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MORAL DECAY DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

“Conference resolves to task DEWCOM to develop a discussion document on the issue of moral decay at it affects the church and its prophetic voice” p.96 Yearbook 2012

The world in which we live is not static. The landscape of politics, economics, social structures, norms and values is in constant flux as each of these categories, as well as others, adapt to the stimulus provided by their histories and their contexts. The question of moral decay is complex, but a complexity which the church cannot afford to ignore or simply dismiss. At the same time, the church stands in a position of constant flux itself and cannot claim to observe morality from an objective perspective or treat morality as a static subject. When the church acts on its prophetic calling to be a moral voice to the world, it needs to take cognisance of a few questions. These will be described below and the reader is asked to engage with these questions personally and/or in a group so as to gain greater clarity regarding the church’s role in speaking out against moral decay.

1. Is the Church the sole custodian of morality in society?

Points to ponder:

The Church has an inherit view of itself as being the voice of morality in society. In the Bible, we certainly find that religious structures, -leaders and prophets exercised this role in their contexts. This role was generally recognised by the “State” and society at large. In, Southern Africa, is this the case? Is the Church now one voice among many voices (e.g. the media, judiciary, education specialists, special interest groups etc.) calling for morality? What place does the Church occupy in the eyes of the State and of society when it comes to issues of morality?

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2. Where is the decay?

Points to ponder:

When the Church speaks about moral decay, it seems to address issues and problems located within a specific sphere. The question needs to be asked whether there is any moral decay taking place within the Church itself. If moral decay is to be found in the Church, it would severely hamper the legitimacy of the Church's prophetic voice. Should the Church first address its own issues of morality before it speaks out on issues outside its direct influence? Is it possible for the Church to give a credible prophetic critique while dealing with its own moral questions? What are the questions the Church needs to urgently deal with so that its voice will not contradict its practice?

3. What does it mean to be prophetic?

Points to ponder:

For the Church to be prophetic means that it reflects what it believes to be the voice of God regarding the practices, attitudes, actions and worlds expressed in the world. How does the Church do this? Is it helpful for the Church to be independent of all social structures or is it better for the Church to be part of social structures (facilitating change from within)? To what extent can the Church contribute change in society by performing actions, rather than passively offering verbal critique?

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4. How can the Church ensure the validity of its prophetic voice?

Points to ponder:

To enhance its credibility, would it be helpful for the Church to draw up and subscribe to a Code of Ethics? Are the current accountability structures in the Church sufficient to promote trust in the Church as a credible, moral body? How does the Church make sure that it accurately reflects the Will of God? What does the Church believe and practice regarding discernment, prayer and consultation? Is the Church well informed on issues before it endeavours to speak prophetically? How is the Church as prophetic voice represented in each person in its fold who claims to be a follower of Christ? How does the Church encourage personal engaging with issues of morality in its membership?

5. How can the Church enable all people to become expressions of what Mr Wesley called "Perfect love"?

Points to ponder:

Christian living is not confined to our church membership or times of communal worship. As Christians, our claim is to be followers of Christ, growing in our faith and in the reflection of the work and presence of Christ in every aspect of our lives. This means that Christian living should be visible in all areas of our being. Does being a Christian bring healing and transformation wherever the Church moves?

It is not the aim of this document or of DEWCOM to prescribe to the MCSA what it should believe about moral decay, moral formation or the prophetic role of the Church. It is the vision that all God's people should be part of the Church's prophetic witness in their respective roles and capacities in society. This document serves to spark discussion in the MCSA on the topics of our own morality, our role as the Church in society and how we should go about being a light to the nations.