



Covenant Service Message

Methodist Conference 2016

Wesley College

Te Hāhi Weteriana O Aotearoa

Covenant Service Message Conference 2016

'Moving into Mission'

[Acts 13:3] So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

We have been in conference. I hope we have had an experience of being moored to Christ over the 5 days. Now it is time to move into mission. The mission we move into has at least two models to note. One is the model of mission we inherited from our ancestors, particularly from those who introduced a new faith. Those missions began in Europe and were transplanted into Aotearoa. We have experienced and been engaged ourselves in this model.

The second one is an emerging model of mission. This is the kind of mission that requires our attention in the 21st century Aotearoa and beyond. Just as our forefathers and foremothers faced challenges of their time in sharing the gospel, we too face challenges; but of a different kind. We must discern what emerges and calls us to move. We are about to move into this mission.

Before that we are going to spell out our response to Conference Question 25 for the next two years: (a) What is God saying to us now? (b) What more can be done to promote the work of God?

As we give our responses, first, I invite you to focus on what is emerging in the ocean where we launch our canoes; take a moment to think about what is God saying to us now. More importantly do we hear the cries of those among whom Christ is to be found?

If we hear the cries, we will move into mission to serve Christ. If we don't, or if we choose not to hear by covering our ears, we will stay at the mooring post.

Secondly, what more can be done to promote the work of God? There is no boundary in the ocean into which we launch to promote the work of God. Primarily, we need to untie our canoes from where we are and launch into the deep. We have to move the canoe from maintenance into its voyage. We have an option of staying on the shore and saying "we tried and it does not work", as Peter told

Jesus. Alternatively, like Peter, we can move into the deep in simple obedience. We as a church need to move into the deep to promote the work of God. Rather than debating a theology of mission, we are called to be engaged in mission. A missionary agenda must lead to the theology of mission instead of a theological agenda determining the mission.

This is where we get our priorities wrong. Robin Meyers says, “It is no wonder so many mainline churches are dying. They have so long existed on maintenance mode that they have lost their prophetic nerve. They have put so much energy into survival that they have forsaken their responsibility to be places of free and fearless inquiry and radical hospitality as well as spiritual sustenance.”[9]

We have opted for a mission of theology and doctrine instead of serving. Meyers critiques, “We have been travelling down the creedal road of Christendom since the fourth century, when a first century spiritual insurgency was seduced into marrying its original oppressor.”

The mission of Jesus and the disciples was engagement in the day to day lives of the people. Instead of doing a spell-check on our doctrines and structures, Jesus calls us to follow his lead into real life, as he did to his first followers. They were ordinary fishermen who forsook the things they were holding onto to keep company with an itinerant sage, down a path that was not obvious, sensible or safe. The journey on the ocean may also not be obvious, sensible or safe.

As one who has taken boat journeys in the oceans around the Solomon Islands, I have experienced situations where there was no safety gear on board, where the current was against the boat, in sun and in rain, and yet moving into mission continued. I always thought while I took those boat trips, that if we had taken account of the ocean current, possible weather conditions and the adequacy of safety gear on board, the missionaries would never have set out for Sasamuqa. Sr. Lucy Money would not have become a healing angel in that village. Then I always reasoned: if Sr. Lucy and others could go without a GPS 50 years ago, why not me, with a new boat and the gear?

The problem we have is, we have become obsessed with ticking every square of our check list. We keep debating the soundness of our theology, the accuracy of our doctrines and above all, political correctness. By the time we finish these exercises we are tired out, having exhausted our energy and resources.

In our Church's mission statement, we agree to these:

Our Church's Mission in Aotearoa New Zealand is to reflect and proclaim the transforming love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and declared in the Scriptures.

To be flexible, creative, and open to God's Spirit in a changing world and Church, so that the Church is relevant to people's needs.

To release energy for mission rather than to absorb energy for maintenance.

I invite you to think seriously about these commitments. We must wake up to the reality that we cannot be hundred percent certain about the outcome, but we need to take risks in moving into mission, that is by being flexible, creative and open to God's Spirit in a changing world. We need to be mindful of safety, but keeping safe is not the object of the mission. We must move into mission as and when Christ leads us. It isn't a case of waiting for favourable or unfavourable times; but of responding as Christ leading us. We must be prepared to move into mission as and when we discern what God is saying. When we move into mission, theology will emerge to enlighten us further.

Christ Jesus is ahead of us, calling us to launch into mission. It is time for us to follow him. May our responses to the question of what more could be done to promote God's work prioritise God's mission. Amen.