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Ordination and Non-Itinerant Ministry.

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Introduction:

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa ordains Ministers who do not itinerate. This is a recent innovation, and as such, Conference has asked us to reflect on the effectiveness of this ministry. The task of DEWCOM is to ask the theological questions of this, and leave the training and practical application to other departments of our church.

Ordination

The Methodist Church sets aside particular men and women through ordination. The only context in which the ministries of ordained deacons and presbyters can be rightly understood is that of the calling of all people, lay and ordained, to participate equally, yet distinctively, in God's mission in the world. All followers of Christ are called to the ministry of **service**: service to God, service to the Church, and service to the world. It is the pattern of Christ's ministry and so must be evident in the ministry of every believer. Deacons and Presbyters are set aside to express, enable, and focus the ministry of the whole people of God. This is therefore a ministry of mission, that reaches beyond the confines of the institution. We make some missional concessions when we lock 'Ordination to word and sacrament' to the congregation, instead of extending it to include the work of the whole Church, both gathered and scattered.

Traditionally the ordained ministry has had three primary functions:

- **Participation** in the ministry and mission of the Church as a disciple along with all other disciples.
- **Coordinating** the other disciples in their worship and mission, as a primary focus of their vocation.
- **Equipping** all disciples for mission and worship.

This is a relationship defined by the Vows of Ordination. These admit the Minister to the Order of Ministry, and it is the tradition of the Methodist Church that once Ordained, this minister cannot be "unordained."¹ In addition to admission to the Order of Ministry, the Methodist Church also admits the Ordinand into Full Connexion with our Denomination – viz: the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. This is understood as a reciprocal relationship, where the Methodist Church offers opportunity to exercise ministry, within a system of accountability. The extent to which Ordained Ministers are able to share effectively in the creative, re-creative, restorative and reconciling work of the Church is in direct proportion to the extent to which the Church has been instrumental in their creation, recreation, restoration and reconciliation.

The question never debated by the Methodist Church is the extent to which the Vows of Ordination bind the Minister to obey the Conference of the MCSA. It has always been assumed that these Vows of obedience are all encompassing. This assumption is best

¹ Some in our group would want us to re-visit this. There is a suggestion that ordination belongs to the denomination and not to the individual. And when an individual leaves the denomination that person is no longer a minister.

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expressed by the questions that are asked at the public examination of Ordinands, such as “Do you accept our Discipline?” and “Will you go where you are sent?”

This should also be the case for non-itinerant Ministers. While Non-Itinerant Ministers are not at the disposal of Conference, their Ordination Vows ask whether they will be obedient to the Doctrine and Practices of the MCSA. . While some suggest that unlike itinerant Ministers, non-itinerant Ministers get to choose where they will exercise their ministry and therefore this is a ministry on the terms of the minister, it must be pointed out that non-itinerant ministry is always at the invitation of the Circuit Quarterly Meeting, and as such is not the prerogative of the non-itinerant Minister. In addition, to “go where one is sent” is more than just geography – this is the requirement to be available for Ministry wherever the Minister is needed, whether this is agreeable to the natural inclinations of the Minister or contrary to them.

However, it should be noted as a matter of concern, that some Non-itinerant Ministers find themselves in conflict with the demands of the Methodist Church. Examples of this are those non-itinerant Ministers who earn their own income (“tent-making” ministries, or “market-place” ministers), who will have moments when they find themselves facing a choice between the wishes of their employer and the wishes of their Church. When it comes to a direct choice of who has “first call” on their time, invariably the one who pays the salary has a greater call on the time of the Minister.

Different Ordinations?

This then begs the question: is there such a thing as “part-time ordination”, or “after-hours” ordination? Is it possible to be an ordained Minister within the Methodist Church of SA, but to allow for an employer to have the first call on the time of that Minister?

- The point must be made that the presence of an Ordained Minister in the work place is also a ministry, and so the MCSA should allow for Ministers who exercise their ministry within a secular work environment. After all, Jesus sent us out “into the world” to be his ministers, and as such a working, non-itinerant minister fulfil this mandate. There are many 'sacramental' and 'proclamation' tasks that are performed by ministers of the Church outside of the congregation (See Col 3.23-24). At the same time it must be noted that all Christ-followers are called to be in the market place. The critical question is whether the task being done in the work place demands the presence of an ordained minister or not. If this task is not specific to the ministry of Ordination, then there is no need for a non-itinerant minister.
- The original intention of non-itinerant ministers was missional. This is about establishing God’s mission in areas that have no Ordained Ministers. This is a category of Ministry that goes beyond the reach of a stipendiary Ministry, and offers the presence of an Ordained Minister where none can exist. Therefore the non-itinerancy becomes an essential ingredient to planting new work for Christ. Some have pointed out that what remains unanswered is why non-itinerancy is essential to this. Surely the church can station an itinerant “tent-making” Minister in a mission situation, and once this ministry has established itself, the position can be re-evaluated. Therefore, while non-itinerancy can be a useful tool in mission, it cannot be seen as an indispensable part of establishing new work.

Disclaimer: Please note that this paper does not represent the views of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa or DEWCOM, unless specified otherwise. 3

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In conclusion we want to affirm the principle that there are not different ordinations. Rather there are a variety of Ministries that recognize the gifting, celebrate the fruit of the ministry, and place them under the care and discipline of the Church – by means of one Ordination.