

## Reverend Linda Mandindi and the Quest for Black Methodist Consultation: Muted Voices Are Enabled to Speak

The blind receive their sight and see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf can hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. (Mathew 11:5)

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### Abstract

This paper reflects on the approach of Reverend Linda Mandindi to ministry in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). Special emphasis is given to the contribution he made as ninth president of the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC). I will highlight Rev. Mandindi's journey in the ministry, his struggle to candidate for the ministry, and the ways in which he dealt with ethnic and cultural challenges of being a black minister in a church predominantly led by white people. Rev. Mandindi's narrative demonstrates the liberating work of the church to black people, whom it empowered through gospel spirituality and education. The article presents a truncated biography in the context of the historic evolution of the BMC, its contribution to the transformation of the MCSA, and ultimately to our nation. I have divided this paper into four sections. First, I briefly discuss the founding of the BMC. Second, I look at Rev. Mandindi the man, with specific emphasis on his development as a progressive pastor and leader with a keen understanding of the political and religious landscape of South Africa. Third, I seek to appraise Rev. Mandindi's work and legacy. I conclude the paper by looking at the challenge that Rev. Mandindi's legacy presents to the MBC and the MCSA.

**Keywords:** Reverend Linda Mandindi; Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA); Black Methodist Consultation (BMC); legacy

### Introduction

The fact that we have lectures through which we are celebrating the founding and legacy of an organisation such as the Black Methodist Consultation (BMC), and the fact that the focus is not on some highfalutin ideas or mysteries that are beyond human imagination, but that we have chosen to look at the actual contributions and legacies of past presidents, demonstrate that we as members of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), and the BMC in



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particular, are coming of age. It is only people who have matured who can look upon their own heroes and celebrate them in order to draw on values from which they can craft a vision for their future. Echoing Bernard of Clairvaux, the Peruvian liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez stated that when it comes to searching for a comprehensive and holistic spirituality, we as a people must know how to “drink from our own wells” (Gutierrez 1984, 5). He thus observes:

In our insertion into the process of liberation in which the peoples of Latin America [read, Methodists] are now engaged, we live out the gift of faith, hope, and charity that makes us disciples of the LORD. This experience is “our well.” The water that rises out of it continually purifies us and smoothes away any wrinkles in our manner of being Christians, at the same time supplying the vital element needed for making new ground fruitful.<sup>1</sup> (Gutierrez 1984, 5)

Therefore, this paper is a contribution to the efforts of the current leadership of the BMC to encourage us to “open our own wells” as black Methodists, where we and our generations come to drink the waters of wisdom, progress, liberation and human dignity bequeathed to us by those who went before us in the MCSA. Churches, especially mainline churches such as the Methodist Church, are known as consumers of knowledge from the West without exporting any intellectual resources to be consumed by those in other continents. A reflection on the life and work of the BMC is a fundamental shift from that perspective, for it is the black people seeking to learn from our own, to produce our own knowledge and to disseminate it—not to our own alone but to the rest of the globe. Ultimately we will move from being consumers of other people’s knowledge, to also being disseminators of our own knowledge to the rest of the world; thus making us not just objects of the production of knowledge but rather the subjects and producers of new and liberating knowledge. Celebrating the life and ministry of Rev. Linda Mandindi—who has since been elected to be the Bishop of the Natal Coastal District of the Methodist Church—is shaking the bones of those who founded the BMC, but who have since left us. These include people such as the Rev. S.S. Seane, who was the organiser, Rev. Earnest Baartmann, who was the first president, Dr Khoza Mgojo, who was the founding secretary and Rev. Enos Sikhakhane, who conducted the first Bible study in the meeting that founded the BMC on 21–23 September 1976.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper reflect on the work of Rev. Mandindi, the ninth president of the BMC. My approach is to focus on a truncated biography of the man, located in the context of the historic evolution of the BMC, its contribution to the transformation of the MCSA and ultimately our nation. In my attempt to fulfil this mammoth task I have divided this paper into four sections.

First, I briefly discuss the founding of the BMC. Second, I look at Rev. Mandindi the man, with specific emphasis on his development as a progressive pastor and leader with a keen understanding of the political and religious landscape of South Africa. Third, in what will be the longest section, I seek to appraise Rev. Mandindi’s work and legacy. I conclude the paper

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1 Gutierrez, G. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984, 5.

2 Minutes of the Meeting of the BMC held in Bloemfontein on 21-23 September 1976, 1.

by looking at the challenge that Rev. Mandindi's legacy presents to both the MBC and the MCSA.

## **Ministry as Transformation of Realities**

David Bosch argues that ministry needs to lead to “transformation of realities for the better.”<sup>3</sup> This is a shift from the original understanding of mission as being just the “conversion of the gentiles.”<sup>4</sup> Kritizinger and his colleagues also point to the fact that transformation by mission is contextual, meaning that it responds to relevant issues that face the church at a particular time and place.<sup>5</sup> William Willimon has argued that a pastor has to be an activist, one who moves the community to seeing injustice and acting upon it in order to change the way things are. He regrets the loss of this kind of pastor.

I regret the loss of the pastor as an instigator of holy discontent, righteous indignation, and disease with the powers. Some of my guiding images for ministry were provided by people ... who relished the role of speaking truth to power, prophets who knew that Jesus provokes conflict.<sup>6</sup>

The title of this paper highlights Rev. Mandindi's overall contribution to the ministry of the Methodist Church, which is a transformation-centred ministry and which manifests itself in the quest for muted voices to be heard; speaking on some of the key issues that affected them. He is one of those activist-pastors, but his activism was exercised in a more cautious manner, to the extent that—if you do not watch carefully—you can miss this important aspect of his ministry. Fortunately this quest is at the heart of the purpose of the BMC, which was to enable the visibility and articulation of the roles and experiences of black people within the MCSA. This was well articulated by the first chairperson, Rev. Baartman, after his election as the leader.

The aim of the Consultation is not to devise means of giving birth to a Black Methodist Church, but that its main objective is to examine the Methodist Church as a whole in its present structure and to see if there is any important role played by a black man in the church.<sup>7</sup>

The quotation that introduces this paper was borrowed from the words of Jesus in Mathew 11:5. He was responding to John's disciples, when they were asking if he was really the one who was to come, and he said: “See the evidence for you. See for yourselves, the blind can see, the lame can walk and the sick are healed.”<sup>8</sup> From this statement, we can infer that Jesus had come to transform people's lives for the better. Within the context of the Methodist Church today, if Jesus would come to a circuit as a pastor, or if he were appointed to a position of responsibility and things happened, realities would be transformed, the blind

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3 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 4.

4 Kritizinger J. J. *On Being Witnesses* (Johannesburg, Orion, 1994), 1.

5 Kritizinger, *On Being Witnesses*, 113.

6 Willimon, W. *Pastor: The Theology of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 64.

7 Minutes of the BMC held in Bloemfontein 11-12 September 1976, 1.

8 Mathew 11:5.

would see, the lame would walk, the deaf would hear—who would not want a minister like that?

Rev. Mandindi's ministry stretches over the past 27 years and in this period we can see signs of a transformation-centred ministry. I have seen that some received sight, the deaf could hear the good news, those who had been burned by patriarchy and oppression were enabled to shake themselves up and walk. It would seem that the challenges which confront us each day in Africa—and especially in Rev. Mandindi's beloved church, the MCSA—present us with the challenge to look for those who are still experiencing some form of marginalisation. Once we have identified them, we can create spaces for them to express themselves and for them to be heard, not just to be seen.

This captures what Rev. Mandindi has sought to do in his ministry, especially in his three years as president of the BMC. He campaigned for women to work as leaders in our church; the inclusion of groups from other races in the leadership structures of our church; and promoting the integration of circuits as a means of enhancing reconciliation, not only in the church, but also in our country, as will subsequently be discussed in this paper. Through his work as an activist-pastor, he fought to create thin spaces for Methodists on the margins, to gradually move to the centre so that they may speak and be heard. Therefore, you cannot talk about the contribution of the BMC in the transformation of our church—and ultimately the South African religio-political landscape—without talking about Rev. Mandindi's contribution in that transformation. His legacy as a pastor is marked by walking the thin line between maintaining the tradition of the church, whilst creating spaces for those on the margins in order to transform them. His legacy is founded on how he contributed to the building of the church as a liberating space for those in the margins. He had an earnest quest for muted voices to be heard in the church and he worked through the BMC to enable those voices to be heard.

### **The Legacy of a Eurocentric Methodism**

When the Methodists landed in South Africa, it was a Eurocentric denomination like other English-speaking churches.<sup>9</sup> It was dominated by white culture, theology and polity. Although most of its mission agents sought to adapt it to the African context and its dynamics, it was trapped in colonial vestiges and legacies for a long time. African mission agents joined the church and offered to participate in its adaptation to the African context, but most of them were frustrated and ended up leaving it to form their own churches. These are people like Nehemiah Tile, James Mata Dwane and Mangena Mokone.<sup>10</sup> Much had changed in the Methodist Church of the 1970s, as a result of progressive resolutions that the church had adopted in order to resist apartheid, for instance:

- In 1958 it had adopted the resolution to declare the church to be “one and undivided.”

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9 This is the term that is used mostly by Charles Vicencio and John de Gruchy to refer to churches that originated from Britain and the USA.

10 For more on this subject, see Kumalo, R. S., “Missions are Money and Money is Mission.” *Studia, Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 2011, XXXV11 (2): 115–131.

- In 1964 it had elected its first black president in the person of Rev. Seth Mokitimi.
- In 1974 it had hosted the first multi-racial youth camp facilitated by Revs Alex Boraine and Ernest Baartman, which shook the foundations of the church.

In the same year the Rev. Dr Alex Boraine left the Methodist ministry in protest of what he saw as racism in the church.<sup>11</sup>

However, there were still numerous issues that concerned progressive Methodists, who felt that the church was not transforming enough to be faithful to the needs of its black membership and ministers. More contentious was the lack of genuine unity between white and black Methodists. Daryl Balia notes that up to the mid-seventies, “The Methodist Church was still controlled by white Methodist decision workers.”<sup>12</sup> This point is also emphasised by Mokhele Madise:

It is a fact that the Methodist system is white and capitalist. The feeling of the BMC is that it needs to be overhauled.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Genesis of the Black Methodist Consultation**

It is not surprising that in 1975 the Rev. Ernest Baartman, a proponent of black consciousness and also youth secretary of the Methodist Church, mobilised some black clergy who wanted to see change in the church. They had a vision of “a church with equal representation at all levels of power sharing” where black Christians could equally claim “privileges and rights in God’s family.”<sup>14</sup> In May 1975, Baartman convened a meeting of black Methodist ministers at St John’s Methodist Church in Bloemfontein. The aim of the meeting was to reflect on the ministry of the MCSA from a black perspective and “more in particular to assess the role and contribution of black people in the leadership structures of the church.”<sup>15</sup> It was at this meeting that the Black Methodist Consultation was formed, with Rev Earnest Baartman as its first chairperson, Rev. Dr Khoza Mgojo as secretary and Rev. Andrew Losaba as treasurer. The following were the objectives of the BMC:

- 1) Equal representation in the structures of the church.
- 2) Same treatment of all Methodist ministers, especially with regard to stations.
- 3) Dismantling of old traditions, customs and racism.
- 4) Growth of African spirituality.
- 5) Equality in financial remuneration of ministers.
- 6) The combining of synods instead of two separate ones based on race.
- 7) The development of black consciousness and political awareness amongst black clergy.

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11 Boraine, Alex, *A Life in Transition* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2008), 73.

12 Balia, D. “New Independent Methodist Movements in Southern Africa.” In *Afro Christianity at the Grassroots*, 1994, edited by G. C. Oosthuizen.

13 Madise, M. “Struggle from within Black Caucuses’ Quest for Recognition.” In *Orality, Memory and the Past*, edited by P. Denis (Pietermaritzburg, Cluster Publications, 2000), 261. The contribution of the BMC to the Methodist Church: 1.

14 Balia, “New Independent Methodist Movements in Southern Africa,” 2.

15 Balia, “New Independent Methodist Movements in Southern Africa,” 2.

Over the decades the BMC has pushed the Methodist Church to transform in a number of areas. Dion Forster (2008) has highlighted three important areas that show the significant contribution of the BMC in the church.

First, they have pushed the church to represent its black members and their voices more adequately as could be seen in the number of black bishops in the church compared to whites. Second, the BMC has made it possible for African values and traditions to find a place in the MCSA. Third, politics, through the work of the BMC, has found a place as one of the official concerns of the church, thus, making the church truly a part of the society in which it finds itself. And the BMC has remained a very important movement in the church today. (Forster 2008, 11–12)

Rev. Mandindi has contributed to this change as one who led the BMC at presidential level. The question that may be asked is: Who is this Rev. Mandindi and what makes him tick? At this juncture I would, therefore, like to shift the focus on him. For us to appreciate the contribution that he has made not only to the BMC but to the Methodist church at large, we need to discuss his personal story.

### **Reverend Mandindi: The Man and his Story**

Linda Mandindi was born on 11 December 1966 and raised in a small village in the Northern Cape, called Banks Drift. He is the third of six children (2 boys and 4 girls). Rev. Mandindi is married and the couple has a 25-year old daughter, a 17-year old son, as well as a grandson, Lelethu, who is only four years old. Linda Mandindi and his siblings, together with their cousins, were raised by their maternal grandparents, who were devout Methodists and paid special attention to Linda's church attendance and involvement.

After his matriculation in 1986, Mandindi moved to Meadowlands, Johannesburg where he lived with his sister and brother-in-law. This was after his attempt to candidate for the ministry was not successful, since the superintendent of the circuit was not interested in helping him with the process of candidature. After a few months in Soweto, Linda was able to locate a Methodist Church. His membership was then transferred to this church that was under the leadership of Rev. Hector Shabalala. In 1987 he registered at the famous Funda Centre in Baragwanath where he read for a Diploma in Arts, Poetry and English. At the time, the Funda Centre was under the leadership of the well-respected Dr Ntatho Motlana. It was during this time that Linda became intensely aware of his call to the ministry of the Methodist Church.

Out of his own volition, Mandindi got very involved in the life of the Methodist Church in Zone 7, Meadowlands, where he was a member. He sang in the church choir and served there as the youngest society steward of this congregation. Under the guidance of Rev. Hector Tshabalala (who is now working in the National Parliament in Cape Town), his leadership skills within the church were sharpened. His sense of call to the ministry had manifested itself since his childhood and it intensified as time went by. He expressed it as follows:

I have always known that there is something that I need to do but I never really understood what it was. I have always been told that, even as we were playing as kids, even when there was no need, I would always choose the path of being a pastor, and when I was in Jo'burg that stood out. I loved preaching. I was scared of it but I loved doing it.<sup>16</sup>

After a deep and passionate conversation with his grandmother about his call to the ministry, Mandindi was advised to share this news with his minister. Rev. Tshabalala prayed, guided, encouraged and journeyed with Linda, who had subsequently qualified as an accredited local preacher of the Methodist Church in 1987. Thus, Mandindi became certain at that time that he was not only called for word and service, but also for word and sacrament. Through the guidance of Rev. Tshabalala, he became a candidate for ordained ministry in the Methodist Church in 1988 and was brought before the synod of the then South Western Transvaal District (now Central District) of the greater Johannesburg area.

Linda was admitted by the synod after a gruelling time of examination; he was collared by the end of 1988 and was commissioned to work in Brandfort, in the Kimberly and Bloemfontein district of the Free State at the beginning of 1989 as the successor for Rev. Ziphozihle Siwa (the current presiding bishop of the MCSA). He stayed in Brandfort for three years (1989–1991), where he had a fulfilling ministry of looking after 34 societies: “People welcomed me in an amazing fashion and God blessed me with influence, good influence ... I enjoyed my ministry in Brandfort.”<sup>17</sup>

The hard work, hectic schedule and the lack of support from his superintendent, led to his under-performance in his theological studies, which was very important for the continuation of his training in the Methodist ministry. By the time of the next sitting of the synod he had passed only two courses out of eight and the church wanted to remove him from the Role of Ministers in Training, as was the practice in those days. The tremendous strides he was making particularly with his work in the congregation, was overlooked. He was wholeheartedly involved in the life of the community, and regularly faced harassment by the Special Branch of the then South African Police (SAP) for his activist work in the community and involvement in the pre-school project that had been established by Mrs Winnie Mandela some years earlier during her banishment to this community. His footprints are still visible in Brandfort and his impact still felt until this day. Yet, synod voted unanimously to remove his name from the roll, based on his academic performance. In a subsequent Meeting of the Bishops his name was discussed. Special attention was devoted to the manner in which his name was removed. It was the Bishop of the Natal Coastal District, Rev. Norman Hudson, who decided to take him under his wing. Consequently Mandindi was sent to the remote village of Ubombo in KwaZulu-Natal in 1991.<sup>18</sup>

Mandindi arrived at Ubombo at the peak of the ANC-IFP struggle for political control and Ubombo was a predominantly Zulu-speaking community. This constituted a new kind of

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16 Linda Mandindi, “My story as a Methodist Minister.” Unpublished essay written by the Rev. Linda Mandindi. June 2015 (Umlazi, Durban), 1.

17 Mandindi, “My story as a Methodist Minister,” 6.

18 By this time he was already married to Nokhaya Magketla, whose brother was also a Methodist minister.

challenge for Mandindi. He has a Xhosa surname. People in the community, therefore, did not take him seriously. They believed he was affiliated to the ANC and was there in the interest of the ANC under the guise of a church minister.

In June of 1991, he went to the internship in-service training session in Durban. Whilst at the internship service the Rev. Bernedino Mandlate asked Mandindi to accompany him to the Federal Theological Seminary (Fedsem) in Imbali, Pietermaritzburg. Whilst accompanying Rev. Mandlate—and very coincidentally—he met Rev. Dr Khoza Mgojo, then president of Fedsem, and a former president of the MCSA. When Dr Mgojo heard that Mandindi was stationed at Ubombo, he was disappointed and said:

Ubombo? How can this church place such a young and good looking man in such a remote area? You must come to seminary next year.<sup>19</sup>

This is how Mandindi found himself at Fedsem in 1992. When Fedsem was officially closed in 1993, Mandindi was among the first group of students to be moved to Kilnerton in Pretoria, where he completed his Diploma in Theology with distinction. Mandindi's leadership qualities were recognised right from his first year at seminary. He was elected as the student representative to the Seminary Council and liaised between students and seminary leadership. His outspoken nature and representation of students at the seminary almost led to his expulsion at some point, but he was saved that demise by the intervention of the then Presiding Bishop, Dr Stanley Mogoba, who came to his rescue.

Mandindi was ordained in 1996 and was invited to Umlazi U-section, under the influence of Rev. Dr Mgojo, who was the superintendent of the Umlazi circuit at that time. After five years of servitude at Umlazi, Rev. Mandindi was invited to Clermont. He brought with him a wealth of leadership experience and learning in the Methodist Church as well as the spirit of servitude he had displayed at Brandfort. With more maturity than at Clermont, through the help of the municipal council, he founded the Ministers Fraternal and served as its first chairperson. He was able to foster sound ecumenism in Clermont and brought ministers of other churches together. They celebrated Ascension Day, Week of Pentecost and pre-Easter services ecumenically.

In 2011, Rev. Mandindi accepted an invitation from a “coloured” congregation in Cape Town. He was excited about this invitation, because it would offer him an opportunity to minister to a culturally and racially different congregation from the black congregations he used to serve. He believed that this would offer him learning opportunities. Unfortunately this was not to be an exciting experience. He recalls:

I would choose white people for the simple reason, and this is personal experience. Maybe it's not for all coloured people, in the absence of white people, coloureds are the worst oppressors. In the absence of white people, coloured people see themselves as superior, more superior than you as a black person. They try to prove a point, because when whites are there

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Rev. Mandindi by Sokfa John, 29 May 2016, Umlazi. I am grateful for the assistance of my research assistance, Mr Sokfa John, from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.



they are the second, now when whites are not there they become the first and you as a black person you'll always be the least. They ill-treated me badly during my ten months' stay there.<sup>20</sup>

Another challenge was that his wife, who is a nurse by profession, could not find employment in Cape Town and could thus not stay with him. This made his experience even worse since he had no one to go home to, to share, to ventilate, and for encouragement. The following year he was sent to Durban circuit, where he was appointed as the superintendent. Durban circuit is one of the most respected circuits in the Methodist Church, since it had been led by luminaries of the Methodist ministry such as J. C. Mvusi, E. Z. Sikhakhane and Khoza Mgojo. For Rev. Mandindi to be invited and appointed to the superintendence of this church was indeed an affirming experience.

### **Leadership of the BMC**

Rev. Mandindi served as the connexional president of the BMC from 2002/3–2005/6. He was approached by people who felt the BMC needed his leadership. This forced him to do some research on the BMC, because he knew very little about its history and purpose. Rev. Mandindi took over the BMC leadership from Rev. Sidwell Mokgothu, who had led with perfection and who had outstanding qualifications compared to Rev. Mandindi at that time. In terms of achievement, Rev. Mandindi believes that the leadership of the BMC is open-ended. There are a few achievements that can be attributed to Rev. Mandindi's leadership of the BMC:

#### *The Election of a Woman Bishop*

It was when Rev. Mandindi was president of the BMC in the Natal coastal district that he influenced the membership to vote for Rev. Purity Malinga to be bishop of the Natal coastal district. No woman had been a bishop before in the MCSA. Some clergy, especially, were opposed to this elevation of a woman to a position of bishop, which implied that she was going to have authority over them. Rev. Mandindi persevered, believing that the time had come for the Methodist Church to have women bishops. Indeed, Rev. Purity Malinga was elected and led the district with distinction for two terms of three years each.

Another achievement was when, as National President of the BMC, Rev. Mandindi campaigned for the election of Ms Lindeni Madlala as Lay President of the Methodist Church. Ms Madlala was an accomplished leader of the Methodist Church and had even been secretary of the National BMC. However, there was opposition mainly from black clergy. The opposition was both patriarchal and ethnic. Those opposed to her election argued that she was a woman and that she was Zulu-speaking and thus they were not happy with her election. Rev. Mandindi believed that she had the prerequisite qualifications and so she deserved to be elected. Colleagues in the ministry heavily criticised him, but he and his executive continued to mobilise support for Ms Madlala. Finally she won the elections and was appointed as Lay President for the MCSA for a period of three years.

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20 Interview with Rev. Mandindi by Sokfa John, 29 May, Umlazi.

### *Affirmation of Lay Leadership*

Rev. Mandindi was also appointed as president of the Young Men's Guild (YMG) of the Natal coastal district in 2005. It was during this leadership that he demonstrated the abilities of a visionary leader. He changed the programme of the convention which had remained the same for decades. He was searching for a new way of running the convention that would lead to transformation, inspiration and empowerment. This was very risky, because it meant removing some of the services that had become a tradition of this gathering. Rev. Mandindi demonstrated the qualities of a risk-taker. He affirmed Mr Mandela's advice to leaders that:

There are times that a leader must take an unpopular decision that would make him/her to stand alone and do things the way he sees them as needing to be done.<sup>21</sup>

Rev. Mandindi's commitment to the work of the laity is evident when one looks at his executive committee. He worked very well with all the members of his executive. Each one had a specific role to play. He even afforded the vice-chairperson of the YMG an opportunity to write and present his own report, which was not usually done. That was an affirmation of his leadership style.

When Rev. Mandindi was appointed the General President of the Triennial of the YMG, he became the leader at a national level, who demonstrated his appreciation of the leadership for lay people in the MCSA. His time in office coincided with the centenary celebration of the YMG. He led the centenary celebrations with vision and innovation. His leadership at this time can be seen in the following areas:

- 1) He brought dignity and pride to the YMG.
- 2) He called for research on the history of the YMG.
- 3) Having established the true record of the development of the YMG, he honoured the pioneers of the YMG, e.g. Gideon Baqwa.
- 4) He mobilised the YMG throughout the connexion to celebrate the YMG and celebrations were held throughout the MCSA.

Being in the leadership of the BMC gave Rev. Mandindi a bird's eye view of black people in the Methodist Church. From the top, and as if with a microscope, it was very painful to see how strongly ethnicity is a dividing and destructive factor among black people within the church. When someone is elected into office, questions are raised in terms of the ethnic group to which the person belongs. People had begun to complain that from 1976 Nguni people (Xhosas and Zulus) have dominated the leadership of the BMC. Rev. Mandindi found it painful that:

... instead of continuing to see each other as brothers and sisters who belong to the Methodist Church as members of the BMC, people were dividing themselves along ethnic and tribal lines.<sup>22</sup>

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21 D. Patta. 2000. *One Step behind Mandela* (Rivonia: Zebra Publishers), 123.

22 Interview with Rev. Mandindi by Sokfa John, 29 May, Umlazi.

This tribal and ethnic separation, for him, is the beginning of xenophobia. The BMC as a formation within the MCSA is based on building the integrity of black people, however, it seemed as if the church was decentralising along ethnic lines. This was regrettable and a painful experience.

Since, I stepped down as connexional chair of the BMC, I have never been to their single meeting, and part of me had been saying maybe somebody will come to me and ask me so that I'm able to tell the story, because I can't just take anybody else's platform and share this story ... Having experienced, unfortunately, these instances, I don't want to be associated. I will only share my views. But until and unless we are willing to talk about this and agree that we are not as good as we claim to be, we have faults, and we need to learn to accept and admit our faults if we are going to be a driving force within the Methodist Church.<sup>23</sup>

The good news is that the BMC has since taken the issue of ethnicity on as part of its agenda. This is not surprising because tribalism was one of the issues that were raised at the founding meeting of the BMC for it to address. So actually the BMC has never been in favour or in support of ethnicity and tribalism.<sup>24</sup>

There are growing concerns within the Methodist Church regarding the relevance of the BMC as an exclusively black movement within contemporary South Africa. Some Methodists (many blacks included) think that in the new South Africa, a rainbow nation, and with the vision of the Methodist Church as "one and undivided," the BMC as it is today is no longer relevant. There have been views that it is actually a racist movement. Membership of the movement is based on skin colour. Even some white Methodists share the vision of the BMC and wish to contribute to it as part of the movement, but they have been denied membership for being white. Responding to these concerns, Rev. Mandindi observed that:

The BMC was formed as a forum where black people come together because of their peculiar black issues in the Methodist Church and in society. Therefore it will remain relevant for them as long as they still face those issues. It is for black people to ask whether it is relevant or not, especially those who are within the movement itself.<sup>25</sup>

The vision of the BMC is far from having been achieved; therefore, opening the group to non-blacks will impede the attainment of this vision. Black people in the church are still suffering financial and other exclusions. Rev. Mandindi believes that many whites still don't see themselves living side-by-side with black people. It is clear that 95 per cent of the wealth of the church is still in the hands of white people, and white parishioners in some places move to other churches in other suburbs when black people join their services. He further gave the example of his church in Umlazi, which has 18 other churches and over 3 000 members, yet it is served by his team of four. However, a white church in the same town with only about 197 members is being served by three ministers. For Rev. Mandindi, the BMC is a forum where black people meet to tease out their peculiar issues; not that they have anything against whites. Some white people want to be a part of it only because of its influence and the

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23 Interview with Rev. Mandindi by Sokfa John, 29 May, Umlazi.

24 See Minutes of the BMC held in Bloemfontein 11-12 May 1976 for more on this.

25 Interview with Rev. Mandindi by Sokfa John, 29 May, Umlazi.

transformation it is bringing in the church, while there are other legitimate bodies in the church that they can join, such as the local preachers' department, and they do not.

They don't go into the doors that are open to them; they want to come into a door that is closed to them. They want the BMC because the BMC slowly but surely is closing down the gap of manipulation that has been exercised by white people for a long time ... the BMC still has a long way to go. We are not racist, we are a formation that seeks to speak and address issues that relate to black church in the Methodist church. We are not discussing white people; we are discussing how we strategise to be on par with the white people.<sup>26</sup>

Despite this opinion, the question of relevance, shape, value, purpose and vision of the BMC in today's rainbow nation and in a supposedly "one and undivided" church begs for critical attention—now more than ever before. Rev. Mandindi has called attention to the ethnic divisions within the BMC, but it is important to ask pertinently whether the BMC itself is not dividing the Methodist Church along ethnic (racial) lines? Black people have become very prominent leaders of the Methodist Church today, and white people have lost enormous control of the church and are increasingly becoming less prominent. Thus, is the BMC really still relevant? Or can there be a BMC that is not exclusively black? Is it possible for the BMC to advance its course without being exclusively black? Many white people in South Africa today feel like a minority, and feel excluded in the new South Africa, and possibly within the Methodist Church. Can the BMC make this broader aspiration its goal of achieving unity and equality for all—irrespective of race, colour or ethnicity? Can it focus more on being "one and undivided" rather than having a strictly black agenda? Will opening up the group to white people change the group? Will the membership of non-blacks water down the group or will the effort to accommodate them and move with them somehow change/influence the vision, strategy, and distinctive/distinguishing quality of the group? However, is this change necessary or is it still not yet time, as Rev. Mandindi has argued? He has also highlighted his concern that white people do not seem ready to live side by side or share their resources with blacks. It is equally important to ask: Are black people ready to share their resources and live together with white people in today's South Africa? Are they willing and ready to be in the same church and treat all equally?

### **Key Influential Persons in Reverend Mandindi's Life: Sources of Strength/Motivation**

Rev. Mandindi also considers his wife to be a special blessing from God. In his words:

But then God blessed me with a very supportive wife, Nokhaya. She is a strong prayer warrior. She is a powerful, powerful, powerful support structure any man would ever ask for. My wife is not a full-time employee of the church. She is a support system to her husband, which is me. But there are times I feel that she is doing more work than I am. That woman is the glue that holds women in the circuit together. She is the one who affirms and reaffirms me. She is the one who critiques and criticises me, who makes me want to go out so that wherever she is, when she says she is Mrs Mandindi, people can take her seriously.<sup>27</sup>

Another figure that has earned Rev. Mandindi's deep adoration is Rev. Dr Khoza Mgojo. He believes that his leadership within the church and as a minister is directly related to the

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26 Interview with Rev. Mandindi by Sokfa John, 29 May, Umlazi.

27 Interview with Rev. Mandindi by Sokfa John, 29 May, Umlazi.

person that Rev. Mgojo trained him to be. He was loved very much by Mgojo, who taught him the value of humility in leadership. Some of the lessons he has learned from Rev. Mgojo are captured in the following sections.

### **Reverend Mandindi the ecumenist**

Wherever Rev. Mandindi finds himself, he tries to identify persons who would be his brothers, who can support him; people with whom he can check his ideas and who can be open, courageous and honest with him. He believes that successes are often in line with one's relationships. Thus, at Umlazi, Rev. Mandindi currently finds support and friendship in the Anglican Rev. Mazibuko and a dear friend who is an army chaplain, Rev. Dlamini. They pray together, share, and hold each other accountable in their work.

Singing is also close to Rev. Mandindi's heart. Many people know him more for his gift of singing. Rev. Mandindi has been able to influence a number of young people by actively being involved in ensuring that they pursue their vocation. These men are currently respected ministers in the church, including the YMG president of Limpompo district, Rev. Molefi Tau. During his past four years at Umlazi where he is superintendent, Rev. Mandindi has also directly influenced four people to offer for the ministry and who are currently either serving congregations or are about to begin their probation as Methodist ministers. These are Msizi Msibi, Philani Dlamini, Skhumbuzo Mkhize, and Siyabonga Ntombela.

### **Lessons from Reverend Mandindi**

There are a number of lessons that can be learned from Rev. Mandindi's journey by members of the BMC in order to serve their organisation, the MCSA, and South Africa even better. I would like to turn to those lessons now.

### **Re-defining the BMC**

Rev. Mandindi is one of the people who are currently grappling with the role of the BMC in the contemporary era. As a deep thinker, he has been asking questions regarding the relevance for this organisation. He is convinced that this body is still important, although he struggles to articulate its new role in a Methodist Church that is run by black people anyway. This paper supports his thinking that the BMC is still relevant but not as it is currently, because it needs to adapt to the changing times. The ground has shifted in the MCSA, for it was transformed from a white-dominated church to one that is predominantly run by black people. It is a fact that things have changed from a time when: the MCSA was run by white bishops; having racially discriminated circuits; preaching a Eurocentric theology; structured in racially separated circuits; having extremely poor churches on the one hand and extremely rich churches; and having whites in every structure with no black representation. That is no longer the case. Today, out of the 12 bishops of our church, only two of them are white (one of them is already exiting) and the rest are black. We have more financially viable black circuits than financially viable white circuits. Moreover, the structures of the church are dominated by blacks. We have more black ministers than white ministers. Even the key institutions of our church such as the presiding bishop's office, the MCO, SMMS and EMMU

are run by black leaders. In fact, one of the challenges that we are facing is that we are not attracting white people to either the membership of the MCSA nor to its ministry. Looking at these achievements, we can celebrate the achievements of the BMC as they were identified in its original mission statement. These are the hard facts that should not be denied, but accepted for what they are if they are to be truthful.

### **Learning to Live in Canaan and Practising Freedom**

It also means that the BMC must make the psychological mind shift from being a pressure group, to a governing group in power. In the language of the ANC, it needs to make the psycho-ecclesial move from the margins of the MCSA to the centre, because that is where it is physically and where it should also be ideologically. You cannot be permanent victims, when the call to be free has already materialised and the chains of imprisonment have been removed, at least legislatively. The BMC does not need anyone else to free it now, because it will liberate itself. One of the good examples is that the BMC has limited its role to caucusing for positions and nothing more. As a result they are not developing sustained leadership that is fully supported and empowered by us. Most of the time we elect people into positions and even before they have warmed up to those positions they are thinking of the next elections and who we are going to elect to replace them. That may be necessary at times, but we also need to learn to live with the leadership we have put in office, challenge it where necessary, but sustain it so that it can make a long-term contribution to what we want.

### **Black Consciousness**

One of the original aims of the BMC was to raise the appreciation of black consciousness amongst our people. Conscientisation is defined as follows:

By Black Consciousness is meant the awareness of black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness. It means that black people are no longer ashamed of being black, that they have a black history and a black culture which is distinct from history and culture of the white people; it means that blacks are determined no longer to be judged by or to adhere to white values. BC is an attitude; it is a way of life.<sup>28</sup>

In a society that for centuries had always juxtaposed what is black with what is white, and emphasised the superiority of the white and the inferiority of what is black, one needs to build an appreciation of what is black. So, black is beautiful, black is capable, black is also an image embraced by God, the Messiah is also black. The black man's presence in the Bible and in theology must be explored: the decision by Jesus to seek refuge in an Egyptian community instead of a European one; the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch who carried the gospel to Africa; the story of the church in Antioch which was the first African church; the fact that Ethiopia had Christianity before Europe—all of these facts are to be explored in order to bring a black perspective to the gospel. Black people must not be mere consumers of white theology, but they should tell their own story of Christianity from their own perspective. This task has not been done and still needs to be done. This paper upholds that

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28 Madise in Denis. P. *Orality, Memory and the Past*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2000, 251.

there is no other organisation that can take this work as its core business in the MCSA, other than the BMC.

Black consciousness is so important because when you go out into the world, you are still discriminated against. As a black person you are more likely to be searched at an international airport than your fellow-white passengers. This is the case everywhere in the world except within the African continent. A black person is still a suspect wherever he/she goes and he/she is most likely to be thrown into prison for a long time, even for a crime that he/she has not committed. That has negative effects on black people. They become angry, develop an inferiority complex, and are most likely to be violent to their spouses and children. Therefore, there is a need to affirm black people, both males and females, to take their place as leaders in the world.

However, this cannot happen because black people are manifesting their hate of themselves or anything that is black. Have you not asked yourself why the xenophobic attacks were actually not xenophobic but rather Afrophobic? The word *xeno* is a Greek word for stranger or foreigner, *phobia* is a Greek word for fear, so it is *xenophobia*. Xenophobia is found all over the world, not just in South Africa. The difference with what we have in South Africa is that it is directed against black people, not white foreigners such as Chinese, Koreans, Europeans and Americans, who when they migrate to South Africa are embraced as beneficial tourists and investors. However, any African who moves to South Africa is regarded as an economic refugee, even if he has money to invest and an education to help uplift the country. That is what Frantz Fanon (1961), renowned Algerian philosopher, referred to as Negrophobia or Afrophobia—when black people hate themselves and express this by hurting those who are vulnerable to them.<sup>29</sup> We argue that the BMC should lift its focus and work to deal with such complex issues, teaching Methodists to embrace what it means to be black; to love being black and to love their fellow black people from within the continent.

### **Developing African Spirituality**

There is still a need for a developed African spirituality that expresses the quest of the Methodist people to worship God as Africans, drawing experiences from their culture but also from their consciousness as a people. Enculturation has been practised in our churches for years and most of us are at peace with this. There is a need for a solid spirituality of what it means to be a Methodist within the African context, one that goes beyond racial undertones to real issues affecting the African church, including its other Africans such as whites, Indians, and coloureds. This is who we are as a “one and undivided church.” How do we practise church together in an inclusive fashion; church with commonly shared visions and values? Rev. Mandindi’s campaign—first for a white bishop in this district some years ago, and then his campaign for a coloured presiding bishop when he was still president of the BMC at connexion level—was a quest to take us to another level. This was also consistent with the BMC’s attempt to have Rev. Paul Verryn elected as Presiding Bishop of the

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29 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove), 1961.

Methodist Church, even though he is a white man. This is a level where we see ourselves as an inclusive church and community of faith, rather than remaining in our racial silos and ghettos. This is important in a church that is struggling to hold onto its membership and pastors in a society where young people are leaving the Methodist Church in droves to become the proverbial sheep of pastors who literally make them drink petrol, eat grass, step on them and even take their money in the name of buying blessings from the Lord. The BMC should be concerned about the kind of spirituality that we need to offer as a church, one that attracts all races back into our church, so that we can see it growing rather than shrinking.

### **Gender Equality**

One of the contributions by Rev. Mandindi was his campaign for the election of a woman bishop in the Natal coastal district and women lay presidents for our connexion. He and his colleagues won those struggles and put women leaders in office. Today we boast everywhere the MCSA goes that it is the only mainline church in this country that has ever had a woman bishop and we have at least had two women as lay presidents of our church. Now that is good, but those things could not have been done without leaders of the calibre of Rev. Mandindi. He was castigated by some who were opposed to this idea and some of the criticism came from within the BMC. In 2016 the Methodist Church celebrated 40 years of ordination of women. In these 40 years the church has been able to ordain at least 177 women to the ministry, which is just about one per cent of the total number of ministers ordained in the MCSA within the same period. Out of these 177 women ministers who have been ordained in 40 years, one has been a bishop, only four have been vice-chairpersons of districts, and only one has been the secretary of conference.

This means that the BMC's work is cut out for it. It needs to continue with its work of conscientising Methodists to move towards liberation of all those on the margins. It is sad that some in the BMC are the ones who are opposed to the election of women into positions of leadership, when this is the movement to empower people who are marginalised. As the BMC continues its journey, it needs to participate in the emancipation of women to enable them to take leadership in the MCSA.

### **Ethnicity**

One of the biggest challenges of our times is the problem of discrimination based on ethnicity. When apartheid collapsed in 1994—at least legislatively—it did not go away. Firstly it became subtle, so it went underground, where it continues to do its work. Secondly it mutated, meaning that it changed to another form, through which it continues to express itself. That form is ethnicity or tribalism, which is gradually eating the Methodist Church away and if we do not eradicate it, this church will not stand against it for long. It is a fact that some of our districts are doing good work to stop the whole idea of organising themselves around certain ethnic groups of people who were born, bred, offered, ordained and now minister in those districts. Those who are never willing to go anywhere where conference wishes to send them, nor are they prepared to welcome ministers from other ethnic groups to come to their districts. You will find this “worm of ethnicity” eating away at



our districts in different places. In some districts even have names by which they call each other, such as Majaponi or Majapere—Majaponi are the Ngunis and Majapere are the Sothos. This is perpetuated by members of the clergy, who should be encouraging unity across ethnic and tribal lines. When the colonisers came into Africa they mastered the art of dividing black people according to tribal and ethnic groupings so that they could be weak and conquerable. Now, through ethnicity, we are maintaining these divisions in the church.

Rev. Mandindi is a typical example of a Methodist minister who has served in the connexion not in his ethnic-dominated district. After offering for the ministry he was sent to Kimberley, a Sotho-Tswana-dominated district and he did suffer ethnicity there; he moved to KwaZulu-Natal where he has served almost all of his ministry. He relates in an interview that personally he has not experienced ethnicity, but he has rather been embraced with love. It is no surprise that in this district he has continuously climbed the ladder from heading the youth, the YMG, the BMC and currently he is the vice-bishop. The BMC of this district has to be applauded for the good work they have done to work against the rise of ethnicity. The Natal coastal district is one of the most ethnically mixed districts in the connexion in terms of the clergy. The BMC at national level should take a leaf from this district, the one in Limpopo and Grahamstown on how to preach the gospel of inclusivity in the connexion and fight the worm of ethnicity that is eating our church away.<sup>30</sup> Charlotte Maxeke, that great Methodist pioneer of women's rights, once warned the leadership of the church:

Be careful of ethnicity, it is a dangerous animal that if ignored, in the end it will kill us all.<sup>31</sup>

## **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, I would like to go back to where I started. Rev. Mandindi has been an enabler and an empowerer of voices that have been silenced in the Methodist Church. Through his work as a minister and a leader of the Black Methodist Consultation, he was able to empower women to become leaders, enabled the election of a coloured presiding bishop for the church, and enabled the MCSA to celebrate the African heritage brought by the YMG through Gideon Baqwa's work. He has pioneered a number of projects and initiatives. In this district and area he is known for his work as a preacher and a great singer. He has indeed been and continues to be an asset for the MCSA and its ministry. In celebrating 40 years of the organisation of the people called Methodist, the BMC has been a catalyst for the salvation of black people within the MCSA, and can proudly say to all who dare to look at and listen to the work that has been achieved: "We can unashamedly call all and say: See the evidence. See for yourselves":

The blind receive their sight, the deaf can hear, the lame can walk and the sick are being healed.

Our appreciation to the BMC for producing leaders like Rev. Linda Mandindi.

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30 The Limpopo district, which is Sotho and Tswana-dominated, elected Rev. Themba Mntambo—a Zulu—as their bishop; and the Grahamstown district, which is Xhosa-dominated, elected Rev. Musi Losaba as their bishop.

31 See Kumalo, R. S. "Wathinta Abafazi, Wathinti Mbokodo: The Pioneering Leadership of Charlotte Maxeke," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, December 2014, XL (2): 212–132.

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