

Partnership Coordinator for Africa

Visit to Lesotho & Benin

25 February – 14 March 2023



Lesotho Consultation.



With AMC Heads of Methodist Churches in Africa. Porto Nuovo. Benin.

Purpose of Visit:

- **To accompany an ‘All We Can’ Consultation with the Methodist Church in Lesotho.**
 - **To visit local Churches and Institutions in Lesotho.**
 - **To attend the Africa Methodist Council meeting in Benin.**
- **To share discussions with Methodist Heads of Churches and encourage a final decision on the way forward for the African Mission Fund.**
 - **To share developments at MCB.**
 - **To discuss and share vision for future partnership.**

The Methodist Church in Lesotho is part of a District that comprises both Lesotho and part of New Free State District of South Africa. This Consultation was arranged by All We Can and funded by MCB to prepare for the possibility of enabling the Methodist Church in Lesotho to become a District/Synod in itself. I joined to represent MCB. This was the first time that the Methodist Circuits in Lesotho had come together for such discussions. We also took the opportunity to travel extensively across Lesotho to visit Circuits and see the context. The visit was transformative for the Methodist leaders and members in Lesotho who were uplifted by the Consultation and are moving forward with vision and commitment. The following report was written by the Consultation Facilitator: Retha Mahopolo

Report on MCSA MISSION UNIT and ALL WE CAN Visit to Lesotho Written by Retha Mahopolo.

Date: February 26th 2023 to March 6th 2023

Delegation: Bishop Mamoalusi Mothupi (NFS&L)
Rev Musi Lusaba (MCO Mission Unit)
Nancy Heron (MCO Mission Unit)
Rev Desmond Mmutle (NFS&L District Mission Coordinator)
Rev Kabelo Gaolatloe (NFS&L Regional Mission Coordinator)
David Kalete (All We Can)
Rev. Andrew Ashdown (MCB)
Retha Mahopolo (Semonkong Childrens Center/ Facilitator)

Purpose

The purpose of the exercise was to assess the work and effectiveness of Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Lesotho and to develop a common understanding of challenges, needs and possible areas of growth and development within the church. Thence to establish a response to the expressed needs and a strategic plan for the way forward.

Background

All We Can assists local church communities to become self-sustaining through community-based projects. They empower membership through education and economic development and promote the growth and development of the church using local resources. Some preliminary on-line workshops were done prior to this visit. The visit to the selected circuits around Lesotho was to do an initial assessment and establish the relationship required at circuit level to be able to move forward effectively.

The circuits visited were:

- Leribe Circuit led by Rev. Kabelo Gaolatlhe
- Makhotlong Circuit led by Rev. Gift Legodi
- Qacha's Nek led by Rev. Mpiyakhe Mzizi
- Semonkong Children's Care Center managed by Retha Mahopolo with the church being represented by Evangelist Mahlatsi.



Leribe Circuit Methodist School



Leribe Circuit Meeting



Mokhotlong.

On Saturday March 4th, an initial inception meeting/ workshop was held in Maseru with representatives from all circuits, the Superintendents, Ministers and Evangelist. Mr. David Kalete from All We Can shared background information about the organization and the basis of its partnership. Rev. Andrew Ashdown, Partnership Coordinator for Africa for MCB, shared examples of work being done and supported by the organization in different countries across Africa within and in some cases outside of the Methodist Church.



Mokhotlong Consultation



Qacha's Nek Methodist Orphanage. Qacha's Nek Meeting.



Retha. Semonkong Manager



Semonkong meeting.



Consultation in Maseru.

Findings

The scope of discussion in all the circuits was to establish the current activities in the circuits, the challenges being faced and the possible solutions to those problems in order to become self-sustaining.

Common challenges raised across all circuits are:

1. Lack of financial resources

All circuits have been unable to get their desired projects going due to financial constraints.

In Mokhotlong they had their utilities disconnected due to lack of funds and this has hindered the projects they have in mind.

Leribe started projects that failed to kick off for the same reason.

The Methodist Primary School in Leribe is a non-fee-paying school resulting in difficulties in maintenance of the property and failure to comply with the requirements for children with challenges i.e building ramps for children who use wheel chairs.

The Semonkong Children's Centre has managed to start up projects for food security and generation of income but what is generated is not sufficient to cover the costs of running the organization - particularly the staff salaries. It therefore relies heavily on donors who are beginning to question what percentage of the operational costs the church is contributing and why.

2. High levels of unemployment.

All circuits raised this as a challenge impacting their finances and causing a hindrance to church growth. Many congregants have left the church because they cannot keep up with the financial demands to be able to keep circuits and society's functioning.

There are no job opportunities. This has led to a large exodus of youth and the able-bodied to other towns in pursuit of greener pastures.

In Mokhotlong the congregation is largely made up of elderly ladies most of whom are beyond the age of employment but are not yet of age to qualify for the social grant.

In Qacha's Nek the high levels of unemployment have led to a rise in human trafficking and other social ills such as alcohol and substance abuse, gangsterism, school drop outs and teenage pregnancy, murder, rape and other crimes.

3. Geographic Challenges

Lesotho is very mountainous and this causes a challenge particularly for circuits and societies such as Mokhotlong, Qacha's Nek and Semonkong, which are situated across the mountain range. The challenges are centred around extreme weather conditions and difficult accessibility. The distance between the circuits and society's is a large contributing factor towards poor church growth.

The Semonkong Childrens Centre's effort to venture into selling produce from their farming project faced challenges due its geographic location i.e the harsh and unpredictable weather and the transportation costs to the main target market which was Maseru and Qacha's Nek.

4. Governance issues

Some of the challenges raised are purely to do with poor governance faced by the country as a whole.

The largest Diamond mine in the country, Letseng Diamonds as well as the largest water project in the country, the Podihadi Dam, are both located in Mokhotlong yet the communities surrounding these establishments are living in abject poverty which negatively impacts the church.

Poor service delivery has led to complications and frustrations that have a bearing on the church.

Social grants are too meagre to meet the basic needs of the recipients and the qualification age of 70years is not practical because most are out of employment well before that age and due to the exodus of able-bodied people, they find themselves being the primary care givers for their grandchildren.

For Semonkong Children's Center, the government through the Ministry of Social Development places children at the facility but do not give the financial assistance required to care for them.

4. Low morale within the church

Years of conflict within the church caused a number of people to fall away. Congregations have reduced significantly and this has demoralised many. Some of the project ideas raised simply require team work and support e.g starting a food garden in Mokhotlong.

There is a Chapel at the Semonkong Childrens Centre but after a local conflict arose, there are no congregants left and the Centre has had to come up with strategies to resolve the poor relations that had developed between the church and the community.

In Qacha's Nek the MCSA chapel and mission house have been taken over by a different Methodist denomination and the congregants had to find a small room in which to hold their services. The Minister is located in Quthing, which is quite a distance away and this has aggravated the already existing challenges.

All the Circuits visited have brilliant and viable project ideas and not all of them require external funding for them to take off. Some motivation, teamwork and support can get the projects started.

5. Idle/ under-utilised assets and resources

The church in Lesotho has many assets and resources that are either lying idle or under-utilised. The Mokhotlong church property could be used for an array of activities that could benefit the community and bring people back to the church. They have lost some portions of land that initially belonged to MCSA but which have now been allocated to other people.

Much land in the Qacha's Nek/Quthing circuit is lying idle.

Leribe have land on which they intend to build a High School, but a plan is required to make this happen. They have a pigsty already built and just need to start the project whilst they work towards establishing it.

Mafeteng have a fully fledged chicken coop lying idle. There are skilled congregants within the church who are able to make clothing, slippers, lotions and cosmetic oils etc. If this assortment of skills can be harnessed and channelled towards community partnerships, there can be growth in the church.

Semonkong has a property in desperate need of attention.

There is an urgent need to carry out an audit to ascertain what assets the church owns and to come up with viable plans for their productive use.

Inception Meeting/ workshop

At the inception meeting held in Maseru on March 4th, 2023 the representatives from the five Lesotho circuits were engaged on the findings from exercise.

Discussions considered the following questions:

1. Where are we as a church?
2. What are our needs?
3. What resources do we have?
4. How can we use our resources to answer to our needs before we seek external help?
5. Motivation to get started.

All were in agreement that the MCSA Lesotho is not where it would wish to be. Relationships and commitment within the church need to improve before requesting external funding for any projects.

The presentation for All We Can showed that Poverty is personal and so is the solution. Support is not just money - it is also about partnership with and within the local community. One of the desired outcomes of this organizational assessment exercise will be to change the mind-set of the church in Lesotho through empowerment of local people.

Rev. Dr. Andrew Ashdown gave a Presentation sharing inspiring stories from countries such as Malawi, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Cameroon and many others facing governance challenges similar to or even worse than Lesotho. The motivation behind the stories was to realise that we can use our own available resources to start the process of steering the church towards growth not just in numbers but in quality as well.

The greatest need identified was not money but rather a mind-set and attitudinal change. Feedback received was that an inward-looking focus has become a hindrance to the successful running of projects.

During discussions, a list of all known church assets and resources was made and discussion was held as to why they are not being utilised and what possible projects might emerge.

It was agreed that each circuit should identify one project that can immediately be started with available resources and to start being innovative in handling some of the challenges are encountered. For instance in Mokhotlong they have enough land at the church premise to start a garden. The water was disconnected because of an unpaid bill but if each congregant brings some water from their home, the project can get started whilst they work on means of getting their water reconnected.

At the Semonkong Centre, a pig was given by the St Leonard Mission to rear for meat. The Centre now has 1 male pig, 4 females (2 pregnant) and 14 piglets. From one gift, a viable, productive project has emerged because of careful management.

Follow up visits will be made to carry out assessments and discuss further ways of bringing back life to the MCSA Lesotho. It is only after there has been success in these initial projects and a noted change in mind-set that All We Can will be approached for financial assistance. In the meantime the circuits have been encouraged to apply for a grant available from MCO for their chosen projects.

The next step will be to develop projects that can be achieved at regional level such as growing marijuana for medicinal and other products.

On-going Process.

On Monday March 6th, 2023 a meeting was held with Mr. David Kalete, Rev. Mmutle and Retha to discuss the process to be followed throughout 2023 for organizational assessment and strategic planning:

1. Engaging local facilitator (done).
2. Relationship building through circuit visits (done).

2b. Inception meeting (done).

3. Identify Internal Change Team (ICT) to work with facilitator - All We Can encourages partners to take full responsibility of the Organizational Assessment process. The ICT will work alongside the facilitator to articulate key issues in each circuit.

Time line last week of March

4. Clarify expectations and building ownership of the Organizational Assessment (OA) process to enable a church-wide understanding of organizational development and the OA process. This will entail the facilitator visiting each circuit and helping them explore and understand what Organizational Development is, what it entails and how it enables sustained organizational growth.

Time line 1st week of April

5. Prepare for self-diagnostic organizational survey process to enable the facilitator and the ICT to understand the church better as they plan and prepare for the actual Organizational Assessment process. They will make use of the Book of Order and review church documents and capacity markers.

Time line Month of April

6. Data Collection and collating process to organise collected data in preparation for the larger church-wide diagnostic process.

Time Line 1st week of May

7. Church-wide self diagnostic process to facilitate the Church to assess itself based on data collected and any new information presented during the workshop, in order to generate a shared and holistic picture of the capacity gaps and how this is affecting its effectiveness in fulfilling its mission and vision. This should support responsibility taking for change, develop a change plan and action steps to effect the change plan.

Time line last week of May

8. Validation of Organizational Development report and plan to verify and validate the outcome from the Organizational Development process and the workshop.

Time line June 2023

9. Strategic Planning Process for in-depth exploration and development of MCSA Lesotho strategy in the church. The purpose being to facilitate the organization to:

- i. Generate a shared understanding of what strategy is and its importance.
- ii. Review the current strategy
- iii. Review and affirm the foundational commitment of the church i.e the vision, mission and core values.
- iv. Identify opportunities and challenges with strategic relevance to the vision and mission
- v. Prioritize identified issues in relation to the church mission and vision
- vi. Affirm the overall goals and strategic objectives, activities and work plan
- vii. Incorporate issues from the Organizational Assessment process.
- viii. Document a risk assessment and management plan

Time line August 2023

10. Developing the Theory of Change and Monitoring Framework

All We Can could arrange for this to be done through a separate workshop process to avoid fatigue on the part of the church.

Time line October to December 2023

Starting to implement the strategy.

Proposed Budget

Facilitators Compensation	R13000.00/month (9months April to Dec) = R117,000
Regional Missions Coordinator	R1500 per seating = R6,000
ICT Stipends (five @R800 each)	R4000.00/ seating (4 seatings) = R16,000
Fuel Costs	R6800.00
Travelling Costs	R9600.00
Accommodation Costs	R10380.00
Meals (for all participants)	R12000.00
Stationery	R3000.00
Internet connection	R650.00/month (9 months) = R5850
Miscellaneous (extra travel&accommodation)	R18000.00
TOTAL:	R 204,630 = Circa £9000



Melatsanye Falls, Lesotho.

Visit to BENIN **7 – 13 March 2023**

Eglise Protestante Methodiste du Benin (EPMB)

The church was founded in 1843 by Thomas Birch Freeman of the Methodist Missionary Society of London. Freeman, the son of a freed slave, also undertook pioneering missionary work in Ghana and western Nigeria. The church maintains its historical links with the Methodist Church of Great Britain. Administratively the Methodist Church of Benin is organized in 15 regional synods. It covers the whole of the territory of Benin from the southern coastline to the Niger border in the north. The church is recognized as playing an active role in the life of the nation: it is involved in agricultural projects, in hospital and prison chaplaincy, in service to refugees; through its strong Union of Methodist Women it is directly concerned with the training of young girls and young women in rural areas, enabling them to have a basic education and to learn income-generating skills.

The Benin Methodist Church plays a leading role in the National Committee to Combat AIDS, but also, at local church level and through the women's union, it works to promote AIDS awareness and prevention.

AMC Conference

From 7- 12 March, I attended the Second General Conference of the Africa Methodist Council in Benin. Conrad Hicks was also present for 3 days of the proceedings. MCB had helped to fund the attendance of some of the Heads of Churches and Lay Representatives from across Africa. This was the largest gathering of Representatives from all Methodist Partners in Africa and the first to include all Methodist Church Heads of Churches in person in one place. It was therefore a historic occasion, bringing together Methodists from across the Continent to consider shared concerns and set forth a shared vision for the future.

Importantly, the Conference was also the opportunity for face-to-face discussions between the Heads of Churches about what to do with the Africa Funds held by MCB that have to be handed over to the Continent by the end of 2024. Extensive consultation has taken place during the past year both online and in-person between MCB and African partners and during meetings with Heads of Churches but the dilemma had not been resolved. After considerable discussion, the Heads of Churches voted by majority in favour of distributing the funds between MCB partners across Africa. This process will be completed by the end of 2023.



Conrad with Heads of Churches – Rwanda, Kenya, Ghana. Andrew with Prelate & Sec. of Conference, Nigeria.

The following is the official Communique from the leadership of the AMC about the meeting. (It does not include mention of the MCB Funds for Africa issue as representatives of other Churches were also present and this subject was a 'side' discussion at the event):

**Communique from the 2nd General Conference of the Africa Methodist Council.
Held at Mission Source de Vie, Cotonou, Benin.
7th – 12th March 2023.**

PREAMBLE:

The 2nd Quadrennial General Conference of the Africa Methodist Council was held at Mission Source de Vie, Cotonou, Benin from Tuesday, 7 - Sunday, 12 March, 2023. The Conference was based on the theme: "Transformation for Impactful Social Holiness", inspired by the words of our father in faith, John Wesley, who stated that "The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness, but social holiness".

The General Conference received the reports on the general management of the Council and the Africa Methodist Awards for Ecumenism were presented to the Most Rev. Michael Kehinde Stephen (Retired Archbishop of Ibadan, Methodist Church Nigeria) and Dr. Olubunmi Olayisade (Immediate Past Partnership Coordinator for The Methodist Church Britain).

In attendance were representatives of the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC), Global Christian Fellowship, the Methodist Church Britain, World Methodist Council and delegates from Ghana, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Rwanda, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Gambia, Southern Africa, Cameroun, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique and Equatorial Guinea.

During the keynote address based on the conference theme "Transformation for Impactful Social Holiness, Rev Godson Lawson Kpavuvu, President, Methodist Church Togo reminded the delegates that the Church must be perpetually reformed. *"No organized structure, including the 2000+ year old Church of Jesus Christ, can escape the transformation taking place in the world. For with globalisation, environmental changes and economic and financial crises, the world today is undergoing major social transformations that are leading to an increase in inequality, extreme poverty, exclusion and the denial of fundamental rights. These changes point to a need for innovative solutions that promote the universal values of peace, human dignity, gender equality, non-violence and non-discrimination"*.

He decried the fact that rather than being part of the solutions many churches are at the centre of financial abuses with an immoderate taste for power and love of power; and that the election and appointment of church leadership instead of being moments of celebration, often become periods of great trials, heartbreak, split and tears. In addition to this *"our propensity to collect titles and create systems of protocol that distance us from the ordinary people in our communities"*. These issues will not bring about the positive transformation we seek. Rev Kpavuvu claimed that one of the greatest paradoxes and ironies of the modern holiness movement has been the tendency of individuals and churches who remain in the tradition of John Wesley to claim their spiritual heritage but not their social heritage. Methodists must hold fast to both the spiritual and the social. *"The gospel of Christ knows no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness."*

Led by the interim Chairperson of the AMC Women's Movement, Rev Purity Malinga, The International Women's Day was commemorated through dance and song and two challenging addresses by Mrs Vivian Fiscian and Rev Dr Fifame Fidele Gandonou Houssou that spoke to the theme: Combatting Digital Gender Inequality and Online Gender Based Violence.

Through rigorous discussion and robust engagement, The General Conference adopted strategies to streamline the Council's activities on the continent and grow the footprint of the Africa Methodist Council.

At the end of the Conference, the General Conference resolved to implement the following:

1. The Conference believes that the youth and young people must be instruments of grace in the society and create inclusive opportunities to collaborate and build networks while providing them with practical skills through capacity building programmes from the formative stages.
2. The Conference calls on the Church to defend the rights of the poor and needy, especially those who are in captivity due to terrorist attacks, human trafficking, and forced labour.
3. The Conference calls on the Church to encourage gender equality in practical terms, as a model for the society to follow.
4. Transformation for impactful social holiness implies that the Church should speak out on issues such as identity crises, sexual perversions, poverty/unemployment, abuse of social media by advocating for Christian education, youth empowerment, mentorship, and capacity Building.
5. Transformation for impactful social holiness calls on all Methodist Conferences to be missional in nature by each member living out a transformed life in the society.
6. The Conference affirmed that impactful social holiness for inter-faith engagement in a religiously polarised Africa may be achieved through engaging people of other faiths in matters that would impact positively on society.
7. The urgency of the transformation of the African Society calls for awareness and a commitment to the path of holiness in order that justice can bring peace to the hearts of Methodists and Africans and have a lasting impact on people.

Elections were conducted during the Conference, and the following are the new officials of the Council for the next four years. All officers except the General Secretary assumed office immediately after the election, the General Secretary elect would assume office after a transitional period for handing over from the outgoing General Secretary.

The elections were executed within the guidance of the existing 2019 Constitution of the Africa Methodist Council.

President: Most Rev. Dr. Paul K. Bofo (Presiding Bishop, Methodist Church Ghana).

Vice Presidents:

Francophone West Africa – Rev. Godson Lawson Kpavuvu. (President, Methodist Church Togo).

Anglophone West Africa – His Eminence, Dr. Oliver Ali Aba (Prelate, Methodist Church Nigeria).

East Africa – Bishop Joseph Bundala (Presiding Bishop, Tanzania Methodist Church).
Southern Africa – Bishop George Mawire (Methodist Church Zimbabwe).

General Secretary-elect: Rev. Dr. Martin Mujinga – Methodist Church Zimbabwe.

Honorary Treasurer: Very Rev. Anthony Kwamena Cobbah- Methodist Church Ghana.

Coordinating Secretaries:

Justice, Development, Peace and Reconciliation: Rev. Dr. Tiburce Kpamegan (Methodist Church Benin).

Communications: Ms. Bongikosi Moyo-Bango (Methodist Church Southern Africa).

Mission and Evangelism: Rt. Rev. Emmanuel Asare Kusi (Methodist Church Ghana).

Wesleyan Studies and Leadership Development: Rev. Dr. Mary Kinoti (Methodist Church in Kenya).

The Africa Methodist Men’s Movement was initiated at the 2023 General Conference. The following are the interim officers:

Chairman: Bro. Edward Kwame Ofori (Methodist Church Ghana)

Secretary: Bro. Reuben Atsu Kugblenu

Members:

- Bishop Hawkins Mugaya
- Gear Hanyane
- Rev. Kouadio Obo Clotaire

Conclusion

The General Conference appreciates the effort of the host, Methodist Church Benin as led by His Eminence Prof, Kponjesu Amos Hounsa and all the outgone executives for the foundation which had been laid successfully and all the Conferences who took part in the 2nd General Conference. We are reminded that John Wesley stated “The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness, but social holiness”.

Very Rev. Opeyemi Awe. General Secretary

12 March 2023

After the Conference, delegates were taken to the former slaving port of Ouidah, 90 minutes west of Cotonou. There, we visited a ‘sacred forest’, a ‘Python Temple’, and the site of the former slave market as well as the ‘Point of no return’ on the coast. This was one of the many locations along the coast of West Africa where tens of thousands of slaves were sold and shipped to Europe, the Carribean and the Americas.



Ouidah. Site of Slave market.



Ouidah



Gate of no Return.

On the Sunday morning, we visited the town of Porto Novo, an hour east of Cotonou. Here, in the presence of most of the Heads of Methodist Churches in Africa, Revd Dr. Andrew Ashdown, MCB Partnership Coordinator for Africa was invited to preach. Afterwards, we visited the ‘Good Samaritan Hospital’, a hospital that has been supported by MCB, the ‘Universite Protestante de L’Afrique de l’Ouest’ (UPAO), another partner of MCB, and also attended a Lady’s Day Celebration.



Porto Novo. Good Samaritan Hospital



UPAO. Porto Novo.



Lady’s Day Celebration. Porto Novo.

Instrumental in translating during the AMC Conference was our NMA, Constant Lokossou, Protocol and Translation Officer for the Methodist Church in Benin. The Conference proved an invaluable opportunity for bringing representatives from across Africa together to share and strengthen friendship, understanding, challenges and vision.



With NMA Constant Lokossou.



Some of the delegates of the AMC Conference. Benin.