

JAMAICA METHODIST DISTRICT PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE 2021

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord, grant you grace, mercy and peace in the midst of the global pandemic, COVID-19 with all its challenges.

The meeting of District Conference 2021 has begun by the grace of God. With the wearing of masks, the frequent sanitizing and the social distancing it is very clear that we are meeting under vastly different circumstances. Yet the mission and the message are the same because the Great Commission and the Gospel have not changed. It is with this in mind that we continue with the District theme **'Spreading Scriptural Holiness to Reform the Nation; Beginning with me'**. This year the sub-theme which will direct our focus, our work and our witness is: **'Caring for the Body Mind and Soul as We Serve the Present Age'**.

We must take care of our bodies. Every human being is meant to be a temple of God, and because God's Spirit dwells in us, we who are Christians know this to be true. We glorify God not only with our spirits, but also with our bodies. It is true that sacrificial service may toll on the body, but the body was not meant to be misused or abused. We should not do anything with our bodies or allow our bodies to be used for anything that does not honour the Lord. Holy living is as much a physical act as it is spiritual.

We must take care of our minds. Heart and mind as a single concept, or taken separately, refers our faculty of reasoning and understanding, our character, the centre of our desire and intention. The word of God exhorts us with the words 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2:5). This equipped mind according to William Barclay¹, is the mind that has the wisdom which can see and understand the ultimate and infinite things; which can deal with the practical problems of daily life and living; the wisdom which can judge and test things and choose the right aim and the right course of action, in accordance with the will of God.

We must care about and care for our souls. The two most important dimensions of life, the physical and the spiritual, are summed up in the terms body and soul. One part of us is mortal, the other immortal. Jesus once said ". . . do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt 10:28)

However, let us not believe that the theme is a call for us to focus only on ourselves. The District theme is **'Spreading Scriptural Holiness to Reform the Nation; Beginning with me'**. This is the starting point.

¹ William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1964), 261.

In order to prepare others for the kingdom, we ourselves must to be prepared. We cannot effectively share what we do not have.

As we face the challenging experiences of COVID-19, which are new to all of us, how the Church has approached pandemics and plagues throughout history is worth re-visiting. We are more likely to find that the crisis was not met with resignation and defeat. On the contrary, the Church saw opportunity to live the gospel and to proclaim the living hope which we have through Jesus Christ. They rescued the perishing, they cared for the dying, they wept over the erring ones and lifted up the fallen. They demonstrated obedience to Christ's command to love one another. In many instances, in such times the Church grew as much in number as in grace.

Today we are faced with restrictions regarding attendance at church, but more and more churches have resorted to using technology. The result has been that in many cases more people are hearing the preaching of the word of God. We see people participating in worship as never before because persons are joining worship from other parts of the country and even from overseas. What great opportunities this crisis has opened! Churches are exploring available means of reaching their members who are unable to come out to worship. No doubt, some shut-ins are now being seen as never before. It is hoped that when this pandemic has passed, the Church will continue these innovative means of keeping in touch with members and reaching others, even the un-churched.

Charles Wesley's hymn, 'A charge to keep I have', which is one of the theme hymns for this year should serve as a constant reminder of our solemn charge as Methodist Christians to spend and be spent for Christ and His kingdom. Let us be reminded of the consequence of unfaithfulness. The let our sincere prayer be:


To serve the present age,	Arm me with jealous car
My calling to fulfil:	As in thy sight to live
O may it all my powers engage	And O thy servant Lord prepare
To do my Master's will!	A strict account to give

As the year progresses, may we turn the crises into opportunities. May we encourage faith rather than fear. May God be enthroned on our prayers and our praises. To God be the glory!
The words of the beloved Apostle, St Paul is a fitting benediction as I commend you all to God's gracious providence and guidance:

"God is the God who gives peace. May He make you holy through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept free from blame. May you be without blame from now until our Lord Jesus Christ comes."²(1 Thessalonians 5: 23-24

The God who has chosen you is faithful. He will do all these things.

Your servant, for Christ's sake,



Bishop the Revd. Christine M Gooden Benguche

January 23,2021
