



The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

A Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of Nations

● Series Teachings
on the MCSA Book
of Order

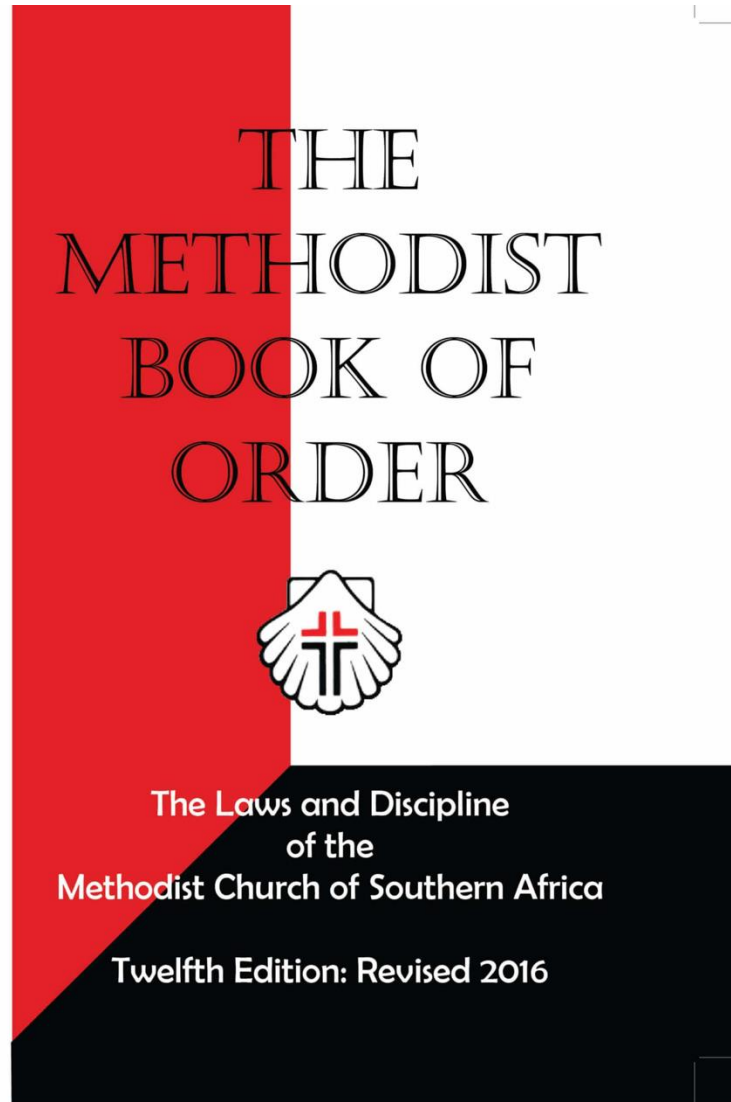
**Laws and Disciplines of the
MCSA - 02 June 2026 - Session 1
of 5**

**Khanti T. Mhlubulwana – MCSA
Lay President**



Rationale for Laws and Discipline - MBOO

- Identity
- Covenant
- Mission and
- Discipline



Series Purpose (1 – 5)

To equip **All Methodists** (leaders, ministers, probationers, evangelists, Bible Women, class leaders, society stewards, circuit leaders, and church members) with a Wesleyan understanding of the Methodist Church's Laws and Discipline (**Book of Order**), enabling them to live faithfully within the covenantal life, mission, governance, and discipline of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (**MCSA**).



Session 1 – 02 June 2026 Focus

- Introducing the Book of Order as
 - *a spiritual, theological, missional, and governance* document
- rather than merely a legal or administrative manual.

| Governance Focus | Objective(s) | Desired Outcomes |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| Methodist Identity and Governance | Understand the purpose, authority, and spiritual foundation of the Book of Order | Participants appreciate the Book of Order as an expression of covenant, mission, doctrine, and discipline |



Learning Objectives

By the end of this session participants should be able to:

1. Explain why the Methodist Church has a Book of Order.
2. Describe the relationship between Scripture, Wesleyan theology, and Church governance.
3. Understand the covenantal nature of Methodist membership and ministry.
4. Explain the connection between mission, discipline, and accountability.
5. Appreciate the Book of Order as a tool for discipleship rather than control.



Scripture and Governance

- "But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." **1 Corinthians 14:40**
- "... All the believers were together and had everything in common"
Acts 2:42-47
- **Time for Reflections:**
 - What happens when a church has no agreed way of living together?
 - Can a church be spiritual without being accountable?



Scripture

“Whoever is faithful with very little will also be faithful with much.” **Luke 16:10**

Are we worthy stewards so that God can trust us with more?



Key Insights

- The Holy Spirit is not opposed to order.
- The Spirit creates holy order that enables mission, discipleship, accountability, and growth.
- John Wesley believed that *spiritual vitality* requires both: ***Spirit*** and ***Structure***
- Methodism was born as a movement but survived because it developed holy discipline.



Governance in the Prophetic Mission

- ***Governance is*** “How we make decisions, how we ensure fair implementation, how we keep ourselves accountable, and how we live out our values.”

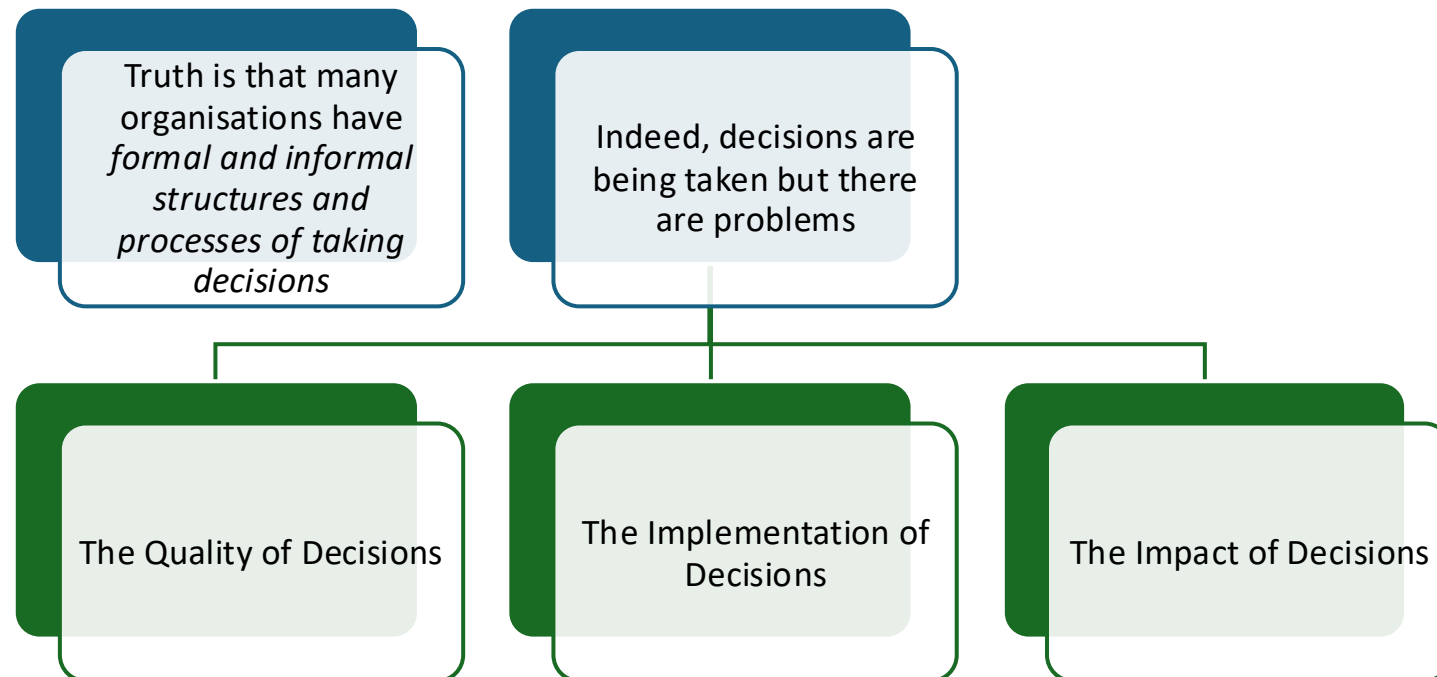


Governance Defined

- Governance refers to the processes by which organisations and institutions are directed,
 - Decision Making and Implementation
 - Policy making
 - Rules and procedures
 - Monitoring and accounting of activities
 - Ethical standards and practice



Governance Deficits – Context



Introduction to the MBOO

- The Methodist Book of Order states that the Laws and Discipline: "...is an ecclesiastical [**Ekklesia** (or *ecclesia*)] and organisational tool that is meant to assist in the effective and orderly governance of the Church."
- Further: "...the official Constitution of The Methodist Church of Southern Africa."

(MBOO, 2016:3)



Start-Up Discussions

When you/we/people hear 'Laws and
Discipline,' *what feelings arise?*



Possible responses

- Fear
- Restriction
- Punishment
- Rules



Reflections ...

How does poor governance damage our witness amongst the people?

What does good governance look like in your context?



The Book of Order is fundamentally about

- Mission
- Community
- Accountability
- Covenant
- Spiritual formation

Not merely punishment.



Why Does the Church Need Order?

- **John Wesley** never intended Methodism to become an undisciplined revival movement.
 - He believed: "There is no holiness but social holiness."
- Christian growth occurs in accountable community.



John Wesley

"I am not afraid that the people called Methodist should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist *as a dead sect*, having *the form of religion without the power*. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they *hold fast* both the *doctrine, Spirit*, and *discipline* with which they first set out."



Governance and Prophetic Mission

- **Good governance** protects the prophetic voice from being distorted by personal agendas.
- **Structures** (policies, rules, reporting systems) help us remain faithful to our calling and protect the trust of the people.
- Remind that **governance is a *gift* for order, not a burden**



Methodist Structures Developed by Wesley

- Classes
- **Bands** (small-group structures designed to foster deep spiritual growth, confession, and Christian fellowship)
- Societies
- **Love Feasts** (small-group structures designed to foster deep spiritual growth, confession, and Christian fellowship)
- Covenant Services
- Conference
- All these were methods for discipleship. Hence the name, **Methodists**



Governance, Church Structure, Checks and Balances (*Separation of Powers*)

| STRUCTURE | DECISION MAKING/GOVERNING BODY | OFFICERS/EXECUTIVE |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Connexion (L&D Chp.5) | Conference / CE | Presiding Bishop |
| | | Lay President |
| | | General Secretary |
| | | Unit Directors |
| District (L&D Chp. 6) | Synod / DEC | District Bishop |
| | | District Lay Leader |
| | | District Synod Secretary |
| | | District Conveners/Secretaries |
| Circuit (L&D Chp. 7) | Circuit Quarterly Meetings / CEC | Superintendent |
| | | Ministers |
| | | Circuit Stewards |
| | | Other Circuit Leaders |
| Society (L&D 7.33) | Society Leaders meeting/SEC | Resident Ministers |
| | | Society Stewards |
| | | Other Society Leaders |
| Class/Fellowship/Cluster (L&D 3.14-15) | Class Meeting (Members) | Class Leaders |



The Church Needs Order Because

1. Mission must be coordinated
2. Resources must be managed responsibly
3. Leaders must be accountable
4. Members need pastoral care
5. Conflicts require resolution
6. Doctrine must be protected (*tenet*)



Methodism seeks a balance

Without
discipline
there is chaos

Without grace
there is
legalism



What is the Church

- **Chapter 1 of the Book of Order** defines the Church as: "The company of the disciples of Jesus..." who confess Christ, love one another and serve God's Kingdom.
- **Wesleyan Understanding, *The Church is:***
 - Not a building
 - Not an institution only
 - Not merely a denomination
- ***The Church is:***
 - **The People of God** - Gathered as a covenant community to worship and reflect Him (**1 Peter 2:9**)
 - **The Body of Christ** - Operating as a unified organism where Christ is the head and believers are the interconnected members (**1 Corinthians 12:12**)
 - **The Community of the Spirit** - Assembled and empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:42**)



Stewardship in a Prophetic Mission

- **Stewardship** is “*Taking care of what God has entrusted to us.*”
- **MCSA Tradition**, Stewards are the *administrative heart* of the church, especially vital in African contexts where there is no formal staff.
- **Stewards enable prophetic mission to happen**, by making sure resources, property, and finances are handled with integrity.



Group Reflections

"What makes a church different from any other organisation?"



Other Organisations vs. Church

| Organisation | Church |
|--------------|----------------|
| Governance | Covenant |
| Membership | Discipleship |
| Rules | Grace |
| Leadership | Servanthood |
| Compliance | Transformation |



Methodist Identity

The Methodist Witness, The Book of Order identifies several distinctive emphases:

1. **Universal Grace** - God's salvation is available to all people.
2. **New Birth** - Transformation through personal conversion.
3. **Christian Fellowship** - Believers grow together.
4. **Holiness** - Christians can grow toward perfect love.
5. **Priesthood of All Believers** - Every Christian is called into ministry.

Open Reflection Question - Which of these Methodist distinctives is most under threat in today's Church?



Covenant, Not Contract

- Crucial Wesleyan principle. The Book of Order describes ministry as a, "*...covenantal relationship but not contractual relationship...*"
- ***A contract asks:*** "What am I entitled to?"
- ***A covenant asks:*** "What has God called us to become together?"



Examples

| Contract | Covenant |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Rights | Responsibility |
| Self-interest | Mutual commitment |
| Transaction | Relationship |
| Legal obligation | Spiritual obligation |



Open Reflection Question

How would our societies, circuits change if members saw themselves as covenant partners rather than consumers?



The Methodist Ethos – Christian Community (MCSA Book of Order 3.3)

"Made Perfect in Love" - *"The law of love is the law of Christ for all His disciples."*

- **Key Principles** - Christian love is the foundation of Methodist discipleship and membership.
- Members are called to **grow towards perfection in love**: *"Pure love filling the heart and governing all words and actions."*
- Faith is nurtured through **mutual accountability, encouragement, and support**.
- Every Methodist is called to participate actively in Christian community.

Methodist Ethos Cont.

- **Distinctive Methodist Practices: Class Meeting** – Spiritual accountability and growth.
- **Love Feast** – Fellowship and testimony.
- **Covenant Service** – Renewing commitment to God and one another.
- **Wesleyan Challenge** - "None is excused from this debt of love."
- **Leadership Reflection:** Do our structures cultivate love and accountability?
 - ✓ Are we helpers of one another in mission and ministry?
 - ✓ How do we care for those who have become disconnected from the means of grace?
- **Scriptural** : Colossians 1:28; John 13:34–35; Acts 2:42–47



The Methodist Rule of Life

Living the Wesleyan Way (MCSA Book of Order 3.4–3.5) - Three Dimensions of Wesleyan Discipleship

1. Do No Harm

- *"Avoid evil of every kind."*
 - Reject dishonesty, greed, exploitation, corruption, and harmful speech.
 - Exercise integrity in personal, church, and public life.
 - Use influence and authority responsibly.

2. Do Good

- *"Do all the good you can."*
 - Show mercy and compassion.
 - Evangelise and witness to Christ.
 - Serve communities through justice, peace-building, and sacrificial giving.
 - Every Methodist is called to be an **evangelist and missionary disciple**.



Attend Upon All the Ordinances of God

"Remain rooted in the means of grace."

- Public worship and Holy Communion.
- Prayer and Scripture reading.
- Christian fellowship and accountability.
- Self-discipline and family worship.

Wesleyan Vision

- **Personal Holiness + Social Holiness = Transforming Discipleship**
- **Leadership Reflection**
- **How are we being relocated and repositioned for mission through:**
 - Holy living?
 - Compassionate service?
- Faithful participation in the means of grace?
- **Key Wesleyan Principle** - *"There is no holiness but social holiness."* — John Wesley **Attend Upon All the Ordinances of God**



Discussion

What resources are we stewarding on behalf of God and the people?

How can we improve our stewardship to empower our prophetic mission?



Holding Centre

- **“This is the center that must hold for things not to fall apart.”**
- When governance and stewardship collapse, prophetic mission collapses too.
- Our spiritual witness depends on getting these basics right.



Reflection

What practical next steps can we take to strengthen the “center” in our societies, circuits, or congregations?



More Reflections or Discussions

A member says, "I don't need leaders. I don't need the Book of Order. I only follow the Bible."

Reflective Questions

1. Is this statement fully Methodist?
2. Why or why not?
3. How would Wesley respond?



Key Take Away

“Empowered for prophetic mission, walking amongst the people” requires that we manage God’s house with the same care God shows to us, **faithfully, transparently, and with deep accountability.**



Summary

Methodists believe,

- Scripture is supreme.
- Doctrine is interpreted within the Church.
- Christians grow in accountable community.

The Book of Order is not above Scripture,

- It is the Church's agreed way of living under Scripture.



Conclusions and Key Take Aways

The Book of Order is,

- ✓ A covenant document
- ✓ A discipleship tool
- ✓ A mission guide
- ✓ A governance framework
- ✓ A witness to Wesleyan identity
- ✓ A means of accountability



Finale

"Methodists do not merely belong to a Church; they belong to a covenant community committed to Scriptural holiness."





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