

THE PASTORAL LETTER TO THE CONGREGATIONS

To: The Officers and Members of Congregations

From: The 196th Annual Session of The Bahamas Turks & Caicos Islands Conference of
The Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Warm greetings to you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Our Conference met January 10-21, 2008, in the historic Grand Turk Methodist Church, Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos Islands, described as “beautiful by nature”. With the theme, ***Ready for Miracles: Energizing the Conference NOWW*** (N-Nature, O-Outreach, W-Witness, W-Worship) as its focus, Conference assessed the work of the church done in the past year and charted the way ahead, guided by the Spirit of God.

WELCOME

Welcome was extended to all the delegates, especially to the Vice-President of Conference, Mr. Arthur Chase, who was attending Conference for the first time in his capacity as Vice President; also to Mr. Theodore Fahie, Treasurer of the Connexional Conference Funds who was in attendance as representative of the Connexional Conference. In addition welcome was expressed to Rev. Dr. Oscar Mathura, supernumerary Presbyterian from the United Methodist Church, serving in the South Eleuthera Circuit.

Conference looks forward to receiving Rev. Evans Lazarre from the United Theological College of the West Indies in September.

A TIME FOR CELEBRATION

There were causes for celebration. Among these were:

- (a) The observance of the 10th Anniversary as a Self-Governing Conference. This was observed at a banquet when Conference paused to recognize the way we had come and to give thanks to God for his guidance and blessing for the future.
- (b) The Creole Ministry. The reports of this ministry, carried out in Grand Turk, Providenciales as well as South Caicos in the Turks and Caicos Islands, and Croix des Mission in Nassau, indicated progress. In addition, it was cause for joy to have a choir from the Creole Ministry participating in the Welcome Service and also to have two of their leaders address a session of the Conference.
- (c) Acceptance of Candidate for Training as a Lay Evangelist. Mrs. Carmen Ramlochan of the Grand Bahama Circuit was accepted for training for this ministry. She is the second person in the Conference to embark upon training for this form of ministry. We pray God’s blessing on her as she pursues her training.

MINISTRY AWARENESS LORD’S DAY

With a view to highlighting the role of ministry, and developing a better understanding and appreciation of the place and function of the minister, Conference decided that a ministry

Awareness Lord's Day be observed during the year. The date designated is the second Sunday in September.

RESOURCES & DEVELOPMENT

The Resources and Development Committee takes great pride in the current budget and strategic plan which was presented at the 196th Annual Conference. We look forward to the move to self sustainability. The entire financial focus of the committee in preparing the conference budget was the creation of a self sustaining church by the year 2015, whereby all of our internal and external debts would have been satisfied.

The Reconstruction Fund remains in place and the total goal for the fund is \$20,000 for the 2009 Conference year which begins September 1st, 2008. The expected total amount has been decreased so that congregations and circuits may focus on creative and fundraising activities towards financial empowerment and viability. Further, there was a need in the budget to raise the 2009 Circuit general assessments. The increase has been spread over a three year period, and, we believe that our congregations and circuits can and will meet the challenge as we move to a strong financial footing. We encourage all congregations and circuits to exercise fiscal responsibility and also when preparing their own budgets to focus on making their areas financially viable and sustainable by the year 2015.

MISSION, EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH.

- (a) Conference rejoiced that the NOWW programme has been embraced by all Circuits, and encourages the continuation and development of activities and programmes in the areas of ministry concerned.
- (b) Evangelism. As Conference sought to further advance in Mission, it was agreed to make a thrust in evangelism in the form of National Crusades, one such Crusade to be held during the Annual Conference and another, later in the year.
- (c) Social Issues.
 - (i) HIV/AIDS. Conference continues its interest in ministry to persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families, and calls congregations and Circuits to increase their efforts to deepen awareness and sensitivity in members regarding this matter.
 - (ii) Crime and Violence. Conference gave due consideration to the challenge presented by the escalation in crime and violence in our communities, and calls upon congregations to become more actively engaged in working with other agencies to combat crime and violence, and build Christian community. The building of Christian family life, the establishing of relationships with schools, partnership with the police in community building, urban renewal programmes, were some of the areas mentioned as possibilities to be explored. As a church we continue to proclaim a message of hope.
 - (iii) The Disabled (Physically and Mentally challenged). Conference recognized the need to do more to increase awareness of the needs of the Disabled and seeks to develop a policy which addresses their need. Congregations are encouraged to do what they can to promote the well-being of such persons, for example, by making church buildings accessible to them.

- (d) Family Life. Again and again in Conference the importance of the Christian foundation for family life was emphasized. Members are therefore encouraged to deepen Christian home and family life practices.
- (e) Christian Stewardship. The importance of this subject was again emphasized, and circuits and congregations are to implement a Stewardship programme during the year. The programme “Treasures of The Transformed Life” was recommended for use.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Events

The following events were approved by Conference. We commend them to you for your support:-

- (a) Youth Gathering July 25-31, 2008
- (b) Youth Award Ceremony
- (c) Children’s Summit 2009
- (d) Gender Awareness Workshops 2008-2009
- (e) Men’s Treat May 29 – June 1, 2008
- (f) Scripture Examinations April 12, 2008
- (g) Youth Disciple Bible Study 2008-2009

Lay Ministries: Conference reminds members of the various opportunities to participate in Lay Ministry. Members are urged to speak to their minister for further information on these Ministries.

GENERAL EDUCATION. The reports from our three Methodist Schools, St. Paul’s Methodist College (Freeport, Grand Bahama), Wesley Methodist School (Providenciales, Turks & Caicos Islands) and John Wesley Methodist College (Nassau) indicate that they are making good progress, and that there has been an increase in enrolment. We rejoice in the completion of Phase 2 of the building development of Wesley Methodist School, enabling the school to increase its student population. Congregations are encouraged to support the work of our schools.

Conference closed with the Official Conference Service held at Grand Turk Methodist Church, Grand Turk, on Sunday, 20th January, 2008.

May God bless you.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Dr. Raymond R. Neilly
President of Conference

Rev. Derek C. O. Browne
Secretary of Conference