Dear People called Methodists, sisters and brothers in Christ!

I have participated in the 14th Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies from 12th to 19th August 2018 at Pembroke College, Oxford, England. The theme was “Thy Grace Restore, Thy Work Revive: Revival, Reform and Revolution in Global Methodism. The Institute began with the first plenary session on “Reflections on the Reformation.” I commented in understanding the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) on the issue of justice which was raised when the World Communion of Reformed Churches gathered for its association with JDDJ along with Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran World Federation and World Methodist Council in Leipzig, Germany, in 2017.

There were several plenary lectures on the Methodist legacy of revival in many different regions in the world such as Argentina, United States, Sri Lanka, and South Africa. From the forgotten stories of lay people and deaconesses to the stories of conflict and struggle for peace and justice, the heritage of the faithful Methodists has been critically reflected and sincerely shared as the food for imagining the continuing Methodist revival. At the particular plenary panel on “Methodist Connexionalism in Flux”, Bishop Ken Carter explained the One Church Option as well as the two other options, according to the Way Forward Commission of the United Methodist Church. I talked with him after the panel to send my good will message to the UMC Council of Bishops, along with the very important theological reminder that the One Church Option has to be critically illuminated in the light of the Nicene-Constantinople creed, namely, “the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.”

Besides the topics of Reform and Revival, the topic of Revolution has been relatively less dealt with in the Institute. Fortunately, the Rev. Dr. Joan Delsol Meade lectured on “Immigration, Religion and the Working Class.” During the Q & A time, I challenged all members of the Institute to see to it that the rapid rise of economic nationalism is a great alarm for the prophetic witness of Methodist Christians today. I remember Bishop Christian Alsted’s perceptive remark during the last World Methodist Council in Seoul: “The cause of the deterioration of European Christianity has nothing to do with Muslim immigrants. It is rather secularism in Europe.” Therefore, the Bishop continued to speak out, “The exclusion and discrimination of the refugees is the betrayal of the Gospel by European Christianity.”

I am glad that the key Institute leaders have paid great attention to the theme of the next World Methodist Conference in 2021 in Gothenburg, Sweden; “On the Move.” I hope and pray that the next Institute of 2023 will meet the new realities of our time complexly intertwined with the issues of migration and economic nationalism on the one hand, and secularism and world religions on the other.

I joined the post-Institute meeting of the two-third world theologians at Wesley House, Cambridge on August 19-20. It was initiated by my friendship with Dr. Amos Nascimento, of the UMC GBHEM, who organized to resume the very significant roundtable for the majority of world Methodist theologians. The theme of the post-Institute was “Empire and Decolonization in Wesleyan Traditions.” I had a very good discussion with the prominent scholars

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from the Global South. I am looking forward to continuing collaboration of WMC, GBHEM and Wesley House!

Bishop Ivan Abrahams, who presided at the covenant service at Christ Church Cathedral during the Institute, kindly arranged my visit to his London virtual office as well as my meeting with General Secretary of the British Methodist Church, Rev. Gareth Powell. It was wonderful to experience the de-centering and globalizing presence of the World Methodist Council. Indeed, the heyday of World Methodism is yet to arrive!

In this edition of the First Friday Letter, you can learn about other Methodist happenings from around the globe like the World Methodist Peace Award, MCCA Elects New Connexional Officers and New District Bishops, the WME’s new RIM Gap Year Program, and the celebration of the 70th year of the World Council of Churches. You will also read about the passing of two former World Methodist Council staff members, the World Methodist Museum receiving a cross sculpture made from materials from the DMZ, the Methodist Church in Kenya Celebrating its 50th anniversary since autonomy, and the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. A Church in Nigeria Opens a Hospital and Korean United Methodists Choose Prayer Over Plans also make interesting reading in this edition of the FFL.

May God bless you and your ministry!

Rev. Dr. J. C. Park
The Prestigious “World Methodist Peace Award” Presented at the OPCEMI

Torre Pellice (Turin), 27 August 2018 (SSSMV / 07) - Bishop Ivan M. Abrahams and Gillian M. Kingston, respectively the secretary general and the vice president of the World Methodist Council (WMC), have presented the prestigious “World Methodist Peace Award” at The Society for the Evangelical Methodist Churches in Italy (OPCEMI), awarded the recognition for its constant and convinced commitment to and for migrants and refugees, an activity that dates back to 1989, with the following motivation: “This small church showed great courage in the face of the widespread crisis due to the flows of refugees and migrants to Europe. When others said that the problems were insurmountable, the attitude of the OPCEMI was ‘we could not do anything else, we could not sit down and let it happen’. The motivation emphasizes the commitment to the ‘humanitarian corridors’ and to the ‘House of Cultures’ in Scicli, Sicily, where there is a Methodist church. The Casa delle Culture is part of Mediterranean Hope – refugees and migrants program of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy (FCEI).

“It is with joy and honor that on behalf of OPCEMI I receive this prestigious award that men and women of value, inspired by feelings of faith and peace, have received before us. I can not forget, for example, that the former UN secretary general, the Ghanaian Kofi Annan, received him in 1998, “declared OPCEMI president Mirella Manocchio, in receiving the medal.

“There is still a lot to do. I am thinking of the unresolved issues of the dublinati and of the law on ius soli, the exploitation of many workers, immigrants and others, in the Italian countryside. A form of real slavery that is a scandal for our country “concluded Manocchio.

In bringing greetings from the WMC, Kingston emphasized how remarkable the way in which the respective traditions of the Methodist and Waldensian churches in Italy “have affirmed the role of women and laity in the whole ministry of the church”.

The award was established in Dublin, Ireland, in 1976, during the critical and conflicting years known as Troubles, and its requirements were courage, creativity and consistency from the start.
Museum receives sculpture made from Korean DMZ materials

“The Museum is honored to have this sculpture on display and we welcome everyone to come by and see it and take a few moments to pray for the Korean peninsula as well as our hurting world,” Bolden added. It was presented to the Council by the Korean Methodist Church.

The plaque on the base reads: “This cross is made from parts of the railroad that connects Seoul station (South Korea) and Shinuiji station (North Korea), and barbed wire from the Korean War armistice line, and symbolizes hope for peace on the Korean Peninsula and the reunification of the two Koreas.

It continues with scripture from Ephesians 2:14. ‘For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.’”

A resolution by the Council recognizes with hope the momentous inter-Korean and international progress in 2018 toward peace on the Korean peninsula. It celebrates those who are involved in promulgating and advancing the current steps toward a permanent peace, including progress toward denuclearization.

It notes that the World Methodist Council calls on our member churches to affirm and earnestly pray for the forthcoming Roundtable for Peace on the Korean Peninsula, to be held in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, November 9-11, 2018, acknowledging the timely role of the Roundtable. This meeting is for further constructing and promoting a theology of peace and reconciliation, deepening the Methodist church role in securing the peace, and helping bring to fruition renewed and increased direct humanitarian collaborations with our North Korean sisters and brothers; and for all peoples, advancing toward a permanent peace not only for the Korean peninsula but also the world. Methodist officers are from around the world, and include the Rev. Dr. Jong Chun Park who is Council President. He thanks everyone for their prayers for Korea, noting it is every more important and personal to him as he does not want his grandchild to grow up in a divided country.

A very special cross, constructed from materials at the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, just arrived at the World Methodist Museum at Lake Junaluska.

Presented to Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary of the World Methodist Council, at the recent Council and Steering Committee meetings in Seoul, those attending from around the world were moved by the symbolism. “The cross of these materials is a reminder of the need to break down barriers and walls and to work toward peace and justice for all people,” explained Jackie Bolden who participated in the meeting.

“As Christians and part of the more than 80 denominations of Methodists, we are reminded that we have one creator and must find meaningful ways to reconcile.
Edna Beatrice Atkinson Alsdurf, age 92, died on Saturday, August 18.

She touched many lives over the great number of years she served, which resulted in her being awarded The Order of Jerusalem, the highest honor bestowed by the World Methodist Council. She received this honor at her retirement, which was announced in Brighton, England in 2001 at the World Methodist Conference.

Based at Lake Junaluska, Mrs. Alsdurf traveled the world with her work. She accomplished many tasks for the Council where she was the Assistant Treasurer and also the Director of the World Exchange Program – the ministerial exchange – for many years. Prior to her service to the Council, she was employed at Interpreter’s House at Lake Junaluska for 11 years. She was also active in her local Methodist church in Waynesville, NC, serving as chair of the church council among other roles.

A native of North Carolina, she was the daughter of the late Edwin B. and Lizzie Mae Johnson Atkinson. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her husband, Kenneth G. “Ken” Alsdurf, who died in June 2017. She is survived by her sister, Norma Ellis, of Fayetteville, NC.

The interment was a private ceremony in Waynesville, NC.

Linda Gail Greene, 71, passed away on Thursday, Aug. 23, at her Waynesville home.

Many people from around the globe were affected by her kindness, as she was Executive Assistant / Secretary to the General Secretary of the World Methodist Council for 25 years during the tenure of the late Dr. Joe Hale. She was especially known for her attention to detail.

A native and lifelong resident of Haywood County, North Carolina, she was the daughter of the late Melburn and Edith Teague Miller.

She served as pianist and organist of her local church and especially enjoyed the fellowship of her church family as well as her own family. Known for the beautiful and delicious wedding cakes she baked, she also played the organ/piano at many weddings. A devoted volunteer, she was active in the homeless ministry programs in the county. Linda also loved to travel, visiting 38 countries around the world doing missionary work.

She is survived by her husband of 48 years, James Greene; a daughter, Ashley Greene of Greenville, NC; three sisters: Anne Strickland, Nancy Rathbone, and Melba Powell and one brother, Phillip Miller, all living in the local area. Funeral services were held in her Waynesville church, Grandview Baptist, on Aug. 28. Burial was at WNC State Veterans Cemetery in Black Mountain, NC.
MCCA Elects New Connexional Officers and New District Bishops

We celebrate and give God thanks for the work in the MCCA during the past 258 years. The triennium 2018-2021 will see changes in Connexional Officers and six new District Bishops. The three new Connexional officers are Bishop Everald Galbraith – Connexional President, Rev. Glenna Spencer – Connexional Secretary and Mrs. Yonnette Greaves – Connexional Vice President.

The new District Bishops will be: Juan Simpson B. (Panama/Costa Rica) Kofia Nials (Guyana), Jean-Lesly Dorcely (Haiti), Moses Benguche (Belize/Honduras) Derick Richards (South Caribbean) and Christine Gooden Benguche (Jamaica).

We thank God for the faithful services of the outgoing Connexional Officers and District Bishops.

Connexional Officers: Bishop Otto Wade – Connexional President; Rev. Patmore Henry – Connexional Secretary; Senora Sarah Hudson – Connexional Vice President. Outgoing District Bishops are: Roosveldt Papoloute – Belize/Honduras; Glenna Spencer – Guyana; Gesner Paul – Haiti; Heinsley Johnson – Panama/Costa Rica; Dr. Cuthbert Edwards – South Caribbean.

The appointments of Bishop Christine Gooden Benguche and Rev Glenna Spencer are ground-breaking as Bishop Gooden Benguche will be the first female to be elected president of the Jamaica District in its 229 years of existence while Rev. Spencer will be the first female to be elected Connexional Secretary of the MCCA in its 258 years history. To God be the glory! To God be raise God for all that is past and we trust God for all that is to come.

The Wesley Student’s Ordination Service

Bishop Ivan Abrahams said he “presided at a wonderful service in Christ Church Cathedral where the Wesley’s were students and ordained.”

Bishop Everald Galbraith participating in the handing over in the Jamaica District to the new Bishop, Bishop Christine Gooden Benguche
WME Introduces RIM: The Gap Year, Redefined

World Methodist Evangelism values our international partnerships as we seek to strengthen churches across the Wesleyan family and our commitment to train the next generation of ministry leaders. To help accomplish these goals, we are introducing the Residency in Mission program with placements in New Zealand. The Residency in Mission (RIM) is an immersive mission and evangelism experience designed for young adults who are called to serve beyond their home country in partnership with ministries in the Methodist Wesleyan family. RIM is a 9-12 month commitment that includes guided mentorship from mission and evangelism leadership experts. RIM also provides opportunities for host ministries to strengthen the work in their local contexts, while offering Residents an environment in which to grow in their ministry service. Each ministry context has been carefully vetted to provide safe surroundings with well-established support systems.

The Resident in Mission should be someone who:

- Seeks to be a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ
- Has a genuine desire to serve others in Jesus’ name
- Prioritizes the ministry goals of their place of service
- Desires to learn more about missional leadership
- Is exploring a call to long-term mission/ministry service
- Is willing to raise their own support partnership team and be sent by their local church
- Is teachable and flexible

Residents in Mission must have completed high school or the equivalent and be at least 18 years old. Current or future university and/or seminary students are welcome to apply. The Resident in Mission should be a citizen or resident of Australia, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, or the United States.

Please share this life-changing program with those in your ministry. We are currently accepting applications. To request an application or to learn more,

Visit: https://www.worldmethodist.org/engage/rim/Questions? Contact Rev. Dr. Rob Haynes, Director of Education and Leadership: rob@worldmethodist.org

70 years World Council of Churches – Celebration in Amsterdam

Amongst hundreds of pilgrims celebrating the 70th anniversary of the World Council of Churches were several Methodists, rightly so, since Methodists have been actively engaged in the WCC since the beginning to today. The Prayer Service took place in the Nieuwe Kerk in the centre of Amsterdam, where August 23, 1948 the WCC was officially founded. In his sermon in the Prayer Service WCC General Secretary Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit referred to the beginning saying: “The assembly message from Amsterdam shows that the delegates were bold in speaking to the reality of the world. Their faith was a hope, against the realities of many of their recent experiences.” Receiving a pair of sandals, the participants were reminded that the pilgrimage has to continue. In her meditation leading to the opening prayer, Dr. Agnes Abuom from Kenya, the first female moderator of the WCC

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To observe the Season of Creation and at the vigil of the Assisi Ecumenical Prayer for Creation entitled “Walking together to COP24” (August 31–September 1, 2018) the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops’ Conferences of Europe (CCEE) are calling Christians and their communities to pray and care for creation. The two organizations have released a joint video featuring a message from CEC President Rev. Christian Krieger, Pastor of the Reformed Protestant Church of Alsace and Lorraine, and from CCEE President Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, Archbishop of Genoa.

The Season of Creation is observed from September 1 to October 4, 2018, around the world and is linked to the Eastern and the Western traditions of Christianity. September 1 was proclaimed as a day of prayer for the environment by the late Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I in 1989. In 2015, Pope Francis established for the Catholics the celebration of the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on the September 1.

“As the environmental crises deepen and its consequences for the most vulnerable of our brother and sisters in humanity progressively appear, Christians are called to witness, in word, in action and in prayer, their faith in God as Creator,” said Rev. Krieger. “The “Season of Creation is for the Christian family, beyond all denominations, an opportunity to celebrate together God as Creator, to express our common gratitude for the gift of all life, to bring to God our sorrow for the defacing overuse of our environment and natural resources, to become aware of our responsibility toward all humans and toward creation, and to commit ourselves to action. To deepen our relationship with God, we have to deepen our relationship to each other and to all creation.”

“Environmental ecology demands an integral ecology, that is to say, a human ecology, too, respect for the dignity of every human being, of life and all that stems from that, life from its beginning at conception right up to natural death – yes all are part of this commitment to integral ecology,” said Cardinal Bagnasco. “On this point, all Christians – and therefore the Assisi meeting is particularly expressive and significant – find themselves in the light of the same faith and the same responsibility. Together, naturally, with all people of goodwill throughout the world, because to speak and look with love and to care for the human person, peoples, nations within a universal context, appropriate ecology is certainly part of the universal responsibility of the whole of humanity.
The Methodist Church in Kenya held its Golden Jubilee celebration last August 18, 2018 at the Nairobi School in Kenya, where representatives from the thirteen synods across Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania gathered for the grand celebration. The merry and colorful worship service was filled with various performances brought by the various choirs from the different synods.

The ongoing Bishop Rev. Joseph Ntombura talked about the ongoing national war on corruption and expressed positive remarks on the said campaign. He reminded the congregation of the church’s purpose which is to allow concentration, attract cooperation, and assist evaluation in the movements that impact the livelihood and overall wellness of the people. He also highlighted the growth of the Methodist Church in terms of number and geographical scope, as well as its expansion in terms of sectoral service and involvement in mission and evangelism, agriculture, health, and education.

The guest speaker, Rev. Lord Leslie Griffiths from the Methodist Church Britain Conference, delivered a challenging sermon. He emphasized how the church people must go down to the most marginalized and oppressed – those needing them the most.

In the same week, the Methodist Youth in Kenya held its national conference, “The Dunamis Experience Episode 1: In and Out of Season”. Over 600 young people from the synods in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania participated in the conference from August 15 to 19, 2018, concluded by the grand jubilee celebration of the MCK.

Simultaneously happening as well was the 53rd Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Kenya from August 17 to 23, 2018 with the theme, “The Great Commission” (Matthew 28:18-20). In his address to the conference, the Presiding Bishop Rev. Ntombura declares that the mission of the Church continues, as this is the time and the season to follow the mandate to lead the revival and take the gospel of Grace, healing and salvation across Kenya, East Africa and beyond. As quoted from this address, “We conclude with hope – For nothing of the Church’s life, worship and mission can be properly understood, unless it is seen in the light of the final fulfilment of God’s purposes.”

Church in Nigeria Opens Modern Hospital

The Nigeria Episcopal Area has opened one of the best-equipped private hospitals in the region. Unveiled last month, Jalingo United Methodist Hospital, a 30-bed facility, is expected to treat more than 10,000 people annually.

General outpatient, surgical, nursing, administrative and pharmaceutical units are stocked with the latest equipment. The hospital has an expanded range of services that includes an operating room, high-quality medical equipment and health care, as well as public space.

Bishop John Wesley Yohanna expressed hope that the new facility would encourage patients to seek care in Nigeria rather than traveling abroad for medical attention.

Dr. Ayuba A. Gagare, chairman of the United Methodist

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Church in Nigeria Opens Modern Hospital Continued

Rural Health Programme, said the hospital will provide urgent care for patients of all ages. He praised the church for alleviating the suffering of the people by bringing services closer to them.

Health worker Dickens Daniel noted that the hospital would be affordable. Other private medical facilities in the area often are too expensive for many people.

Susan Adams, a nurse at Gilead Hospital, also in Jalingo, described the new facility as the best privately owned hospital in the area. She said that even before the structure was built, the existing United Methodist clinic attended to emergency cases quickly and treated patients with care. The clinic, which was housed in The United Methodist Church in Nigeria’s Secretariat Building for six years, is now part of the hospital.

“I always feel welcomed and at ease whenever I am admitted in this clinic,” said the Rev. Yunusa Z. Usman, “because the management treats patients with love and harmony. It is also accommodating and comfortable.”

Yohanna commended the ministry of pioneer missionaries “upon whose labor we are now building this hospital.”

Simon Benjamin, coordinator of The United Methodist Church of Nigeria Orphanage, which is in the same complex as the new hospital, thanked United Methodist Global Ministries for its support. The mission agency awarded a $161,000 grant through its Global Health unit to build and equip the hospital. Global Ministries also helped the Rural Health Programme establish a revolving drug fund to ensure that medication is always available at this hospital and 18 other health centers the agency supports in Nigeria.

The Rev. Yayuba B. Yoila, administrative assistant to the bishop, urged United Methodists to continue to carry out meaningful projects like this one that better society.

Korean United Methodists Choose Prayer Over Plans

The Alternative Plan Task Force, the Central Committee and the executive committee of the Korean Association of the United Methodist Church pray together at a joint meeting held in August 2-3, 2018. Photo by Thomas Kim, UMNS

The Alternative Plan Task Force of the Korean Association of The United Methodist Church and its Central Committee met to discuss the 2019 Special General Conference and the future of the Korean United Methodist Church at the First Korean United Methodist Church in Chicago.

General Conference, the ultimate decision-making body of The United Methodist Church, is held every four years. This special session has been specifically called by the Council of Bishops and will be held Feb. 23-26, 2019, to address disagreements regarding human sexuality in the denomination.

The Commission on a Way Forward consists of 32 members appointed by the Council of Bishops, and recently proposed three plans to discuss at the special conference. The three plans are the One Church Plan, the Connectional Conference Plan and the Traditional Plan.

In addition, the Council of Bishops has asked the Judicial Council, the highest court of the denomination, to decide whether the plans would violate the church constitution as found in the Book of Discipline. The Judicial Council will meet Oct. 23-26, 2018 in Zurich. The special General Conference is expected to consider as legislation the three plans, including those provisions that would require a constitutional amendment.

The Korean Association decided to form an Alternative Plan Task Force to handle this issue during the Central Committee meeting held in October 2017. The Alternative Plan

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Task Force, which was newly organized during a gathering of the association held in April 2018, as well as the Central Committee and the executive committee recently held a joint meeting.

During the opening worship service of this meeting, the Rev. Hannah Ka said, “We must change our life’s value from doing to being. This means we respect each and every person in the body of Christ as a being of equal value before God.”

“Jesus was interested in a Samaritan woman, a leper, a blind man, a bleeding patient, a child of a Gentile woman, a sinner, a tax collector and Judas Iscariot,” said Ka.

“We have to realize that the thoughts of God are deeper and wider than our thoughts, and that our thoughts are only a part of God’s infinite will. Even though our life experiences, situations and colors of faith are different, we are to hear the word of God rather than to pay attention to human beings,” she concluded.

There is a concern that the 2019 Special General Conference may be the beginning of a new conflict rather than a settlement and arrangement,” said the Rev. Paul H. Chang, executive director of the Korean Ministry Plan. “We, the church, should pray and work for the unity of the church, and the two extreme groups at both ends should concentrate on mission rather than division and separation.”

Myeong-rae Kim Lee, one of the leaders of the Korean American United Methodist Women and a member of the Way Forward Commission, recalled the history of the denomination. “In the 1800s, (U.S.) Methodism was divided into South and North due to slavery problems,” she said. “A great number of people were sacrificed in the Civil War. Even after that, there was a great conflict over the ordination of women, but now no one talks about slavery or the ordination of women.

“I hope that the Korean United Methodist Church, which has grown up as a fruit of the mission of The United Methodist Church, will now become a bridge of peace and unite the divisions of United Methodism.”
We welcome your press releases, articles and resources! Please contact us by the last Monday of the month at communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org if you would like your story to be included in our next edition of the First Friday Letter.

We Are On the Web

This and past First Friday Letters can be found online at FirstFridayLetter.worldmethodistcouncil.org.

The World Methodist Council’s website may be found at worldmethodistcouncil.org.

The World Methodist Museum’s website is at methodistmuseum.org.

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