, mission, and ministry of the Church. Consequently, we all have a responsibility to help our youth feel connected to the Methodist Church.

We affirm at every level of our church's life and witness the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

May the God of John and Charles Wesley, Nathaniel Gilbert, Black Harry and Sarah Ann Gill be with you always. Be assured of our continued prayers for you, your families and the work of God among you.

Shalom!



Rev'd. Everal L. Galbraith
Connexional President/Bishop



Rev'd. Patmore C. Henry
Connexional Secretary