Dear Friends,

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus is condemned to pushing a large boulder up a hill. Every time he reaches the top, the weight of the rock pushes him back, and he never manages to get it over the hill.

Are you exasperated pushing boulders of broken relationships, prejudice, violence, grief or some other life circumstance on life’s journey? We can overcome the inertia of boulders large and small that stand between our hopes, dreams, and aspirations to live a life of dignity, meaning, and purpose.

As people of faith, we know that the rock that sealed the grave of Jesus was rolled away. The tomb was empty because death could not hold him. We claim the power of the resurrection when the Risen Lord lives in our hearts and guides our thoughts and actions. Boulders in our path should not defeat or separate us from the love of God. The Apostle Paul declares:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:31-39)

This month’s First Friday Letter shares stories of xenophobia, the disasters in Indonesia, and a super typhoon in the Philippines and how churches are moving these boulders through the power of the Spirit.

In this First Friday Letter, you can also read about the re-launch of an ecumenical book, Bible Month, Camp Meetings, new church plants in the Congo, and how two Oklahoma Pastors plan to become debt-free.

May God empower you to push your boulders over the hill before you.

Shalom,

Ivan
Global Conference against Xenophobia

Global Conference against Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration in Rome September 18-20, 2018

“All human beings are equal in dignity and rights and equally to be respected and protected.”

This is part of the message adopted by the participants of the Conference “Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration” in Rome September 18-20, 2018. The Conference was organized jointly by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (Vatican City) and the World Council of Churches (Geneva) in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Vatican City).

Fiona Kendall from Scotland, a Mission Partner of the Methodist Church in Britain working with “Mediterranean Hope” in Italy was not only attending the Conference, but also one of the speakers. Together with Luca Maria Negro she explained how the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy is responding to the needs of migrants and refugees e.g. in the House of Cultures in Scicli, the work in Lampedusa and the safe passage for asylum seekers with special needs through humanitarian visas to Italy.

The Methodists in Italy are actively participating in the work of “Mediterranean Hope”. They have received the 2018 World Methodist Council Peace Award in honor for their work. In her report about the Conference “Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration” Fiona Kendall shared reflections on the unique role of Christian Churches: “We don’t just preach tolerance but love, which has no end. As Christians, we have an opportunity to show our faith in practice by seeing the face of Christ in the other, by loving and by offering welcome. Churches could be proactively creating social cohesion by talking to people at a local level and promoting ubuntu (togetherness).”

The conference concluded with an audience with Pope Francis in the Sala Clementina in the Palazzo Apostolico at the Vatican. Pope Francis expressed the desire that the meeting give rise to many more collaborative initiatives, so that Christians may together construct a society which is more just and which expresses solidarity.

The World Methodist Council has indicated at its meeting in Houston, Texas, USA in 2016 that “migration” and “combating racism” shall be foci in its work in this quinquennium. We are called to continued efforts to overcome xenophobia, racism and populist nationalism and to promote a culture of encounter and dialogue, recognizing God in the faces of migrants, as it has been recommended in the message of the Conference (see: www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/message-from-the-conference-xenophobia-racism-and-populist-nationalism-in-the-context-of-global-migration-19-september-2018/).

Received from Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, Geneva Secretary
In 1984 a pastor from Uruguay became the first Latin American to be elected as general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The late Emilio Castro (1927 – 2013) left an unmatched legacy of passionate ecumenism behind him. His book “Pasion y compromiso con el Reino de Dios”, first published in 2007, has now been translated into English and released in an edited version.

An audience of 50 ecumenical enthusiasts gathered at the Ecumenical Centre on Friday to hear current WCC general secretary, Rev Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, former deputy general secretary Prof. Dr Wesley Ariarajah and others share their impressions of a very engaged ecumenist: “Castro was generous with his time and attention, especially to young people. Today is not only a book launch, but an opportunity to give thanks to him for his contributions. Somehow, we keep asking ‘what would Emilio have done’ in situations we face today,” Tveit said.

Castro’s accomplishments and his passion for ecumenism certainly shine through in the book, according to Ariarajah, who served under Castro: “He speaks directly to the reader and shares compelling accounts of conversations with leading politicians such as Nelson Mandela and Fidel Castro. At heart, Emilio was a pastor and a preacher”, Ariarajah explained.

Authors Rev. Dr Carlos Sintado and Manuel Quintero, who both worked with Castro and knew him well, have played key roles in the fruition of the English edition. And without translator and former WCC interpreter Tony Coates, who took on the challenge to reduce the material to a reasonable size, there probably wouldn’t have been an English edition:

“In the translation process, I re-lived what I experienced as a WCC interpreter during the Castro years. I am indeed grateful to him for writing the book in the first place and for being such an inspiration,” said Coates.


This article was originally published on: https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/an-ecumenical-pioneer-book-re-launched-in-english

Methodists Called to Help Indonesia

Following an earthquake and tsunami that destroyed major parts of Sulawesi, in the Indonesian archipelago the death toll exceeds 1400 with many more injured. This has been followed by a volcano adding to the severe trauma and devastation. Indonesia lies on the Pacific “Ring of Fire” and is prone to natural disasters.

The General Secretary of the World Methodist Council, Bishop Ivan Abrahams expressed condolences to the people of Indonesia and called on the Methodist community to pray and support those affected by the recent catastrophe.

Devastation in Palu, Sulawesi Indonesia.
Photo credit: All We Can/World Renew.
According to a statement released by All We Can, a Methodist relief and development fund in Britain, Humanitarian Aid Coordinator Laura Cook said: “People who have lost everything are in desperate need of water, food, shelter and access to medical care. The final death toll could rise in to the thousands, and thousands more are left in a dire situation. We urge people to give generously so we are able to respond quickly.’ Conditions in the devastated area are extremely difficult. The tsunami tore up roads, washed away homes and cut off lines of communication. At least 42,000 people are displaced and more than 1.5 million have been affected.”

Bishop Abrahams urges Methodist people everywhere to join their respective church agencies in rendering aid to share love and resources as life’s basic essentials are in severe need.

Bible Month

Bible Month 2019 is being relaunched this September by the Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust (LWPT) and the Methodist Church.

Bible Month is an opportunity for churches and individuals to spend four weeks engaging with one book of the Bible. For 2019, the renowned theologian and British New Testament scholar James D G Dunn will be writing notes on the book of Colossians.

The aim of Bible Month is to improve biblical literacy and engagement within churches. The first Bible Month in 2017 focused on the letter of James, and the second, this year, on Jonah.

Engagement with Bible Month over the last two years has spurred on the expansion of the initiative in 2018. While many churches run Bible Month in June, each church or group can choose any four weeks of the year that suits them best.

The Bible Month magazine is a resource which brings a book of the Bible to life within churches and smaller Christian groups. Each annual magazine includes Bible notes, preaching ideas, small group material and ideas for children and young people.

This year’s publication, which will be available available online, will bring its readers a deeper understanding of scripture and encourage group Bible study.

Alongside the magazine and online resources, Bible Month training days will be rolled out across UK regions. Training days give participants a deeper insight into the biblical book being studied and opportunities to delve further into preaching and small groups.

Amelia Gosal, Chief Executive of LWPT, said: “It’s truly wonderful to have entered into a partnership with the Methodist Church to produce Bible Month magazine, which many churches will agree is a valuable and useful resource. The magazine is a welcome addition to our growing resources supporting preaching and Christians across all denominations.”

Jude Levermore, Head of Discipleship and Evangelism for the Methodist Church, said: “Reading the Bible is a basic part of being a Christian. To share and discuss a book from the Bible in depth like this is a great opportunity for fellowship and to deepen our understanding. We’re excited to work with LWPT in developing and promoting Bible Month as a key resource for churches wishing to engage more deeply with Scripture.”

For more information on the Bible Month initiative, visit: www.preachweb.org/biblemonth
Some people may be overwhelmed at the idea of paying back more than $30,000 in debt, but Michelle and Jeff Carden will soon put that worry behind them.

The Cardens are 2014 Southern Nazarene University graduates. Their calls to ministry led them to SNU, and now, four years later, Michelle is the children’s pastor, and Jeff is the digital ministries pastor at Sapulpa Church of the Nazarene in Oklahoma.

Before they got married, Michelle and Jeff decided to take some practical steps toward managing their finances effectively, but no matter how proactive they were, there were some things that were out of their control.

“My husband and I took Dave Ramsey [finance classes] before we got married and are committed to financial health in our family, but we came out of school with a decent amount of debt that we knew would take us a long time to pay off,” Michelle said.

Though they were able to pay off a large portion of their student loans, they still had a long way to go.

“$17,000 [of our debt had been paid off], but we were really struggling with the final $15,000,” Michelle said.

While they were attending a conference in Oklahoma, Michelle and Jeff heard about The COMPASS Initiative, a program led by the Church of the Nazarene that addresses U.S. pastors’ financial challenges.

“I first heard of COMPASS at a young ministers conference that I was attending in Oklahoma City before the program even began,” Michelle said. “I then heard about it again on our district.”

The Cardens saw the opportunity, and shortly after applying, they were accepted into the program. Now, with only three months left in the program, Michelle and Jeff are almost entirely out of debt.

“With the COMPASS grant and with what we were able to pay off so far, this year we will come out debt free,” Michelle said.

Not only are they almost out of debt, but they aren’t waiting until then to begin planning for their future.

“We are really excited to get a head start on planning for our future, including retirement and college funds for our future littles,” Michelle said. “[We are] motivated to stay focused, as well as encouraged to continue our education and keep pressing forward.”

In addition to enabling them to take control of their debt, the program has driven them to learn more about handling church finances more effectively.

“We are excited to continue our journey to financial health in our marriage and our ministry,” Michelle said. “We can’t wait to see what opportunities we are able to take when we know that our finances are taken care of.”

To learn more about The COMPASS Initiative, click here.
City by City, Road by Road

In the bustling city of Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pastor Mike had been leading a healthy congregation for many years. Lubumbashi is a transportation hub for mineral products, making it the industrial center for mining in southeastern Congo. Major arteries of roads connect this southern city to the rest of the country in every direction.

Mike always felt called to be a pastor, and this calling was evident in the way his church thrived through his leadership.

As time passed, Mike began to feel a yearning and sense of urgency to reach the villages around Lubumbashi. He felt his heart break that the people in these villages lived without hope in Christ.

But Mike couldn’t believe that God would use him in this way. He didn’t feel gifted in evangelism and wondered why God would place this new calling on his heart that he had never felt before.

While he was wrestling with this calling, God was stirring a desire in the hearts of others to plant new churches in the area. Gavin and Jill, missionaries to the Central Africa Field, observed that only one or two villages in that area had churches.

They developed a new strategy: the field would mobilize pastors to follow the major roads from city to city planting churches using the church members in the previous city to plant a new church in the next. In this way, the major roads would guide them to create a network of churches from the two small churches that were already in existence.

After prayer, Gavin and Jill felt that God was calling Pastor Mike to accomplish this task. They trained Pastor Mike and members of his congregation to use evangelistic tools like the EvangeCube, and Mike’s church began their work of reaching out to a neighboring community.

On the first day of their new ministry, as they walked to the neighboring community for the first time, Pastor Mike began to doubt whether God was really calling them to this work.

In fact, Mike was so overcome with doubt that he tried to cancel the outreach event on the spot, and he asked everyone to turn around. Mike’s congregation stopped him. They urged him to pray and ask the Lord for guidance. As they prayed, Mike again felt a sense of urgency for the lost in that community and they continued walking.

When they arrived in the community, Mike began sharing the gospel with a group of people who were there. Three people gave their lives to Christ, and a large group followed them back to the church. As they continued to return to the people of the village, they established a church, and as it grew, the people in the new congregation began reaching out to another community near them.

After five years of ministering in this way, Pastor Mike and members from these congregations have successfully planted five new churches in the area. These churches are located in the middle of some of the major transportation arteries in the region and continue to grow stronger through their connection.

Five years ago, Pastor Mike wasn’t sure that God would be able to use him to reach the communities around his church without a natural gifting for evangelism. But as God continued to call and as Mike and his congregation took steps of obedience, God has been faithful to provide all that was needed. Pastor’s Mike’s story and these five new churches transformed by the gospel are a witness of God’s love and creativity in reaching the lost.
Asia consultation urges CCA to initiate regional network on child rights advocacy

A representative group of Asian churches that participated in the Asia regional consultation on upholding the dignity and rights of children proposed that the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) initiate and facilitate an Asia regional ecumenical advocacy network on dignity and rights of Children.

In responding to the proposal by the participants to initiate an Asian ecumenical network to protect the rights and dignity of children, CCA General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara said that CCA would explore possible options to facilitate an Asia Advocacy Network on Dignity and Rights of Children (AANDRoC).

CCA General Secretary further added, “The proposal and suggestion that emerged from the participants reflect the successful outcome of the consultation and the efforts of CCA to sensitise the churches to motivate them in taking their engagements in child rights advocacy more seriously”.

The consultation organised by the CCA and hosted by the Gereja Protestan di Indonesia Bagian Barat (GPIB) was held at the headquarters of the GPIB in Jakarta, Indonesia from 16 to 20 September 2018.

A Communique adopted and issued by the participants towards the end of the consultation urged churches and ecumenical councils in Asia to facilitate advocacy initiatives at the national levels to influence governments for protecting the rights of children, and collaborate with other faith based and civil society organisations to work with inter-governmental organisations at the regional and international levels in promoting child rights.

The communique also affirmed that the desire for life in all its richness and fullness was the most powerful instinct in human beings. Therefore, churches in Asia were called to be engaged in participating in God’s mission and prophetic witnessing of protecting the rights of children.

The participants also urged churches to develop policies on participation of children in decision making process as an utmost priority, and use the curriculum of Christian education programmes of churches as a means of promoting and upholding the dignity of children.

The need to create awareness among parents and children about the negative impacts of the digitalised world and initiatives to develop child-friendly as well as rights-based programmes in local congregations was also affirmed as a priority.

The consultation was attended by about 60 participants representing churches, national councils of churches, civil society organisations, United Nations related organisations, child rights activists and social workers.

‘Komunitas Sahabat Anak’, a community organisation working for the welfare of street children and trafficked children in Indonesia, facilitated an exposure programme for the participants towards the end of the consultation.

Participants after a Workshop Session on the final day

Camp Meetings: Then & Now

A UMC.org Feature by Joe Iovino*

For many United Methodists in the United States, camp meetings are an important part of their summers. These evangelistic gatherings that were part of the early days of the Methodist movement in America, have evolved over the years, but still lead people to revival and renewal today.

Early days

In 18th century America, churches were not nearly as prevalent as they are today. In the spirit of John Wesley and the first Methodist field preachers in England, early Methodist, United Brethren, and Evangelical Association leaders in the U.S. went to where people lived and worked to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Though difficult to definitively verify, the first camp meeting in the U.S. is believed to have been held in Logan County, Kentucky, in July 1800. It was an ecumenical affair led by two brothers, one a Methodist preacher and the other a Presbyterian pastor. The event was well received and was soon replicated around the nation.
Though they began as multidenominational gatherings, camp meetings are commonly considered a Methodist institution because of the leadership provided by early Methodists and their commitment to the form.

In his journal, Francis Asbury frequently writes about attending and preaching at camp meetings. He shares reports of large attendance and many conversions. He saw camp meetings as vital to evangelistic ministry.

In a letter to a Methodist preacher dated December 2, 1802, Asbury writes, “I wish you would also hold campmeetings; they have never been tried without success. To collect such a number of God’s people together to pray, and the ministers to preach, and the longer they stay, generally, the better.” He then concludes with a reference to Matthew 4:19, “This is fishing with a large net” (p. 477).

A typical camp meeting lasted 8-10 days, sometimes longer. Families would pitch a tent on the grounds and attend preaching, Bible studies, and class meetings throughout the day, and sometimes long into the night.

**Resurgence**

Unfortunately, their popularity didn’t last. “As the nineteenth century wore on,” one historian writes, “camp meetings gradually fell into disuse. After the Civil War they were revisited and once again became somewhat popular” (Encyclopedia of World Methodism 384).

Rather than meeting in remote locations as before, this resurgence of camp meetings often included building projects. Many United Methodist camp meeting structures still in use were built during this period that lasted through the late 1800s.

Similarly, the Evangelical Association and United Brethren, who had been part of the early camp meeting movement alongside the Methodists, began a tabernacle movement. During the summer of 2018, Witwen Tabernacle in Sauk County, Wisconsin, celebrated the 100th anniversary of their tabernacle.

Unlike the annual, multi-day, early camp meetings, tabernacles were a place church members would return regularly throughout the year.

**A native tradition**

Many camp meetings, like Ocean Grove, New Jersey, continue today. Preaching, concerts, and choir festivals bring people together throughout the season.

But near Charlevoix, Michigan, for example, the essence of the original camp meeting remains. The Greensky Hill Indian United Methodist Church has been holding a camp meeting each summer, “For as long as anyone remembers,” says the Rev. Jonathan David Mays.

Peter Greensky, a Chippewa and a Methodist preacher, founded the congregation in the mid-1800s.

In addition to being evangelistic, “Camp meetings were the place where tribal people would gather to share crafts, food and culture,” Mays shares. “The old fashioned summer tent meeting with the same intent and theme has continued.”

**Revival and renewal today**

Historic camp meetings are just one of the ways United Methodist churches and our predecessors have sought to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Today United Methodists gather under tents, in tabernacles, on beaches, beside lakes, in town centers, and elsewhere to worship and invite others to come to know Jesus as their savior.

The full story can be found at http://www.umc.org
United Methodists were picking up the pieces and preparing to assist others after the super Typhoon Mangkhut struck the northern part of the Philippines.

The full extent of the damage from Mangkhut is yet to be determined, but 54 people had been declared dead and another 49 were still missing Sept. 17 after the typhoon triggered a massive mudslide that destroyed hundreds of homes, according to CNN. Philippines officials say Cagayan is one of the provinces worst affected by the storm.

United Methodist Bishop Rodolfo A. Juan, the Davao Area bishop, hails from Baggao in that province, where Mangkhut made its landfall on Sept. 15.

“Baggao, my ‘Bethlehem,’ was severely damaged by super Typhoon Ompong (local name for Mangkhut),” he said, reporting damage to sanctuaries and parsonages, as well as his own house. “Thank God, our UMC members and my family are safe. Indeed, God is our refuge and strength.”

After the typhoon, Bishop Pedro M. Torio Jr. of the Baguio Episcopal Area made a call to all the subscribers of an area radio ministry and to the entire United Methodist connection to contact those willing to help the area’s disaster risk reduction and management team.

While the district superintendents there generally did not report casualties, the bishop said “many are affected” by the destruction. He also noted that “assistance will be sent through the district superintendents and we enjoin you to send more help.”

Manila Area Bishop Ciriaco Francisco called for prayers via Facebook the day following the super typhoon.

“As we gather to worship this morning, let us remember our sisters and brothers who are suffering because of Typhoon Ompong. Pray for them, share to them. Jesus said, “What you have done to the least of my brethren, you have done it unto me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Some United Methodist families in those areas hit by the typhoon have accommodated evacuees in their homes, including the family of Olive Beltran, a deaconess who lives in the Isabela province.
CCA extends Centennial Greetings to the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China

As the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China (HKCCCC) marks 100 years of its mission and witness at a Thanksgiving Holy Communion service and commemorative event on 29th September, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) extended centennial greetings and best wishes.

The centennial thanksgiving service held at the Asia World Expo was attended by more than 10,000 people, and led by Rev. Dr. Eric So, the General Secretary of HKCCCC.

“One-ness is the foundation of the Church as to the prayer of Christ in Gospel ‘that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you’, and the HKCCCC has been following the mission of Christ, keeping our unity in Christ, loving and serving our neighbours and witnessing Gospel. We are given another mission to keep our spirituality of unity and pass it down to our next generations”, said Rev. So in his message.

In a centennial greetings message to HKCCCC, the CCA General Secretary Dr. Mathews George Chunakara stated that “the occasion of this thanksgiving service and commemoration of the centenary is a time to pause and look back; to give thanks for God’s guidance and blessings, to take stock of what has been passed on to HKCCCC and then move on to higher and greater achievements for God’s glory”.

The formation of the Church of Christ in China, the forerunner of HKCCCC can be traced back to 1918 when the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in China called a meeting in Nanjing to look into the desirability of forming a union of churches. In following years, especially the May 4 Movement in 1919 and subsequent events in China aroused a great passion for nationalism, and anti-Christian feelings in China due to Christianity being suspected as a tool of cultural invasion by the imperialistic Western powers.

The prayer of commitment at the thanksgiving service affirmed to “keep the vision of unity, to witness the gospel, and to bring hope, in actions of love, righteousness and reconciliation towards the God’s people” in the years ahead.

The HKCCCC has been actively participating in the regional and global ecumenical fellowships through its membership in the Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches.

Mathews George Chunakara further added that the belief and vision of the then church leaders in China to shed the insulting label of “foreign religion” ultimately led to their conviction that a united church could contribute to China at a time when the country was facing problems from outside and civil discontent within.

“The thanksgiving service of today combined with the centennial commemoration is an invitation to take a new look with intimate and joyful gratitude to God in the on-going journey of mission and witness of the HKCCCC”, he added.

As we try to understand and re-read the history of the formation of the HKCCCC, we cannot but be challenged to accept what has been given by God, and the efforts of many faithful servants who dedicated their lives to reach people for Jesus Christ”.

The CCA General Secretary recalled the historical past and stated, “As we try to understand and re-read the history of the formation of the HKCCCC, we cannot but be challenged to accept what has been given by God, and the efforts of many faithful servants who dedicated their lives to reach people for Jesus Christ”.

The HKCCCC has been actively participating in the regional and global ecumenical fellowships through its membership in the Christian Conference of Asia and the World Council of Churches.
The Methodist Church of Cambodia officially came into being in early September at a conference in Phnom Penh. It has 140 congregations, 11 districts, 132 clergypersons, 3,171 full members and average Sunday worship attendance of 6,828.

“This new church is the culmination of many years of collaborative work among five mission agencies, their missionaries and the work of indigenous leaders,” said Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster (retired), the United Methodist bishop assigned to the Cambodia Mission. He represented the denomination at the September 4-7 conference.

The Rev. Lun Sophy, a pastor of two churches at Siem Reap, a city near the ancient temples at Angkor Wat, was elected president of the new church, officially and originally in Methodist parlance called a “provisional annual conference,” but expected to be autonomous or self-governing.

“We celebrate the movement of God’s spirit in Cambodia,” Goodpaster said in an interview after his return from Southeast Asia. “We also celebrate mission partnership. Collaboration is the way to do mission in the 21st century.”

Late in the previous century, five mission agencies began to discuss the value of combining their separate outreach efforts in Cambodia, a country then still recovering from oppression and tyranny of the Khmer Rouge. The five are United Methodist Global Ministries, the Korean Methodist Church, the Methodist Church in Singapore, the World Federation of Chinese Methodist Churches and Connexio, the mission agency of United Methodists in France and Switzerland.

“Inauguration of the Methodist Church in Cambodia is an important event in our mission history, coming just at the start of our celebration of the 200th anniversary of the founding of what is now the General Board of Global Ministries,” said Thomas Kemper, chief executive of the United Methodist agency.

The five produced a Cambodian hymnal together in 2001. Two years later, under the rubric of “mission initiative,” they began collaborating in evangelism and church growth, missionary placements and leadership development, with strong emphasis on preparation of indigenous leaders, pastors and laity. They announced their intention to work toward one autonomous Cambodian Methodist Church.

For several years, all district superintendents and the mission superintendent have been Cambodian.

Of the current clergy, 57 are elders, five deacons, eight members on trial, 26 licensed to preach and 46 lay pastors.

Evangelism and new church development are high priorities. Plans are underway to extend the Methodist Church into the five (out of 25) Cambodian provinces where it is not currently present. The first Methodist church in Mondulkiri province, population 60,811, is now being built.

While the new church is Cambodian led, the five original sponsoring agencies will continue to supply some support and missionary personnel, according to Kemper. Global Ministries at present has seven missionaries in the country engaged in a range of ministries, including rural economic development.

Formal inauguration took place in a service of worship in Methodist tradition and with indigenous music, the usual practice in Cambodian Sunday services. Bishop Chong Chin Chung of Singapore presided at the service recognizing the provisional annual conference.

*Elliott Wright is a communications consultant to Global Ministries. The Rev. Myungim Kim, Asia area liaison of Global Ministries, contributed to this article.

This article originally appeared on: umcmission.org
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.

**About the First Friday Letter**

The First Friday Newsletter is a monthly publication of the World Methodist Council.

**Publisher:** Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary  
**Editor:** Lindsey Buckner, Communications

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