

THE SYKES FAMILY
NEWSLETTER - March 2010
MCCA - Bahamas, Turks & Caicos Islands District

Greetings from Nassau, Bahamas.

I write to you during the season of Lent. On Ash Wednesday I had the privilege in the morning of leading a service of the Imposition of Ashes at John Wesley Methodist College, and later the same day at a Circuit Service. Since then, every Wednesday we have lunchtime meditations at Providence Methodist Church for the whole Circuit.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

In January the 198th Annual Session of Conference for the Bahamas, Turks & Caicos Islands District was held at Wesley, Malcolm Road, New Providence – one of the churches I pastor. I was really impressed with the way the congregation rallied together to do all that was needed to host the event. One has to say that the food is never a disappointment – breakfast specialties included: boiled fish and johnnie cake; chicken, pig's feet or sheep's tongue souse; tuna and grits. For lunch and supper there would inevitably be items such as: crab'n'rice, peas'n'rice, shrimp'n'rice, fried plantains, fried snapper (fish); and if you are lucky minced crawfish. For dessert guava duff is great favorite. As you may guess mealtimes are a great time to fellowship – which is a vital part of conference as persons from all over the district meet together

The Ministerial Session began with a one-day retreat, which I led, using material from Bishop Reuben Job's study entitled "3 Simple Rules for Christian Living." These 3 simple rules, by the way, are: Do No Harm, Do Good, Stay in Love with God. It proved to be a really good day of discussion and fellowship. This year we had the privilege of having the MCCA Connexional President, Rev Dr. George Mulrain with us.

In the business ministerial session one of the joys for me as Ministerial Training Secretary is to process those who are ministers in training or probationary ministers and candidates for the ministry. This year two persons were coming to the end of their studies so were questioned for the last time – as a result, Revs. Evans Lazarre (itinerant presbyter) and Ken Lewis (local presbyter) are recommended to go forward for ordination later this year. A young woman, Kelli Jolly, has been recommended to go forward as a candidate for the ministry.

Events included in the session of conference included the dedication (see above) of the Mission Centre on Quakoo Street – it has been named the Audley Thompson Building in remembrance of the family who gave the building to the church. At the Mission Centre, which is located in the heart of the 'over-the-hill' area there is a thrift shop, children's club and the development of a ministry with the Haitian Community. This is being developed by my Haitian colleague, Rev. Evans Lazarre

We also celebrated Founders Day at John Wesley Methodist College – when the students of the school had a special assembly. I continue to act as chaplain to the school, which is based at Heritage of Redeeming Love Methodist Church, which I am also the pastor of. The school is going well at one level, in that we now have some 50 students, but at another level is in need of resources so that it can fulfil its task more effectively. There is hope that the school may be given Crown Land by the government to build a proper campus. At present the school relies on using the facilities of Heritage of Redeeming Love Methodist Church

The worship highlights of conference, for me, were the Ordination Service for Rev. Leonard Roberts, Jr. who is a local presbyter in the Nassau Circuit. The other was the singing by the Circuit Children's Choir. At the youth event on the Saturday evening – the ministers formed a choir and did a turn at the talent show, which was a lot of fun.

This year, as Rev. Dr. Raymond Neilly comes to the end of his term of office as president of the District, there were new appointments to be voted on. The results are as follows:

President – Rev. Derek C. O. Browne
Secretary of Conference – Rev. Eddie Sykes
Treasurer – Mr. Arthur Chase

Vice President – Mrs. Judy Munroe
Asst Secretary – Rev. Cecil Newbold
Asst. Treasurer – Rev. Ken Lewis

All except for Rev. Ken Lewis are first time appointments to their respective offices. All appointments commence on 1st September 2010. Your prayers for all of us, as we take up our duties, are much appreciated.

Rev. Raymond Neilly will take up his new appointment in Eleuthera, with Rev. Livingston Malcolm (a Bahamian, whose mother is a member at Wesley) coming from Jamaica to serve in the Nassau Circuit. Other changes involved the Revs. Mark and Stacia Christmas going to Grand Turk and Rev. Frednor Toussaint going in the opposite direction to Andros

Throughout conference a candle was lit and daily offerings received for the relief work being done in Haiti following the devastating earthquake – both of our Haitian colleagues, Evans Lazarre and Frednor Toussaint, lost family members or friends in the midst of the devastation.

In the business session of conference, funding and resources were big topics for discussion. In the District there are currently about a dozen major building projects on the go or are soon to commence. The membership of the District now stands at just under 2,000 persons.

LIGNUM VITAE CENTRE OF THE BAHAMAS (LVC)

This is a new name that you will be hearing more about as time goes by. Due to increasing frustrations with the way that the 'All Saints Community' was not being run effectively, or with any kind of accountability, after some two years of seeking to form an 'All Saints Board', and basically getting no-where, the group formerly known as "Friends of All Saints", of which myself, Rev. Kenneth Huggins, and Ms. Ronique Tinker (a member at Heritage Church) were a part, have decided to branch out in hope and faith and form this new 'Not for Profit (NPO)' organization to do the kind of work that we feel really needs to be done for those living with HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses, that is not being covered by any other caring institution in the Bahamas. We are particularly pleased that a member of the newly formed Board for the NPO (of which Ken, Ronique and myself are members) is a lecturer from the College of the Bahamas, who has a passion for the psycho-social work that needs to be done to link such needy persons back with their families and communities – something that was badly lacking at All Saints, which since the death of its founder – Rev. Glenroy Nottage – has become a place where those who have no-where else to go are simply left. At LVC an emphasis will be placed on families, with the aim of giving the right kind of therapeutic care needed – a more holistic approach focused on the needs of the individual/family. We also have managed to form a link with a Medical College in the USA, which is giving us advice and help as well. The Board itself so far covers a broad spectrum of interested parties. It is a wonderful experience to see such enthusiasm for creating this NPO to help those in need after such a time of frustration.

With regards to our roll at All Saints – we are still committed to visitation, and providing for the community in terms of food items, toiletries and the like, and will support where we can any work that is done to improve the facilities. We continue to pay for Antonique's schooling, and hear that she is doing remarkably well, and is benefitting greatly. A large church in the USA, Calvary Chapel out of Fort Lauderdale, which has a mission and education centre in the Bahamas, called the Adventure Learning Centre (ALC), is seeking to develop the All Saints facility with its own vision, and will be bringing in work teams from USA to do that over time. It is possible that one day the ALC may oversee the running of the community.

One of the sad facts about the lack of accountability at All Saints is that it is open to a wide variety of charitable and church groups who, I believe, mean well, but there is no co-ordination of effort, which was one of the aims of Friends of All Saints. Some of the Christian groups who would go there were happy to give charity, but few were interested in the deeper justice and health/wholeness issues which we found ourselves getting involved in. What was particularly disappointing was that none of the government ministries, including health or social services, were interested in taking over the community, yet the main hospital was happy to discharge patients there when they needed the beds.

So it was after a long struggle and truly wanting the best for the residents of All Saints that this new vision for LVC came about. So, if all goes well, then those who are currently at All Saints, who qualify for the kind of care/therapy that we intend to offer, will be welcome to get the care they deserve at LVC.

PASTORAL NEWS

As a pastor, one is always inspired by the saints of the church, who show remarkable faith during times of 'challenging' health. Two such persons are Maxine and Madge.

Maxine was diagnosed a couple of years ago with a benign tumour on her brain, and since then experienced two operations which seemed at the time to be successful. Prior to this she had been diagnosed with breast cancer, which after surgery and chemo is in remission. Since Christmas the brain tumour was seen to have grown, and now a third surgery is seen to be out of the question – currently she is undergoing radiation treatment, and whenever she can, as she has throughout the last four challenging years, she will be worshipping and leading the prayer circle. Last year she served, with remarkable energy and drive, as a Circuit Steward!

Madge hails originally from the Turks and Caicos Islands, although has lived in the Bahamas 40+ years, and like Maxine she was diagnosed with breast cancer, which I am glad to report through similar treatment is in remission. Recently she returned from Miami where she had major back-surgery following years of back pain and is doing remarkably well – in some ways looking like Joan of Arc with her PVC body mould on. Her spirit is remarkable, and like Maxine her infectious joy for her Lord and sense of thankfulness is truly wonderful. Both ladies of faith strongly affirm “God is Good – all the time”, and to that I say - Amen! Please keep Maxine and Madge, and their families, in your prayers.

Concerning other pastoral news, our oldest member, Sis. Rhona Major, died during the week between Christmas Day and the New Year aged 100 years old. As the eulogy was given by a family friend I was amazed to learn of some of her experiences growing up first in Governor’s Harbour, Eleuthera, where she was the post-mistress and latterly in Nassau. All the time I have been in Nassau she has been on the monthly home communion schedule, and always looked forward to this time of fellowship and worship. My last visit to her was the Tuesday before Christmas and our parting words to each other were “Merry Christmas”.

At the other end of the age spectrum over the next two months I will be baptizing five infants – two of whom are twin sisters. Their names incidentally are: Samaire, Madyson, Zhara and Zharan – all girls, by the way. On the Sunday after Easter I also have the joy of going to Andros for the weekend to baptize the son, Zuriel, of my colleagues Mark and Stacia Christmas.

STUDIES/TRAINING

The Lenten Study we are following this year is “Wesley’s 3 Simple Rules for Christian Living” by Rueben Job – the same study which I ‘previewed’ at the Conference Minister’s retreat. So far it is going very well, as persons, for example, realized that to “Do No Harm” actually takes effort and focus, and is not synonymous with ‘do nothing’.

On a quarterly basis I also try to get all the lay leaders – stewards, class leaders, etc - together for a leadership training seminar – currently we are looking at how we use our gifts through the leadership role, and how we can help others with their unique gifts and graces express themselves in the life of the church.

250 YEARS OF METHODISM IN THE CARIBBEAN

2010 is the 250th anniversary. Special celebrations will be held in Antigua during May, which I have been invited to attend, and hopefully will have ripple effect across the region. At this celebration event there will be the launch of the new MCCA Hymnal – ‘Voices in Praise’. This will in fact replace the 1933 Methodist Hymn Book (from Britain), which is currently used by the MCCA. The “*Growing in Fullness*” Church School Curriculum series will also be launched during this conference.

BAHAMA FACTS

While waiting to pick up an insurance policy for the car I drive, I browsed through the January-June 2010 copy of ‘*The Bahamas Investor*’. It contained this information about the Bahamas, which I thought might interest you:

Population: 2008 estimate = 338,300 with annual growth of 1.8%

Approx. 65% of the population live on New Providence (feels like more!)

Approx. 30% population are under 15 years, and approx. 8% are 65 years or older.

The Bahamas archipelago covering about 100,000 sq. miles (258,998 sq. km) includes some 700 islands/cays

Total land-mass of the Bahamas is about 5,382 sq. miles (13,939 sq. km). (There’s a lot of ocean!)

Bimini, the closest islands of the Bahamas to the USA, lie some 50 miles off the Florida coast.

There are approx. 4,900 persons employed in banking, 400+ chartered accountants, and 800+ lawyers

There are approx. 250 banks and trust companies of which 125 are subsidiaries originating from 28 countries.

The annual average per capita income in 2007 was estimated at \$20,000 (\$1 Bahamian = \$1 US)

Independence Day is 10th July 1973, when the Bahamas became an independent, self-governing nation.

The political system is based on the British Westminster model with a Governor General, Prime Minister and a Parliament. The two primary political parties are the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), which held power from 1967-1992 and from 2002-2007, and the Free National Movement (FNM), which governed between 1992-2002, and from 2007 to the present day. The next elections are due in 2012. Queen Elizabeth II is the nation's sovereign. Hubert Ingraham, who is the current Prime Minister, presides over a 41 member parliament (24 FNM; 17 PLP)

FURLOUGH

I am grateful that I have been allowed to 'split' my furlough in two this summer, meaning that I will be on furlough in UK from 4th May – 8th June with Thomas joining me for 3 weeks, and from 7th July to early August with Susan. All the Sundays for preaching have now been taken, but if you would like me to do an OM event during the week there are still possibilities. The reason for the split is that Thomas' High School Graduation takes place in June, and I am committed to taking a group of teenagers to youth camp in USA, where I will be a 'minister in residence' (MIR).

FAMILY NEWS

Susan continues to do well as she teaches second year students at St Andrews International School. She (and Thomas) recently enjoyed a mid-term break in Maryville, Tennessee where they visited Jonathan, and also spent time with friends from our days at St John. Her mother (Rose) is keeping in good health, and has coped well since the death of Susan's father two years ago.

Jonathan will not be travelling to the UK this summer – he intends to earn some money, and instead may travel to see the family in January 2011. He is enjoying his studies at Maryville College, and is currently taking his Tennessee Teaching License. He loves being part of the soccer squad, and has enjoyed the practical aspects of teaching/coaching sports in the local schools.

Thomas is really looking forward to joining Jonathan at Maryville College (MC) where he intends to study engineering. He is also glad that he will be close to the UMC Wesley Woods Camp, where he will be working as a volunteer this summer prior to enrolment at MC. Incidentally because of its Presbyterian roots the MC nickname is "The Scots".

As ever we thank you for your prayers and encouragement.

May God continue to guide us and bless us,

Edward, Susan, Jonathan and Thomas Sykes