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Status: Discussion document

URL: <http://mcsadewcom.blogspot.com/2007/03/stipends-within-mcsa.html>

Stipends within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

A Response from the Doctrine Ethics and Worship Committee

THE METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF THIS DOCUMENT

This DEWCOM document is in response to the conference resolution of 2003 (refer to Appendix A) and the subsequent discussion document for Ministers and Members of The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) regarding Minister's stipends that was produced by the General Treasurers and MCO Executive July 2004.

This document affirms:

- That the stipend debate is about Connexional holiness before it is about finance.
- That the present stipend system should change to favour justice and mission.
- That non-payment of ministers should never be tolerated.
- That parity / equality does not mean "sameness".
- That scripture calls us to embody the values of both freedom and fairness in our economic systems.
- That we share Connexionally in proportion to our relative wealth for the common good of all.
- That the MCSA should work towards application of a system similar to the old augmentation fund.
- That "gifts" be permitted on condition that all monies are declared through the MCO.
- That any new system will only work if it is based upon trust, truth and transparency.
- That any new system would need to be phased in over time.
- That any new system needs to be sensitive to our African context of enormous economic disparities.
- That our stipend system be constantly critiqued in the light of Jesus' teaching and example.

INTRODUCTION

It is extremely difficult for many of us to speak openly and honestly about money. What we earn is often our best kept secret, assisted of course by the fact that many of us from a young age were taught that it is extremely impolite to ever ask someone about their personal financial matters. Financial matters are deemed to be private. Yet, there are few other areas of our private lives that are as publicly influential.

This hesitancy to speak openly about money seems equally prevalent among Christians as it does amongst any other group of people. This may not surprise us, but it is a sad indictment on at least three accounts.

First, it perpetuates the false belief that faith and finance have nothing to say to each other – as if they were meant to live in blissful independence of each other. In this regard, please refer to appendix (B)¹ for a helpful article concerning the connection between money and Christian spirituality. Once we have made the connection between money and our friendship with Jesus, we discover that our discussion around stipends is not so much a discussion about money as it is about holiness.

Second, it differs remarkably from the example of Jesus, who it seemed, couldn't speak enough about money-matters. In fact, outside of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God, he spoke more about money-matters than any other topic. "In the New Testament, one out of every sixteen verses is about the poor [and related money-matters]. In the Gospels, the number is one out of every ten verses; in Luke's Gospel one of every seven, and in the book of James one of every five."² No wonder Jesuit theologian John

¹ Vicki Curtiss, *Connecting Money and Spirituality*, (in Ministry and Money Handbook, by Jan Sullivan Dockter, 2001), 15.

² Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics*, (Orbis, 1994), 149.

Haughey, laments that, “we read the Gospel as if we had no money, and we spend our money as if we know nothing of the Gospel.”³

Third, it betrays the authenticity of our Connexional community. To view ‘money’ as a purely private matter is to deny the truth that we are all family. It thereby opposes Jesus’ prayer that we “may all be one”.⁴ We need to be reminded that there is no such thing as a solitary Christian.

Further, not only do we find it difficult to talk about money, but when we do, it is painfully obvious how our own self-interest is able to dominate the discussion. Seemingly, we have an incredible compulsion to legitimise our own financial advantages. To protect us from this so that we may “live no longer for ourselves”,⁵ we need to be deliberate in having this ‘faith and finance’ discussion with people on all sides of the economic spectrum.

With this in mind, we suggest that this document not only be read by individuals, but be discussed in forums that will include as many diverse economic perspectives and interests as possible within the Methodist Connexion.

CHANGE AS CONVICTION, CONVERSION AND CONTRITION IN OUR CONTEXT

Using the language of our faith, change involves at least three processes:

1. **Conviction** is the realisation that the way things are is not the way things should be. It involves the growing discontent with the status quo.
2. **Conversion** is the realisation of what should be. It involves the awakening to God’s Kingdom vision.
3. **Contrition** is repentance. It involves turning around from what is to what should be. It is a journey toward holiness and justice. Holiness and justice are always grounded in a specific context.

Importantly, if these three processes are to have integrity, they need to honour the specific social **context** in which they find themselves. This **context** is always both intensely personal and at the same time deeply public. Holiness and justice therefore cannot be attained on our own for us alone. They can only be reached in and through relationship with others.

CONVICTION

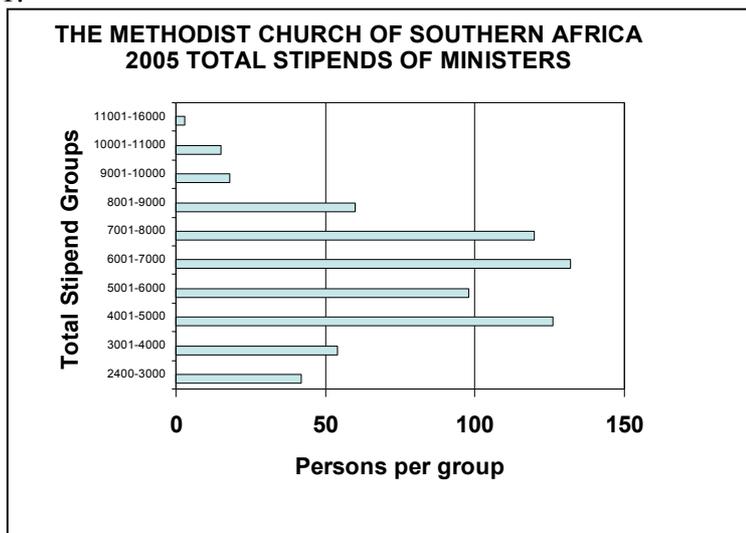
We have prepared, with the help of the MCO, a number of graphs that depict various aspects of what clergy are at present being paid within the MCSA. Please see graphs 1-4 and the correlating explanation notes concerning the 2005 stipend payments of Methodist ministers below.

³ Ched Myers, *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics*, (Published by Tell the Word, 2001), 5.

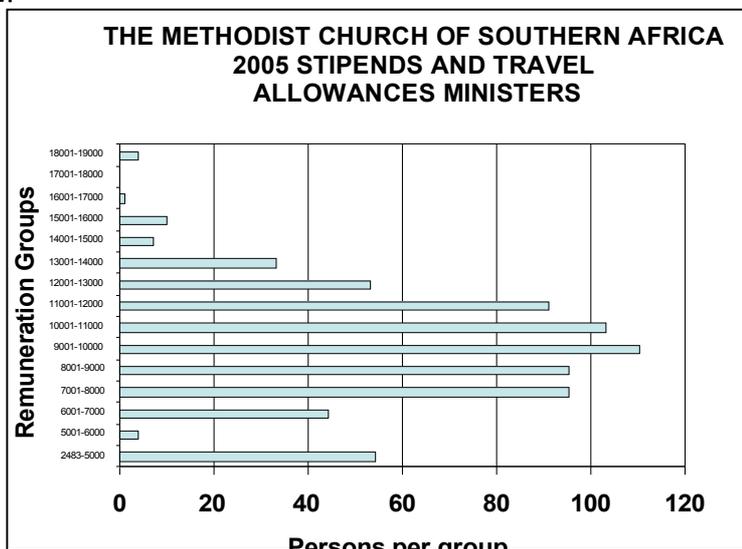
⁴ John 17:21

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:15. (NRSV)

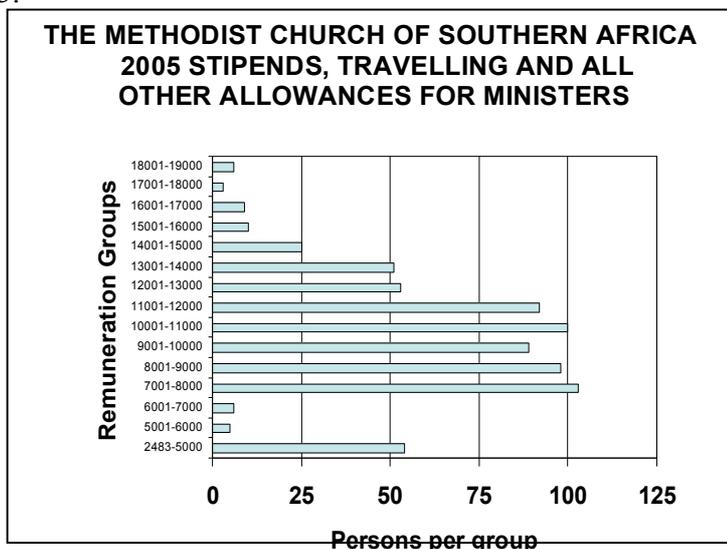
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3.



NOTES

Graph 1.
Monthly stipends of all ministers (704 in total). Those earning between R2400 and R3000 are Phase 1 probationers.

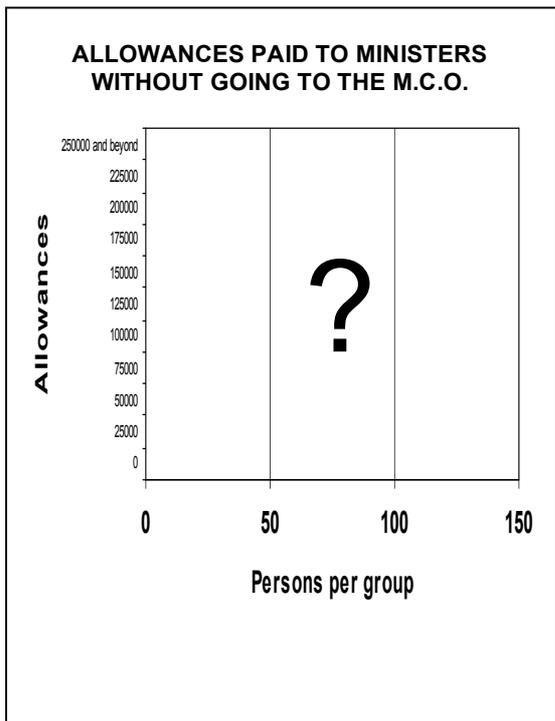
Graph 2.
Monthly stipends and travelling allowances of all ministers. Those earning between R2483 and R5000 are *mainly* Phase 1 probationers.

Graph 3.
Monthly stipends, travelling and all other allowances paid to ministers *known* to the MCO. These "other" allowances include: superintendent allowance; furlough; bonus; computer; school uniform; education fees; housing allowance etc.

Graph 4.
It is important to include this in order to remind us that graphs 1-3 only include the monies that are paid to ministers through the MCO, and therefore is not a complete reflection of what all Methodist ministers are getting paid. It is obviously impossible to guess how graphs 1-3 would precisely change if we knew the exact figures of graph 4. This makes the task of ensuring fairness and justice, as the 2003 conference resolution seeks to secure, very difficult.

Please refer to Appendix (C) for a graph regarding the 2005 pension payments to Supernumeraries and widows. Hand in hand with this graph is a detailed explanation.

4.



Based on this information the present stipend system presents us with three major challenges:

1. **Connexional relationships:** It is not fair that there are such large differences in stipend payments. Obviously it is impossible for us to know the full extent of the unfairness because of the unknown statistics represented by Graph 4. This unfairness would also stretch into the pension payments of ministers. This unfair situation threatens the integrity of our Connexional relationships. This is especially so if and when ministers are forced to go without a stipend. This should never be tolerated, for “the labourer deserves to be paid.”⁶
2. **Anti-itinerant / mission:** Due to the large differences in stipend payments, ministers may be reluctant to move to stations where their monthly income will be significantly less than that which they are accustomed to. This not only makes a mockery of the itinerant system, but negatively impacts the mission of the Church as a minister’s call is restricted to only those places where they see themselves as able to financially survive. Furthermore, this may also perpetuate the perception that a minister is being punished if she or he is sent to a circuit where the stipend payments are at a minimum. And finally, it may perpetuate the lack of cross-cultural appointments within the connexion.
3. **Negative witness:** The present stipend system fails to faithfully witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It speaks more loudly about unfairness and inequality than it does about justice. It does not represent good news for the poor, and thereby fails to have the interests of Jesus at heart. Perhaps most importantly, the present stipend system also fails to offer a prophetic alternative to the growing gap between the rich and poor of our land and in the world at large, but rather adds to this growing and disturbing problem.

As Christians we are called to grieve “that things are not as they should be, not as they were promised, and not as they must be and will be.”⁷ As Christians therefore seeking to love both God and neighbour, revealed to us by Jesus of Nazareth, we are compelled to wrestle with the following types of questions in relation to the stipend discussion:

- How would Jesus pay Methodist stipends?
- How would Jesus handle his finances if he were a Methodist minister?
- What would need to change in order for the stipend policy of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa to be good news for the poor?
- How can we develop a method of stipend payment that would be a prophetic sign of the Kingdom of Heaven in the world?
- What biblical principles and gospel values should determine the direction of our stipend policy?

A complete answering of these questions lies beyond the briefness of this paper; however we hope that the small offering we make in this regard will at least begin to honour something of the spirit and intentions of Jesus and our need to grow in holiness as a Methodist Connexion.

CONVERSION

To begin with, we must state that scripture does not provide any simple proof texts regarding the form that financial structures should take within organisations. Douglas Meeks correctly states: “There is, ... no scientific economic theory in the modern sense in the Bible, even though the Bible is centrally concerned with economy.”⁸ However, he continues, “even if the Bible cannot be immediately translated

⁶ Luke 10:7

⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, (Fortress Press, 1978), 21.

⁸ M Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist – The Doctrine of God and Political Economy*, (Fortress Press, 1989), 3.

into economic theory and policy..., faith in the God of the Bible has economic implications that derive from who God is and from God's own redemptive history with the world."⁹

Although there are many economic implications that derive from who God is and from God's own redemptive history with the world, we will only be focusing on the two that we believe to be most crucial for our stipend discussion, namely fairness and freedom. Please do not think that this means that other values such as generosity, integrity, responsibility and productivity are being dismissed. They are not! They too are of vital importance. In our research however, we have realised that the nature of the relationship between fairness and freedom is key to any economic system as we hope to show below.

The Principles of Fairness and Freedom

It seems obvious that all Methodist ministers would prefer a stipend system that is fair. But this is not as easy to establish as it sounds. It begs the question: "What will be the basis upon which the fairness is determined?" This is where there is likely to be far greater disagreement. It is also where our self-interest often gets the better of us. Furthermore, there are many options from which we could choose, e.g. should ministers be paid according to their years of service; their age; their qualifications; the responsibility of their appointment; their performance; the size of their congregation/s; the size of their family or their provincial location, etc. (To see how both clergy and laity have answered these questions you can refer to appendix (D) question six of the stipend survey). We would then need to ask which of these, if any, Jesus would use as a basis for fairness.

We may conclude that Jesus would pay each person according to their need. Even if we agree on this, it begs the question how we would be able to accurately determine each Methodist minister's needs in order for us to pay them accordingly. What criteria would we use? For example, would it mean that we should take into consideration the monthly earnings of a minister's spouse or not? From this single question we can see how complicated this line of thought is. The complexities of this are never-ending and it is then doubtful that we would ever be able to achieve such an undertaking without at least entering into a stifling legalism, at the expense of everyone's personal freedom. This would deny the existence of legitimate and necessary differences between the different needs that exist between Methodist ministers.

We must surely acknowledge that whatever the 'needs-based' criteria used to determine our stipend policy is, each would contain some short falls. It is interesting to note that both the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa and the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa pay their ministers according to the age of the minister. This is attractively simple to administer, but it does not address any specific differences of need among the clergy.

We believe that the **fairness** which is achieved at the expense of **freedom** does not derive from who God is and God's redemptive work in the world. God and God's work always honours freedom and fairness.

We therefore believe that both fairness and freedom are needed to co-exist in a creative relationship with one another. There are many scriptures that speak of this truth, but we will only reflect upon two of them:

If we go all the way back to the wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel, we read:

"This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Gather as much of it [manna] as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.' The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less, But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed."¹⁰

⁹ Ibid, 4.

¹⁰ Exodus 16:16-18 (NRSV)

From these verses of scripture, we learn the following:

- All we have is a gift from God. We own nothing – all is gift.
- God instructs us to keep the interests of others in mind while we are seeking to satisfy our own interests.
- There is a definite relationship between those who gathered much and those who gathered less. If for example, those who gathered much did indeed gather too much, then there would not have been enough to go around for those who gathered little.
- Freedom exists to gather different amounts of manna as long as it is not to the detriment of others. In other words, the justice or equality or fair balance that God seeks is not “sameness”, but rather the adequate and shared sufficiency within the differences that exist between those who had much and those who had little.

In the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul applies the same principles when encouraging generosity towards those struggling Christians in Jerusalem:

I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, ‘The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.’¹¹

The statement: “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little”, is sufficiently specific, yet at the same time appropriately flexible. It demands one to wrestle with the question: “What is too much?” The answer is not given in amounts (omers), but rather in effects. In other words, I have too much if it results in another having too little. This means we can never accurately answer the question: “What is too much?” if we are not in constant relationship with others who have less than us, and especially those who have the least.

In both the wilderness and in Corinth, the aim is “equality” (NIV translation) or “a fair balance” (NRSV translation). We have already mentioned that “equality” or “a fair balance” does not mean “sameness”. As Douglas Meeks explains: “The egalitarian thrust of God’s economy is meant to serve freedom. It does not aim at eliminating differences among human beings. ... We do not have to be the same or have the same amount of things. What God’s household [economy] seeks to eliminate, is domination over others, which prevents their access to what they need in order to keep their calling to be God’s image, child, disciple, and friend.”¹²

If we have interpreted these scriptures faithfully, then the equality or fair balance that our stipend system should embody is an equality that exists in creative relationship with freedom.

The Economic Model of the Trinity

This creative relationship between equality and freedom is beautifully modelled for us within the Trinity. God is a community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity is “fully divine, none is ‘more’ God than any of the others”¹³. In other words, there is equality. All three ‘persons’ of the Trinity are also distinct from each other. In other words, there is the freedom that comes from difference.

By grace through faith, we believe that all human beings are born in God’s image.¹⁴ This means we have been designed for fairness and freedom. Where there is no fairness or freedom, the human spirit will resist, reform and even revolt. Freedom in the sense of ‘free will’ is part of the human condition, as the

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 (NRSV)

¹² M Douglas Meeks, 11.

¹³ Brian Gaybba, *God is a Community*, (UNISA press, 2004), 94.

¹⁴ Genesis 1:26-27.

scriptural stories of Creation declare.¹⁵ Our economic systems, and in our case, our stipend system, should therefore seek to honour this truth of who God is, as well as who we have been created by God to be. However, even though humanity has been created for fairness and freedom, it does not seem to be an easy relationship to hold together, especially within the field of economics. It seems that the emphasis is always being placed on either freedom or fairness but not both, as recent economic history shows us. In this light it is interesting to note that the freedom in the stories of creation is linked to the Fall. It seems that the Fall and fairness are two possibilities with which we are faced as we live out our freedom. To help us in our understanding we will now reflect upon two examples in recent economic history.

Lessons learned from Capitalistic and Marxist Economic Theory

Without wanting to go into too much detail, it is important for us to learn from the two most influential economic experiments of our time, namely the theory of Classical Economic Liberalism (Capitalism) and the theory of a Centrally Planned Economy (Marxism). Obviously both theories have evolved with time and circumstances, but we will focus only on the original intent of each of their founders and the consequences of each, which history has revealed.

Adam Smith (1723-1790), who is considered the ‘father’ of Capitalism, responded to the exploitation that existed within the economic system of his day. According to him, this exploitation was due to the cartels and monopolies that resulted from the medieval guild and manorial systems. These systems determined all aspects of trade and industry. In response to this, Smith proclaimed “the freedom of the human being and his [or her] property, the freedom of contract and competition, the freedom of trade and industry.”¹⁶ Smith held that there needs to be free competition within the market place. He trusted that this free competition would secure the best price for the public, for if someone else could produce the same product for a cheaper price and thereby secure more of the market profits, they would do so. The net result is both greater profits for the manufacturer and a better price for the consumer. Driven by the manufacturers own self-interest, this competitive cycle would be automatically secured, according to Smith. It was believed that this “free-market system” may involve periods of exploitation, but that the system would self correct itself with equal regularity within the market by what he termed, “the invisible hand of God”.

It could therefore be argued that, from at least Smith’s point of view, the core value of Capitalism is **freedom**. This surely came as a gift to those who experienced the exploitation of his day. The problem is that if there are no restrictions placed upon this freedom, it will give rise to inequality. If these levels of inequality remain unchecked and if they are not corrected, they will in turn reach levels that will finally sabotage the core value of freedom. This results in the “free-market system” no longer being free for all, because many people end up being marginalised from the main stream of the market system altogether.

In direct response to these growing levels of inequality in the world and the sense of self-alienation that subsequently existed within people, especially among workers, Karl Marx (1818-1883) developed his idea of a classless society. It is far too complex to do it any justice in this brief paper, suffice to say that for Marx, the core value he sought to protect was **equality**. To ensure equality, everything was placed under the single authority of the state or ruling political party. This Centrally Planned Economy determined all aspects of trade and industry. The problem is that with everything now centrally planned, the freedom of the individual to be creative and entrepreneurial diminished. This was equality at the expense of freedom. This restriction upon freedom finally sabotaged the core value of equality. It is interesting to note that within all Marxist experiments, there has existed a “free-market” system of sorts in the form of the so-called “black-market system”.

¹⁵ Genesis 3 and 4

¹⁶ Franz Josef Stegmann, *Economic Liberalism, Marxism and Critical Judgement*, (St. Augustine, Vol. 5, No 1. 2004), 7.

Tudor Maxwell summarises:

In the centrally planned economies, the freedoms of individuals were curtailed through the centralisation of power (and hence possibly the disproportionate amassing of freedom in the centre of a social system). Power and the fallenness of humans made conditions ripe for corruption, and a distortion of the system that was to engineer fairness. In the market economy, disproportionate wealth bestowed disproportionate measures of power on individuals, and power together with human fallenness lead to corruption and distortion of the system that was meant to preserve freedom and fairness. In both central and decentralised systems we see signs of the Fall, and therefore need to bias our work in favour of the poor, who are most likely to suffer the lack of fairness.¹⁷

From these two economic experiments of Capitalism and Marxism, we learn what happens if either of these values of freedom and fairness are emphasised at the expense of the other.

Where there is no equality, resentment will soon build and if nothing is done about the inequality, this resentment will eventually boil over in revolt. Similarly, where there is no freedom, anger and resistance will soon follow, as well as an incredible imagination to free oneself. Such is our human hunger to honour the image of our Creator in which we have all been born.

Avoiding the “Pendulum Effect”

This brief sketch concerning recent economic history teaches us that if the relationship between fairness and freedom is broken, each will self-destruct. Freedom and fairness are therefore dependent upon each other for their own flourishing.

We conclude therefore, for reasons both scriptural and experiential, that the Methodist Church needs to develop a stipend system that is able to hold both the values of fairness and freedom together in a creative relationship. We must therefore guard ourselves against the “pendulum effect” of swinging from one to the other. If our stipend policy becomes too centrally planned (read Connexional) without allowing any individual (read Circuit / Society) freedom, it is safe to assume that it will result in anger and resentment as well as imaginative ways to “get around” the system.

It seems true to us therefore, that as we attempt to wrestle with the questions mentioned above, i.e. how would Jesus pay Methodist stipends, we must at all times honour the values of freedom and equality that derive from who God is and who we are as a people born in the image of the Triune God.

Tricky Parables

We realise that we have not focused on any of the scriptures from the Gospels. It is our hope however, that these principles of fairness and freedom will be easily recognised within the life and teachings of Jesus. In fact, this creative relationship of fairness and freedom is celebrated in the very nature of the gift of Jesus to us all. For, through Christ’s free sacrifice, we have been set free to freely sacrifice for the sake of fairness. Nevertheless, we believe that it is necessary for us to reflect upon two specific parables of Jesus from the Gospel according to Matthew. We hope that our exegesis will be a catalyst toward deeper discussion and not a distraction from the real issues before us. Our expectation is not so much that you agree with everything we have to write about these two passages of scripture, but that you do take seriously the issues that are raised.

What if the Master *is not* God?

The first parable we will reflect upon is known to us as the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). It seems that for many people this parable provides a strong justification for a “free-market” economy. On the surface this certainly seems to be the case. However, it may be helpful if we ask a few questions

¹⁷ Tudor Maxwell, Personal Communication, 22 June 2005.

about the text: Why is this parable not introduced with Jesus' familiar phrase: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like this"? What is the significance of the fact that a single 'talent' was equal to fifteen years wages? How does this parable challenge our understanding of God revealed to us in Jesus?

Concerning this last question it must be said that this parable of the talents is a disturbing story. Ched Meyers says: "It seems to promote ruthless business practices (v.20), usury (v.27), and the cynical view that the rich will only get richer, while the poor become destitute (v. 29). Moreover, if we assume, as does the traditional reading, that the master is a figure for God, it is a severe portrait indeed..."¹⁸ In order to soften the harshness of the parable, many interpretations have denied its economic nature by seeing the "talents" as something other than sums of money.

Despite these concerns articulated by Meyers, this parable has consistently been interpreted as a parable of the Kingdom of Heaven, where the master is seen to represent God and as such it has often been used as a scriptural validation for wage inequality. Meyers goes on to ask whether we have not "imposed upon the parable our capitalist presumptions about the glories of a system that rewards "venture capital" and thus read the story exactly backwards."¹⁹ Could it be for this reason that in the stipend survey already referred to (see Appendix D), this was one of the single most quoted scriptures?

It is important to note that Jesus does not introduce this parable of the talents with the familiar words: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like ..." It seems that most of us have failed to notice this, and have simply presumed that all of Jesus' parables were about the Kingdom of Heaven. On close analysis, the parables that are not introduced by Jesus to be about the Kingdom of Heaven make more sense when seen as parables that expose the injustices of his own social, economic, political and religious context, instead of metaphorical examples of Kingdom life. Meyers argues: "The first two slaves double their master's investment (25:16-17). Though lauded by modern interpreters, this feat would have elicited disgust from the first-century audience ... Anthropology has shown that in traditional Mediterranean society, the ideal was stability, not self-advancement. Anyone trying to accumulate inordinate wealth imperilled the equilibrium of society and was thus understood to be dishonourable."²⁰ Therefore, the so called "good stewards" would fall into this dishonourable category. This makes more sense when we remember that a 'talent' was worth around fifteen years wages. Five talents is then equivalent to seventy-five years wages. This is an incredibly huge sum of money!

It is the third slave that speaks the truth to power: "I knew you were a harsh man – you reap where you did not sow, and gather where you did not scatter" (25:24). With these words, Jesus exposes the truth of injustice that exists in the economic system of his own day. William Herzog II speaks of the third slave as the "whistle blower".²¹ This third slave, considered wicked, wasteful and worthless by the economic system represented by the master, then suffers a prophet's fate by being cast out into a hell (on earth) that is for those who don't play by the rules of an economic system that prefers to honour self-advancement over social stability.

We realise that our exegesis of Matthew 25:14-30 is brief and no doubt surprising, if not shocking to some. We hope that in the very least, it will provoke further discussion as well as caution those who have been quick to use this parable to legitimise inequality.

When the Master is God

The second parable for our reflection is Matthew 20:1-16, known to us as the parable of the labourers in the Vineyard. Unlike the parable in Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus introduces this parable as a Kingdom-like story, and therefore we are now free to consider the Landowner as a figure representing God.

¹⁸ Ched Meyers, *The Parables of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels* (unpublished paper).

¹⁹ Ibid,

²⁰ Ibid,

²¹ William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech*, (John Knox Press 1994), 150f.

This is however, also a disturbing parable, especially when we discover that the manager, on the Landowner's instructions, pays all the labourers the same wage even though some have toiled all day, while others have only worked an hour or so. No wonder we read that those who had worked all day "grumbled against the landowner, saying 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat' ..." (20:11-12).

It seems that in order to make this parable easier to swallow, there has been a strong tendency to "spiritualise" its meaning. In this "spiritualised" light, the parable is seen to be referring to the same reward everyone receives when they accept Jesus as Lord of their life. This means that regardless of whether a person's acceptance of Jesus happens early on in her or his life or not, even whether it happens during a person's dying breaths, all receive the same heavenly reward. This interpretation may well speak the truth about the saving grace of God, but it denies the real economic nature and challenges of the parable.

Could Jesus not be suggesting that managers who operate under Kingdom instructions, pay people according to a different principle to that of the profit driven market-world? In other words, Kingdom managers pay people not simply according to what they deserve, as a result of the amount of work they have done, but rather according to what they need in order to live.

This assaults our understanding of fairness! It also assaults our wisdom in that this form of management is obviously open to being abused, for example, who would want to work a full day in the future if they knew they would get paid the same for only working an hour?

The sadness of the parable is that those who worked all day, find it impossible to join in the joy of the other labourers who earned the same as a result of the extravagant generosity of the Landowner (God figure). The Landowner freely sacrifices some profits for the sake of providing a living wage for all the labourers. The Landowner lives out the biblical truth that we work not only to earn a living for ourselves, but to make a giving for others in need. The author to the Ephesians writes: "Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, *so as to have some thing to share with the needy*" (my emphasis).²²

The challenge of this parable certainly stretches past the wilderness principle of: "those who had much did not have too much and those who had little did not have too little", as well as our previously stated definition of equality. This should not surprise us because Jesus is always calling people to live more deeply into the ways of holiness and justice. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus not only calls his followers to refrain from committing murder, but even to refrain from calling another person a fool²³. Jesus always seems to be upping the stakes of what it means to be a faithful disciple! This should serve to humble us as we realise that the values of fairness and freedom that we seek to uphold within the stipend system of the MCSA, will always fall short of the Kingdom vision taught and lived by Jesus, and will therefore require constant and critical review.

Summary

It is our conviction that the present stipend system must change. We believe that it should be converted to a system that is able to hold the values or principles of fairness and freedom together in a creative relationship, while at the same time remaining open to the ever deepening challenge of Jesus to generously and sacrificially share for the sake of the well being of others.

²² Ephesians 4:28

²³ Matthew 5:21-26

CONTRITION

To move from inequality toward fairness without sacrificing our freedom, we believe that the following principle should govern our stipend policy:

Those who exercise **freedom** to the extent that they gather an excess,
should take more responsibility for **equality**.

This means that the societies / circuits who freely choose to pay their clergy more than a certain amount (determined by the MCO), will be expected to contribute proportionally to an equalisation or augmentation fund. Excess, remember, is not measured in ‘Omers’, but in effects, specifically in regard to our relationships with one another. More especially with those who have “gathered little”.

For example: if the determined amount set by the MCO is R8 000 per month, then it will mean that any circuit / society that pays their minister more than this amount will be expected to make a contribution toward a fund that will go to assist those who are earning less than the R8 000 per month. These contributions would be worked out according to a progressive scale, for example: if a circuit pays their minister R10 000 per month (R2 000 over the determined MCO figure), they would be expected to contribute 10% (R1 000) to the augmentation fund, but if they decide to pay their minister R12 000 per month (R4 000 over the determined MCO figure), they would be expected to contribute 12% (R1 440). This percentage would increase proportionally as the amount that ministers are paid increases. (Please note that these figures are totally fictitious, and only serve as an example of the suggested process).

We believe that this system may need to be phased in over a few years. We recognise that it is a huge challenge to change the financial system of an organisation like the Church, and we therefore would stress the importance of an implementation process that is sensitively timed.

One of the primary motivations for this system, is the safeguarding of the integrity of our Connexional community and relationships as colleagues within the ministry. If the levels of inequality continue to grow, it will continue to place more strain on these relationships as well as break down the integrity of the Connexional body. Therefore it seems right that those circuits, who freely choose to pay their ministers more, and thereby contribute towards increased inequality within the Connexion, should contribute proportionally to counter balance this growing inequality.

Fairness and Freedom yes, but what about the FALL?

We have already seen how both Adam Smith and Karl Marx had wonderfully good intentions, but sadly both systems have had negative results. Ironically, they both made the same mistake! They ignored the truth about the Christian teaching of the Fall. This teaching to which we have already made mention in this paper, is summed up by St. Paul when he says: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.”²⁴

Both Smith and Marx underestimated the sinfulness of the human person. In both cases, the selfish self-centredness of humanity got the better of the economic theories they had developed. The MCSA must ensure that we do not make the same mistake! We are all Fallen human beings, and therefore we are in need of assistance to even help us to do the good we want to do.

To be reminded of the Fall does not mean that we must allow the Fall to determine our vision of what our stipend policy should be. Our vision should always be determined by our understanding of the Kingdom

²⁴ Romans 7:15 and 19

of God revealed to us in the life and teachings of Jesus. Yet, our knowledge of the Fall should humble us to willingly accept being held accountable to the living out of this Kingdom vision. We must not deny the Fall, but neither must we allow ourselves or our vision to be determined by it.

Trust and Truth and Transparency

This is of supreme importance! If we do not trust each other as clergy in the MCSA concerning the ins and outs of our income, this proposed stipend system will most certainly break down. Without trust, no relationship or organisation can work. To enable trust there needs to be truth-telling. To facilitate truth-telling, there needs to be a system of transparency. How we go about establishing this system of transparency is going to need further discussion, but in the very least it should facilitate the declaration to the MCO of all income that a minister receives. This includes all allowances and gifts (perhaps over a specific amount, again determined by the MCO).

We do not believe that it would benefit any if the giving of gifts (such as acquired through Farewells or Funerals) were stopped, nor do we think it actually possible, but we do believe that they must all be declared (again perhaps over a specific amount) through the MCO. This would ensure a greater level of fairness by eliminating the huge question mark that exists on graph 4 as shown above. It would contribute toward the augmentation fund benefiting those who truly need it. It would also ensure that all monies received be correctly taxed by the State.

If we cannot erase this question mark over the amounts ministers are truly getting paid this proposed system will certainly not work. Resentment will soon replace our generosity. This is why we believe that this discussion about stipends is about holiness before it is about finances. The question we need to be asking is how can we grow in Connexional holiness?

As long as the air within the Connexion is filled with rumours about how certain ministers are supposedly earning such large sums of money, while others are supposedly earning such little sums of money with both never being transparently verified, this journey toward holiness will be severely hampered. In fact, if the story of Ananias and Sapphira²⁵ is to be taken seriously, not only will our journey be hampered, it will end in death! It will end in the death of our Connexional relationships as well as our integrity as a Church to speak prophetically into the situation of increasing inequality in our land.

CONTEXT

We mentioned above that holiness and justice are always grounded in a specific context. This context is always both intensely personal and at the same time deeply public. Holiness and justice therefore cannot be attained on our own for ourselves. They can only be reached in and through relationship with others. It is right then, for us to keep in mind our African context as we continue our discussion around Methodist stipends, as well as to be reminded of the MCSA's mission statement: A Christ Healed Africa for the Healing of the Nations.

Let us take note of the following facts concerning our context: In US dollars the average yearly income of South Africans is \$3 160, in Senegal, \$570, in Ghana \$390, in Mozambique \$85. Further afield, in Sri Lanka it is \$690, in India \$340, and even in Poland it is only \$2 270".²⁶

Even though the average yearly income of South Africans is relatively high, there are about 20 million South Africans (that is nearly half the total population) that survive on around R354 per month. This

²⁵ Acts 5:1-11

²⁶ Southern African Catholic Bishop's Conference, *Economic Justice in South Africa – A Pastoral Statement* (SACBC publishing 1999), 17.

emphasises just how large the gap is between the rich and poor. It also means that even Phase 1 probationer ministers earn nearly ten times what nearly half the population of South Africa earns!

Sampie Terreblanche²⁷ reveals further how South Africa's highly stratified class society is structured. These figures are for the year 2001:

Population in Percentage	Distribution of Income	Societal Strata
16.6% (7.5 million)	72%	Elite
16.6% (7.5 million)	17.2%	Middle Class
16.6% (7.5 million)	7.3%	Upper Lower Class
25% (11.5 million)	2%	Middle Lower Class
25% (11.5 million)	1.3%	Lower Lower Class

This means that 50% of South Africa's population (\pm 23 million) have access to only 3.3% of the countries distributed income.

This problem is not only local, but global. Wayne Visser and Clem Sunter write,

Three billion people [\pm half the world's population] still live on less than \$2 a day, while more than one billion do not have access to proper food or clean water. According to the United Nations, worldwide poverty has got worse not better over the past fifty years. That's in absolute terms. Relatively speaking, the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' is also widening, ... And being a complex issue, the problem is not going to go away at any time soon. For decades to come, poverty will remain the single biggest threat to social sustainability²⁸.

It is therefore vital that the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) reflect upon its stipend policy. To do so is to take our context seriously as well as to follow the example of the Scriptures.

A Vision to live for

Scripture is clear: "Where there is no vision the people perish".²⁹ Do we have a shared vision as a Connexion with regard to how our faith in Jesus is meant to shape our relationship with money both as individuals and as a community? What is the Christ-like picture of the future that we seek to create?

Perhaps this is where our stipend discussion needs to begin. We need to begin with a shared vision of what should be and what will be according to the promised future of God. Renowned biblical scholar, Walter Brueggemann puts it another way. He writes: "The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception *alternative* to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."³⁰ Brueggemann goes on to say that because most of us in some way or another have deep commitments toward the dominant culture, the first question we must ask is,

How can we have enough freedom to imagine and articulate a real historical newness in our situation? That is not to ask, as Israel's prophets ever asked, if this freedom is realistic or politically practical or economically viable. To begin with such questions is to concede everything to the [dominant culture] even before we begin. We need to ask not whether it is realistic or practical or viable but whether it is *imaginable*.... The prophet engages in futuring

²⁷ Sampie Terreblanche, *A History Of Inequality in South Africa*, 36.

²⁸ Wayne Visser and Clem Sunter, *Beyond Reasonable Greed: Why Sustainable Business is a Much Better Idea*, (Human A Rousseau Tafelberg, 2002), 161-162.

²⁹ Proverbs 29:18

³⁰ Ibid, Brueggemann, 13.

fantasy. The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The *imagination* must come before the *implementation*.³¹

What is the future fantasy of or our Connexional imagination with regard to economics?

In South Africa in 1994 we were given the grace to witness the fulfilment of our most hope-full imaginations. As a nation we witnessed God “making all things new”³² despite the opinion of many that it was neither realistic nor politically practical. The question is will we dare to fantasise about our future again – this time in relation to economic justice?

Our scriptures have a name for this future fantasy. In scripture it is called Jubilee³³. Jubilee justice is the coming of the Lord’s favour.³⁴ Jubilee justice invites us to correct the economic imbalances that exist within our society. Jubilee justice involves a just sharing of the resources that make for life, which all come to us as gift from God. Jubilee justice reminds us that we are stewards who have been called to fairly and freely manage these resources. In the very least, Jubilee justice demands an open and honest conversation about money matters. It is to this end that this document hopes to contribute as we seek to establish a stipend policy that honours the values of Jesus in the payment of all clergy in the Methodist Connexion of Southern Africa.

In closing we draw hope from the prophetically imaginative book of Habakkuk, where the Lord said to the prophet: “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.”³⁵

We believe there “is still a vision for the appointed time”! We believe that the world is in desperate need of visionaries who have had their eyes touched by Jesus.

As individuals and as a community, will we be patient to wait for the vision? Will we be courageous enough to write it down? Will we proclaim it clearly for all to be able to read? This is the privileged task that our discussion around Methodist stipends invites to enter into.

³¹ Ibid, Brueggemann, 44-45.

³² Revelation 21:5

³³ Leviticus 25

³⁴ Luke 4:19

³⁵ Habakkuk 2:2-3

Appendix (A)

Conference of 2003, noted that:

- (a) the present stipend system causes injustice and does not favour mission
- (b) many Ministers have been treated unfairly because of flaws in the present stipend system

resolved to:

- (a) reject any system for giving stipends to Ministers that causes unfair disparities in stipends and adopts the principle of parity in stipends;
- (b) direct the General Treasurers and MCO Executive to conduct research and analysis to develop a stipend system that will enable the implementation of this decision.
- (c) invite Circuit Quarterly Meetings and District Synods to give input on appropriate mechanisms for implementing this decision;
- (d) mandate the Connexional Executive to take further decisions to implement this decision as soon as the mechanisms have been established.

1.2 The rationale for the Conference decision addresses two crucial matters that have direct impact on the integrity and faithfulness of the church, viz. justice and mission. It is obvious that any stipend system designed to replace the existing one must meet both these criteria. In the proposed policy we have tried to address both these issues.

1.3 Conference was disturbed by the fact that some of our ministers are treated poorly in relation to stipends. Some Circuits withhold the payment thereof for months at a time. In other instances, vast disparities exist between stipends. It cannot be in the best mission interests of the church for a situation to exist wherein the economic disparities and variables that occur between various regions and contexts are determinative. At the very least, the policies of the MCSA should establish a framework to ensure fair and just treatment for all the ministers. Furthermore economic disparities that have occurred within the church as a legacy of the racial inequalities that Apartheid inflicted on all institutions must surely be a concern for all.

Appendix (B)

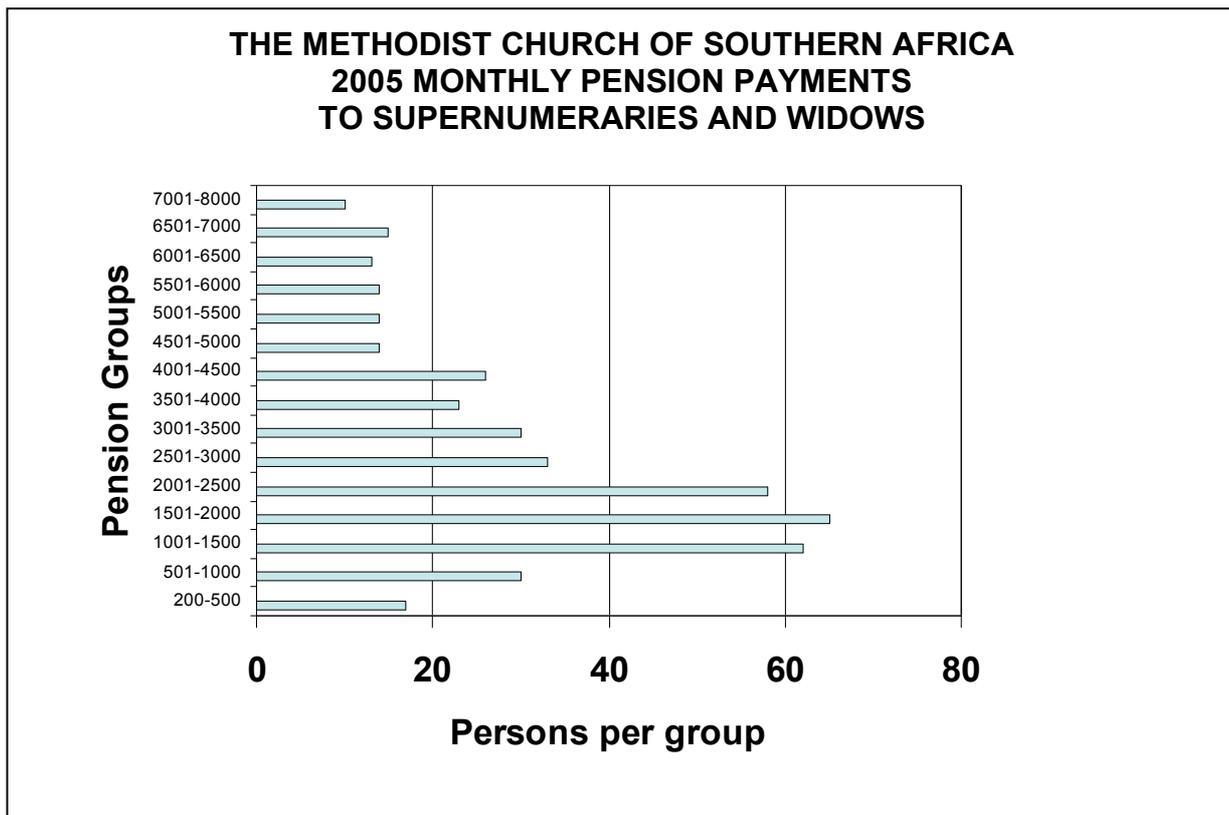
Connecting Money & Spirituality

- Money is a gift from God. When we are in right relationship with God, we will be in right relationship with our money. God's Spirit frees us to find contentment in what we've been given. When God is our source of security and worth we can receive and let go of money. Money becomes a servant rather than a master. We can be free to enjoy money, to use it as a tool of love. We can honestly ask for what we really need.
- Money, as idol, as addiction, is a core spiritual issue. There are many things to which we can become attached, by which we try to maintain control. In our culture money is a prime one, honoured like a god, as if it can bring us happiness, security, power worth. The spiritual discipline of giving money away breaks our compulsive clutching; deepens our gratitude; is an act of trust in God; and, when given in love, multiplies God's work.
- Money is an emotionally charged issue. Deep feelings may be stirred up in us in connection to money. These are often clues to areas in our life that need to be brought before God: wounds that need healing, longings that need expression, blocks that need to be opened. Our consciousness about money allows God to transform us.
- Our use of money is an expression of ourselves. How we spend it, withhold it, give it, save it, receive it all reveal our deepest beliefs and values. Just as our time, energy, call, gifts are blessings of God, so is our money. We need God's guidance in its use.
- Money is too often the determining factor in making certain choices, including what we buy or what we do for a living. Our primary question needs to be "What is God leading me to be/do?" rather than whether we can afford something or whether we'll earn a certain amount. With this perspective we are freer to act on our true calling.
- Money can be used to oppress people, deprive life and lay waste to resources or to provide food, shelter, education, health, beauty and preservation of the earth. Economic justice is central to a world of harmony and dignity for all. To work for justice is a significant expression of faith. The Sacred connects us with all other people, with all living creatures. We are not separate from our brothers and sisters in need, or the earth and its groaning. We are all One. It is no more my right to have money than another's.
- God yearns to bring Shalom on earth. Cultural messages about money lead toward autonomy, self-sufficiency and isolation, which cut us off from a vision of community in which we all give to and receive from each other. When we share we know abundance.

Rev. Vicki Curtiss³⁶

Former Director, Women's Perspective of the Ministry of Money

³⁶ Vicki Curtiss, *Connecting Money and Spirituality*, (in *Ministry and Money: Money and Faith Study Circle Handbook*, by Jan Sullivan Dockter, 2001), 15.

Appendix (C)

Please note the following explanation of this graph by the Lay General Treasure of the MCO, Mr. George Trimble³⁷:

“On the question of pensions I need to qualify this information with the following facts because one might say how is it possible that some people receive such a low pension?”

Pensions are based on two criteria. Length of service and stipend level during service. Certainly some pensions are relatively low because some people have received low stipends for many years. One must also recognise the following realities:

- Some ministers had only one or two years of service before retiring;
- Some ministers with long service resigned in their latter years and the Fund had to pay out their and the Church pension contributions and interest. They then subsequently were re-instated and on retirement only had short service;
- Many ministers in the Clarkebury District at the time of the Schism (about 18 years ago) lost out terribly because for those years they made no contributions to the Supernumerary Fund;
- Widows pensions are based on 66% of their spouses pension;
- Some ministers retired owing large loans to the MCO on motor cars or houses and such debts had to be settled out of pension at retirement;
- Sadly some Circuits do not pay stipends to ministers through the MCO but, we know, direct to ministers. We have stressed over and over the negative consequences of this action because at retirement no benefits will be received from the Supernumerary Fund for those months;
- In many instances the Church (not the Fund) has recognised the financial hardship suffered by many Supernumeraries and widows at the lower pension level and we supplement their pensions every month.”

³⁷ Letter from George W Trimble dated 21st February 2005.

Appendix (D)

Stipend Survey

Note: Do not write your name on this paper. To answer: Tick the correct box.

Clergy (Clergy answer all questions) Male
 Lay person (Laity answer only questions 1-11) Female

1. Should the present stipend system be changed or not? Yes No
2. Should all ordained Methodist ministers be paid the same? Yes No
3. Do you think race is a determining factor regarding the payment of stipends within the MCSA at the moment? Yes No
4. Do you think gender is a determining factor regarding the payment of stipends within the MCSA at the moment? Yes No

5. Who do you think should determine the minister's stipend? Tick the relevant box/s.

- The individual minister The individual society
- The section The Circuit
- The District The Connexion

6. Which of the following factors should play a part in determining a minister's stipend, if any?

- Age of clergy Years of service
- Size of congregation / section Responsibility
- Geographical size of parish Income of congregation
- Qualifications of clergy Size of family
- Health of family Location: city / rural
- Location: province Other

7. Do you agree with the principle that the wealthier congregations / circuits should help subsidise the financially poorer congregations / circuits? Yes No

8. Which of the following congregational gifts for ministers do you think should be encouraged, if any?

- Weddings Funerals House blessing
- Farewells Baptisms Christmas
- 13th cheque Groceries Domestic Help
- Welcomes Holidays Other

9. Do you think any additional income that ministers receive beyond their stipend and travelling should be declared? Yes No

10. What Scriptures do you think are most relevant to the current stipend discussion?

11. Any other comments you would like to make?

12. Adding your stipend and travelling together, what do you receive (gross) from the MCSA per month?

This survey has been compiled by Alan Storey to assist some synods in their discussion and for further research into this topic. Please note that it has not been authorised by the General Treasurers of the MCSA. Should you wish to complete this survey, it would be appreciated. Feel free to use the reverse side of this page for further comment regarding any of the above questions.

STIPEND SURVEY - 2005

Answers to Q. 1,2,3,4,7,9

Survey completed by :

Ministers	187
Laity	171
Did not specify	69
Total	427

	Yes %	No	no answer
Q1 - change present system			
Ministers	80	11	9
Laity	70	15	15
Did not specify	61	25	14
Q2 - should be paid the same			
Ministers	57	38	5
Laity	51	47	1
Did not specify	59	36	4
Q3 - presently race determining factor			
Ministers	53	43	4
Laity	49	46	5
Did not specify	52	41	7
Q4 - presently gender determining factor			
Ministers	13	84	2
Laity	21	70	9
Did not specify	29	59	12
Q7 - agree that wealthy circuits share with poor			
Ministers	94	2	4
Laity	87	7	6
Did not specify	75	6	19
Q9 - should additional income be declared			
Ministers	71	25	4
Laity	73	25	3
Did not specify	49	38	13

STIPEND SURVEY - 2005

Answers to

Q. 5,6,8

	Total no. of Ticks	% total surveys
Q5 - who to determine		
Connexion	229	54
Circuit	125	29
District	70	16
Individual society	60	14
Individual minister	26	6
Section	11	3
Other / No response	8	2
Q6 - determining factors		
Years of service	221	52
Responsibility	176	41
Qualifications of clergy	146	34
Size of congregation	92	22
Size of family	80	19
Income of congregation	73	17
Geographical size parish	55	13
Location: city/rural	51	12
Age of clergy	45	11
Location: province	35	8
Health family	29	7
Other	27	6
No response / None	15	4
Q8 - congregational gifts		
13th cheque	292	68
Weddings	166	39
Farewells	159	37
Funerals	112	26
Welcomes	105	25
Christmas	97	23
Domestic Help	91	21
Groceries	74	17
Holidays	89	21
Baptism	37	9
House Blessing	40	9
Other	21	5
No response / None	18	4

NOTE: A full analysis of the results of this survey is still to be completed.

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