At the entry to the Nassar family farm outside Bethlehem is a large rough piece of the local limestone. Carved into its face, in Arabic, English and German, are the words, ‘We refuse to be enemies.’

It is for the active living-out of this philosophy in the face of almost intolerable pressure and difficulty that the Nassar family has received the 2017 World Methodist Peace Award. The four generations of the family who have lived on the farm have affirmed – and continue to affirm – that ‘Peace is not just the absence of conflicts. Peace is also a mentality. It’s the art of experiencing inner peace in the midst of conflict.’

As ‘the people called Methodist,’ we too are called to this way of life. John Wesley famously said that we are ‘the friends of all and the enemies of none’.

At a time when we are sometimes almost afraid to open a newspaper or turn on television or radio for fear of learning of a further outbreak of hostilities or yet another atrocity against innocent people, this is a considerable challenge.

During his earthly life-time also, the land of Jesus Christ, Palestine, the Holy Land, was an occupied territory. Luke the evangelist records Jesus giving clear instructions to ‘a large crowd of his disciples and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon’ as to how they should handle harassment (Luke 6:17, 27-33) and remain peace-full.

The message remains the same. Some of us are better at living out its demands than others of us; the Nassar family is among the former. May God continue to bless and strengthen them – and bless and strengthen us all as we strive to walk in the Way of Peace.

Gillian
Bishop Offers Hope in the Holy Land

At the Peace Award presentation, many people were moved by the work that had brought this moment to fruition and by the symbolism.

Perhaps, the explanation from Bill Plitt who is the Executive-director/co-founder of the Friends of Tent of Nations North America will allow readers of the FFL to go there and to hear the remarks made by General Secretary of the WMC, Bishop Ivan Abrahams as he spoke at the presentation.

Plitt thanked Abrahams “for his words shared on that cool, breezy evening at Daher’s vineyard, located on that lonely hill which is no longer empty, but filled with God’s spirit and the message of hope. But more, thank you for your presence on the land itself, a place where Daoud’s father had hoped one day that it would be a place of peace, and where people could gather to share their stories. You and members of the Council brought light to the land that night, and left the lemon tree as a reminder. May our paths cross again someday,” Plitt concluded.

“The Council brought light to the land and left the lemon tree as a reminder…”

Abrahams remarks:

The Vice-President, Ms Gillian Kingston and I bring greetings and best wishes to you on behalf of the Global Methodist/Wesleyan family as we gather to make the 2017 Peace Award to the Nassar Family for their COURAGE, CREATIVITY, and CONSISTENCY in pursuing PEACE, JUSTICE, and RECONCILIATION through the projects and programs of the TENT OF NATIONS.

For the past 70 The World Methodist Council (WMC) has been consistent in its witness and advocacy against the APARtheid regime, in its pronouncements on the situation in ISRAEL and PALESTINE and in working for peace on the KOREAN PENINSULA (next month we have a Round Table Meeting on the Korean Peninsula at the Carter Centre in Atlanta).

My life has been shaped on the anvil of the apartheid struggle, and I grew up with the mantra, “Freedom in our lifetime.” I pray that this will be true to this generation of the Nassar family. Remember you have an ally in the

There are moments in life when we are very conscious that we are participating in God’s mission in the world. To be here with the Nassar family and friends a few miles from Bethle-hem is such a moment especially as you prepare for the olive harvest. I am humbled and thankful to share in this celebration.

Despite threats of the confiscation of your land and many legal battles you faced, your family has doggedly preserved for the last 102 years and faithfully cultivated the land. Today we take heart from the story of Naboth (1 Kings 21:1-29) who remained true to his spiritual heritage – what is inherited cannot be sold but transferred to the next generation. You are doing much more than planting olive groves; you are sowing SEEDS OF HOPE through VOCATIONAL TRAINING, the YOUTH EXCHANGE, and WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS.

I wish to echo the words of two South African Noble Laureates. Nelson Mandela who claimed that the freedom of all South Africans and others around the world is inextricably linked to the freedom of all Palestinians and Desmond Tutu who made it clear that: “if you are neutral in situations of injustice you have chosen the side of the oppressor.” Neutrality allows the status quo of institutionalized injustice to continue.

To continue reading, please visit: www.firstfridayletter.worldmethodistcouncil.org
In late August, Vice President, Gillian Kingston, and General Secretary, Ivan Abrahams, traveled to the beautiful town of Torre Pellice in northern Italy to attend the Synod of the Waldensian Church and OPCEMI (the Methodist Church in Italy) and to present the 2017 World Methodist Peace Award to OPCEMI. Later, in mid-October, they traveled to Bethlehem to take the Award to the Nassar family, on whose farm outside Bethlehem, the Tent of Nations offers a meeting place for those committed to peace and reconciliation.

The award is made on the basis of courage, creativity and consistency and members of the WMC Steering Committee saw these qualities in abundance both in the work OPCEMI has been pursuing with migrants and refugees since 1989 and in the four-generation commitment of the Nassar family to peace.

At Torre Pellice, addressing the Synod of the Waldensian and Methodist Churches, the Vice President spoke of the origins of the Peace Award in her home country of Ireland, when, at the World Methodist Council of 1976 in Dublin, a plea was made by the late Revd Dr Eric Gallagher that peacemakers should be honoured. The first Award went to Saidie Patterson from Belfast, for her courageous, consistent and creative works across the community lines in that city at a time of violence and civil unrest. ‘Sometimes the Award has gone to people whose names are in the world’s news headlines; sometimes it goes to otherwise unsung heroes and heroines whose quiet work is known only in their own communities,’ the Vice President observed.

The General Secretary presented the Award on its distinctive blue ribbon to Ms Mirella Manocchio, President of OPCEMI, who responded on behalf of the church (as reported in the September FFL).

At the Tent of Nations outside Bethlehem, both the General Secretary and the Vice President paid tribute to the vision of the Nassar family whose motto has been We refuse to be enemies. Registering his land at a time when this was not the norm, the grandfather of the family ensured that the present generations have the paper work to argue their case for the retention of the land within the family. In the face of considerable opposition, the family has developed the farm as a centre for peace and reconciliation activities. Blessed are the peacemakers...

The family’s spokesperson, Daoud, accepted the Award medallion on behalf of the Nassar family; he then promptly and movingly invited his mother, Meladeh, to come forward and have it placed round her neck, so acknowledging her vital role in the formation of the family and its values.

The Award ceremony happened during a visit of the WMC Inter-Faith Committee’s pilgrimage to the region, exploring issues of peace and water justice. During the afternoon, members of the group assisted with the planting of a lemon tree to commemorate the event.

Gillian

Nassar Family Accepts Peace Award
Building upon a growing momentum for peace in Korea, representatives of the World Methodist Council and various Methodist denominations and ecumenical organizations will participate in this historic event Nov. 9-11 in Atlanta.

The 2018 Roundtable for Peace on the Korean Peninsula, hosted by the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, will begin with a morning session at The Carter Center and feature an address by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter on the “Renewed Promise of Peace on the Korean Peninsula.”

Ambassador James Laney — a United Methodist minister, former missionary in Korea and former president of Emory University — will reflect on Carter’s remarks. Laney was the U.S. ambassador in Seoul when Carter visited North Korea and ensured constant communication with the Clinton administration in Washington.

Also offering a response will be Christine Ahn, founder of Women Cross DMZ; Lee Hong Jung, top executive of the National Council of Churches in Korea; Jongdae Kim, co-founder and executive director of the Re’Generation Movement and Peter Prove, director of international affairs for the World Council of Churches.

When the event ends Nov. 11, participants expect to have an “Atlanta statement” describing next steps for the church and its work for peace in the region.

The election of J.C. Park, Korean Methodist Church, as president of the World Methodist Council in 2016 has been credited with providing “a new impetus” for the work toward peace that has been carried out by churches for decades, said Thomas Kemper, top executive for Global Ministries and moderator for the morning session.

Glenn Kellum, special assistant to Kemper’s office, pointed out that Park wanted the roundtable to be theologically and politically relevant and have some influence. The hope is that the Atlanta statement can become “a tool in influencing change,” he added.

After the opening session, the event will move to the headquarters of Global Ministries, where Park will address the central questions before the roundtable. Discussion will focus on the progress of the ecumenical community and a historical review of the factors influencing modern Korean history and U.S.-East Asian relations.

Ivan Abrahams, World Methodist Council General Secretary, will be involved in a number of sessions including sharing the history of this important effort, and will conclude the last working session. In addition to Park and Abrahams, other Council members will also be participating.

On Nov. 10, Abrahams will bring the message. The morning session will center on biblical and theological issues related to peace and reconciliation, building to a discussion of practical actions in the afternoon. The public worship service and reception will follow at 5 p.m. The following morning, a concluding discussion and worship will take place at the Bank of America plaza in midtown Atlanta.
Celebrating 50 years of Methodist Roman Catholic International Dialogue

The chair of the ecumenical relationships committee, Reverend Dr. Tim Macquiban, Director of the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome, represented the WMC as fraternal delegate to the Synod of Bishops meeting over three weeks to advise Pope Francis on the chosen theme, ‘Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment’. His summary of the meeting, which should be of general relevance to other churches, is linked here.

Members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church assembled in Hong Kong from Friday 12 to Friday 19 October 2018 for their second plenary meeting of the present round of conversations. The sixteen members of the commission comprise Methodists and Roman Catholics in equal number from North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia. The Methodist co-chair is Rev. Dr David Chapman, Chair of the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District of the Methodist Church in Britain. The Roman Catholic co-chair is Rt Revd John Sherrington, Auxiliary Bishop in the Diocese of Westminster.

The commission met in the impressive surroundings of the state-of-the-art conference facilities at Wesleyan House, the new headquarters building of the Methodist Church in Hong Kong. On arrival, members shared together in evening prayer in the Sky Chapel on the twenty-second floor of Wesleyan House, with its panoramic views of the Hong Kong skyline by day and by night.

Continuing the conversation begun in Rome last year, the subject for dialogue was ‘God in Christ, reconciling’ as this relates in particular to the unity of the Church. Papers were presented on a range of topics, including reconciliation in the Old and New Testaments, Methodist and Roman Catholic practices of reconciliation, and the Church’s ministry of reconciliation in the world.

The commission agreed the structure of its eventual report and assigned members to preliminary drafting work ahead of next year’s plenary meeting in Nairobi. A final report will be presented to the WMC meeting in Gothenburg in 2021.

During the weeklong meeting, the joint commission hosted a dinner attended by representatives of the Catholic diocese of Hong Kong and the Methodist Church in Hong Kong, which led to a fascinating conversation about ecumenical and church-state relations in China and Hong Kong.

On Sunday, members of the commission attended worship at the Methodist International Church, led by Rev. Eden Fletcher, who kindly hosted a lunch afterwards at Wesleyan House. In its final session, the commission shared together in a Methodist celebration of Holy Communion in the Sky Chapel at Wesleyan House, joined by several local Methodists. Rev. Dr David Chapman presided and Prof. Lilian Siwila from the Methodist Church in Southern Africa preached a sermon.

On the final evening, the Methodist Church in Hong Kong hosted a dinner in honour of the joint commission. Afterwards, Rev. Dr David Chapman and Bishop John Sherrington led a well-attended seminar for local Methodists and Roman Catholics on the subject of Methodist-Roman Catholic dialogue before presenting copies of the commission’s most recent report, The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory (Houston, 2016), to representatives of the Catholic diocese of Hong Kong and the Methodist Church in Hong Kong.

At the conclusion, Rev. Dr David Chapman commented: ‘Meeting in Hong Kong has located our WMC dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church in a fresh context where Christians form a vibrant minority and where exciting opportunities for shared evangelisation underscore the need for deepening communion between Methodists and Roman Catholics.’

Rev. Dr David M. Chapman, Methodist Co-Chair, World Methodist Council-Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission
15 Ways to Pray for Your Pastor

The life of a United Methodist pastor is filled with a variety of responsibilities. They preach, teach, visit, counsel, lead, consult, communicate, budget, clean, and so much more.

Pastoring a church is not a job that can be done well under the pastor’s power alone. Every pastor relies heavily on God’s guidance, strength and peace as they live into their call.

One of the best ways we can support our pastors and show them our appreciation is to regularly pray for them. But it can be difficult to know exactly what we should pray for. To help get started, we’ve assembled fifteen areas of pastors’ lives and ministries where they would value your prayers.

1. Spiritual lives

Our pastors’ spiritual lives are important to their finding the wisdom, strength and guidance necessary to lead a church. Pray for your pastors’ growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ, as the Holy Spirit works through them to serve your congregation and community.

2. Time management

With all of their responsibilities, United Methodist pastors need to become masters of their calendars. John Wesley knew this back in the 1700s. He instructed the preachers, “Never trifle away time.” Pray for your pastors to use time wisely, including blocking out occasions for Sabbath rest, prayer, work and family.

3. Families

Speaking of families, it is important to remember that our ministers may also be a spouse, a parent, and a child to parents who have needs. Remember to pray for your pastor’s family.

4. Preaching

Delivering a great sermon (and the ones that are less than great) takes hours of study and preparation. Pray for your pastors as they prepare worship services, sacraments and sermons. May they have the words to communicate what God has placed on their hearts.

5. Strength

The work of a pastor requires reserves of spiritual and emotional strength. Ask God to bolster ministers’ hearts and minds, especially on days when they feel weak, inadequate, or unqualified.

6. Visiting ministries

Visiting people in hospital rooms, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, memory centers, hospice units, homes and jail cells, is an important part of your pastor’s job. Pray for her or his ability to connect with those who are struggling and to share God’s comfort, peace and hope.

7. Leadership

Pastors shepherd their congregations, lead individuals to Christ and guide the church as a witness to the work of God in our communities. Pray for your pastor’s ability to lead your congregation.

8. Decision-making

Being a leader includes making difficult decisions. Sometimes that means making a call when the “right answer” is elusive. Other times it is about making an unpopular choice. Pray for God to guide your pastor’s decisions.

9. Ministry with the poor

Pastors are called upon to help those who do not have enough food, rent money, or the ability to pay a utility bill. They also lead their congregations to do the same. Pray that your pastor has the wisdom and resources necessary to help those in need, and that he or she might represent Jesus well to those who feel forgotten.

10. Communication

We’ve all sent a note, email or text that is misunderstood by the recipient. Ministers reach out to so many people, miscommunication is nearly impossible to avoid. Ask God to make your pastor’s communication clear and for grace when he or she is misunderstood.

continued on next page
October 26th 1939 was the day the first constitution of the World Federation of Methodist Women was signed in Pasadena, California. Since that time this global movement of Methodist women has grown and now includes women of United and Uniting Churches with a Methodist Heritage, hence its longer name.

Each year, World Federation Day is celebrated on or close to the last Saturday of October. Women gather for worship, study, sharing and prayer, often using a theme connected with one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This year, many will have used material produced by the women of Europe: Continental Area concerned with both SDG 1 End Poverty, and SDG 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies.

This study includes information about ‘Mediterranean Hope’, part of the Protestant churches’ response to migrants arriving in Sicily and Lampedusa, from North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. The resource material also describes the life of 10-12 million Roma people in Eastern Europe: ‘Blinding poverty, racial hatred, official policy, lack of education, and limited access to health care are only part of a long list of agonies faced by Romani men, women, and children.’ Hope comes in expressions of support for Roma women and girls. For instance, ‘the United Methodist Church has established an advisory service for Roma girls in Ohrid (Macedonia). After a trial phase and an evaluation period, this service will continue to provide valuable help and advice on the girls’ path to womanhood.’ This Federation study resource informs our prayers for these and many other efforts to address poverty and discrimination.

On the 26th day of each month throughout the year, women are making use of the Federation Prayer, creating a wave of prayer across the world.

The World Federation Prayer

Creator God, rooted in your loving care, nurtured through your Son Jesus, challenged by your Holy Spirit, we are in the world to bring peace with justice, reconciliation in love, and hope for all people. May our lives extend as the branches of our Tree of Life, bearing fruit of Unity and Love. We offer praise and thanksgiving through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. For more information about the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, see our website www.wfmucw.org

15 Ways to Pray for Your Pastor Continued

11. Conflict

Conflicts sometimes arise when people miscommunicate and disagree. Some conflicts are serious, while others are petty. Pray for your pastors’ strength, wisdom, patience and discernment as they navigate the conflicts that arise.

12. Vision

United Methodist pastors help set the vision for their congregations. Pray that your pastor may clearly see where God is leading your church and for opportunities for ministries to grow in those areas.

13. Finances

Money worries can be a big distraction. Pray for financial peace for your pastor, both with the congregation’s budget and his or her family finances.

14. Health

Your pastor’s physical health is important. Pray for them to take time to care for their bodies through rest, exercise, and eating well.

15. Encouragement

Pray for your pastors to be encouraged today. Pray that they might know in their hearts the differences they make in the lives of individuals, in your congregation, and in your community.

You can be an answer to prayer when you encourage your ministers. Write a note, text or email to let them know what a difference they make in your life. They will surely appreciate it.

This article originally appeared on umc.org

World Federation Day 2018
After successfully leading a secondary school in Budapest for five years, The United Methodist Church in Hungary has taken leadership of a second school.

“During the five years since the first school has been received, we have gained positive experiences. The years spent with our Forrai school encourage us to start the cooperation with Schola Europa,” said the Rev. László Khaled, superintendent of The United Methodist Church in Hungary.

He said there have been many meaningful encounters of students, teachers and people of The United Methodist Church in Hungary – both at school programs and in the local church. Khaled added that the greatest need of the students is “to feel accepted and loved and it touches them if they experience all this in a Methodist congregation.”

The Rev. Zsófi Pásztor, one of the three United Methodists at the school, has a part-time appointment to the Forrai School and is also available for pastoral care.

Budapest-Obuda United Methodist Church primarily relates to the Forrai school. The church has a partnership with St. Mark’s United Methodist Church in El Paso, Texas.

A number of students have participated in church camps. A special highlight this year was once again the English Camp with United Methodist teachers from the Texas church. Students can do their social service with the church, so they regularly help with events and participate in the ministry with Roma children in Kürtöspuszta.

“Toward the development of the future of the school could be more fruitful with The United Methodist Church than with a larger denomination.”

In the five years that the church has overseen the Forrai Arts Secondary School, United Methodists have been happy with the collaboration, he said.

Three United Methodists work at the school and do not only contribute towards the education of the students but also invest their time in the relationships with the other teachers. They offer, for instance, a spiritual retreat for teachers and a Bible study and discussion group.

The Schola Europa, another Budapest high school, contacted the church in 2017 and asked to become a United Methodist school.

There were again months of deliberations, consideration, and prayers. The church in Hungary has fewer than 500 professing members, but decided to take responsibility for the school.

The Schola Europe primarily relates to Budapest-Pest United Methodist Church, which has a partnership with the Embarras River District of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference. Khaled said Illinois church members have come to Hungary to support the church ministries with the school and hope to return next summer.

The annual conference approved the move in spring 2018 and the school became United Methodist on Sept. 1.

This article originally appeared on umnews.org
The biggest annual gathering in the Uniting Church, the Tongan National Conference (TNC), took place from 5-7 October with more than 1000 people gathered in Katoomba, NSW.

Travelling from across the country, Tongan members of the Uniting Church came together to raise their voices in worship, celebrate their culture and be encouraged in their faith, with the theme of the weekend ‘Living in Faith Eternally.’

The Tongan National Conference is the first of 12 national conferences to be established in the Uniting Church.

Her Excellency Princess Latufuipeka Tuku’aho, Tonga’s High Commissioner to Australia and the President of Free Wesleyan Church of Tongan Rev Dr Ahio were honoured guests at the TNC. Outgoing Chairperson Rev. Jason Kioa preached at the opening service.

I was encouraged by Dr Ahio’s reflection on the Gospel of Luke. He highlighted four core values of Christian communities; breaking bread together, communion in fellowship, sharing everything together and being one in Christ.

He urged members of the Tongan National Conference to be like the very first Christian communities in their witness to the Spirit and their building up of the Church. Most importantly, he called on each person to never give up, in any circumstance, on their faith in Christ.

Throughout the weekend there were activities for each generation, including young children (0-10 years), Second Generation (11-30 years), Step Up (young adults and families), Adults and First Gen and the Golden Oldies (70 years plus).

A significant feature of TNC is leadership of the Second Generation, including in the worship, technical operation and running of the programs. They led the opening worship singing God’s praises in beautiful harmony.

The Second Generation Program began with a worship rally on Saturday morning, included three bible studies led by guest preachers and “tribal war” games based on the conference theme to build community and fellowship.

Myself and Assembly Theologian-in-Residence Rev. Dr Ji Zhang represented the Assembly at the Conference and encouraged members of the Tongan National Conference to get involved in the new Circles of Interest.

During the weekend a space was created for young people to share stories. Rev Dr Zhang was impressed by the ability of the young people to create a safe place where they could talk about issues such as mental illness and sexual abuse.

“Powerful stories were shared among a room of trusted friends,” he said. “There was a strong sense of ‘don’t judge, don’t try to fix it, just listen’.”

Each TNC, the Saturday night of the program is a dedicated Cultural Night where groups perform Tongan dance and song, raising money for the Conference.

Second Gen leader Virginia Lavaki addressed the conference in the Closing Worship.

“As young people we are faced with lots of trials and tribulations. The road is not always easy but one thing we know is that God has a plan for our lives. It may not be what we have planned for ourselves but we must learn to trust and fix our eyes upon God and know that whatever path he takes us on he will never leave us.”

She urged the whole conference to continue to encourage and support their young people.

“The young people are not the tomorrow but the now of the church. We need to work together to continue to enrich, encourage and empower our young people, to recognise the potential leaders in our Churches and to mentor them so we can make generations of faithful disciples.”

A new Executive Committee was elected, with Rev Feke Kamitoni from VicTas taking over as Chairperson and Rev Valamotu Palu from NSW/ACT as Deputy Chair. Other office bearers were elected as follows: Secretary – Rev Mosese Taufa (NSW/ACT), Assistant Secretary – Makelesi Facci (VicTas), Treasurer – Makelesi Facci (VicTas), Assistant Treasurer – Fifita (NSW/ACT).

Second Gen Convenor Virginia Lavaki thanked outgoing Chairperson Rev Jason Kioa for his leadership of TNC for over 17 years.

“Jason Kioa has been a big part in setting the foundation and the platform for the second gen team. It hasn’t been an easy journey but Jason has continued to support us with advice, with praise and of course fatherly love. Jason has mentored many of the Second Gen team and some have now become ministers.”

Rev. Charissa Suli is a National Consultant for the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly. She was the 2nd Gen Convenor of the UCA’s Tongan National Conference from 2009-2017.

This article originally appeared on: assembly.uca.org.au
A delegation of Methodist leaders from around the world, who took part in the World Methodist Peace Prize Award ceremony and the Water and Peace Conference in Israel in October recognize the right of all people to live in peace and safety.

The Water and Peace Conference members expressed particular concern about two issues:

In environmental terms: particularly in relation to water justice, to the sacredness of the River Jordan and the equitable sharing of clean water with the region.

In political terms: especially in relation to Palestinian rights, in terms of land justice and in building the necessary concrete steps towards a lasting genuine peace.

The Water and Peace Conference and traveling seminar took place 8-13 October with 17 participants from New Zealand, India, Germany, Ireland, UK, USA, and South Africa. These leaders visited Jordan, Palestine and Israel and were able to see the current condition of the River Jordan, which suffers from pollution and is smaller than it was only a hundred years ago. It is no longer able to serve the neighboring populations and fails to replenish the waters of the Dead Sea, which is shrinking by a meter annually. People living on both the West and East Bank suffer from lack of water, and Palestinians are prevented from approaching the Jordan, according to Dr. R. F. Leão-Neto, who was a Conference organizer.

The conference group visited Peace Island, designated under a 1994 Peace Treaty between Israel and Jordan, and saw what remains of a 1920s hydroelectric power station that provides energy for the region. Peace Island has become a symbol of what cooperation amongst the peoples of the region could bring: peace and prosperity. It was the product of Muslims, Christians and Jews working side by side with international cooperation to harness the power of the waters of the rivers Jordan and Yarmouk.

The travelling seminar designed to be a combination of a historical and biblical pilgrimage, together with a consideration of present day issues. It included visiting holy sites in Galilee and Jerusalem and the wilderness of the Jordan Valley. Opportunities for participants to engage with local people in their farms and villages, to meet and discuss current issues with municipal authorities in the West Bank and with officials working for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) were also included.

The participants heard how the settlements – illegal under international law and, in some cases, illegal under Israeli law – impose a system that excludes Palestinians and prevents them from access to markets to sell their produce. Some of the land on the West Bank is designated as military training ground or of Jewish archeological significance, thus preventing people from living there. Palestinians reported on their struggle to receive permission to build houses, schools, mosques, or farm facilities.

Strong opinions exist on how to achieve a peaceful two-state solution and some of the difficult issues were discussed. Limited but significant peacemaking continues to chip away at every opportunity. EcoPeace-Middle East negotiates improvement of water supplies and environmental conditions as well as a master plan to address these issues on a more sustained basis. The smaller and much younger WMC Jerusalem Liaison Office acts as a Methodist presence to accompany, support, and pray for those involved in this situation: individuals, communities, churches and non-government organizations. It was agreed that despite the many obstacles, peacemaking efforts need to continue.

The ‘Tent of Nations’, located near Bethlehem in the West Bank, is one small but very significant peace initiative. Read about it and its great work under the WMC Peace Award story in this newsletter.

The Water and Peace Conference sees much potential for continuing further cooperation in similar small but significant peace initiatives. Plans are to be developed toward further cooperation with EcoPeace-Middle East, and with the work of the WMC Jerusalem Liaison Office. The Water and Peace Conference would not have been possible in the first place without the support of the dedicated people working in these two organizations.

The Conference witnessed the sad fact that the challenging words of Prophet Micah ring true today for all too many: “Hear this, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness.” (Micah 3:9 and 10). Let us work together to build peace so that, instead, regardless of faith or ethnicity “…they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid…” (Micah 4:4). As Methodists, here and now, the choice is ours to make a real difference or not, said Neto.
“As people lift their hands to the sky and try to peer through the thick, steel mesh fence, Guillermo Navarrete says, “Look up, see the sun shining brightly on both sides of the wall, the birds, clouds and the breeze feel no human barrier, they migrate freely. “This is what the grace of God is like.”

Navarrete, a lay leader with the Methodist Church of Mexico, comes to this beach in El Faro Park every Sunday to bless souls on both sides of a wall that separates families from families, Mexico from the U.S.

On the U.S. side, which is called Friendship Park, the Rev. John Fanestil, a United Methodist pastor, stands with the U.S. citizens who can barely glimpse loved ones on the other side. The U.S. Border Patrol allows public access to Friendship Park on Saturdays and Sundays between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. There is no access limitation to El Faro Park from the Mexico side.

For 14 miles, the tall, metal wall winds around streets, through neighborhoods, and along sidewalks and dirt paths before it dissects the sandy beach and ends at the Pacific Ocean.

The tiny, square holes in the mesh fence are just big enough for people to touch each other’s pinky fingers. So, in honor and recognition of the limits the wall places on families, the passing of the peace is touching together pinky fingers.

Since June 2012, Fanestil has served the sacrament weekly at El Faro: The Border Church/ La Iglesia Fronteriza. Navarrete took over the ministry on the Mexico side about five years ago.

“Deportees are often lost and overwhelmed when they find themselves suddenly in a place they don’t know. Traumatized by their deportation, they frequently end up suffering from chronic depression,” he said.

A pilot program started by Navarrete and supported by the California Pacific Conference and the Methodist Church of Mexico prepared 20 men who suffered from depression from being on the streets to become residents and neighbors in Tijuana.

The pilot program was successful but lacks funding at this point, Navarrete said.

“People need help with mental illness. God calls and we hear.”

This story originally appeared on: umnews.org
In Nigeria, where the high rate of deforestation is leading to habitat loss, species extinction and soil degradation, United Methodists are hoping that 20,000 trees will make a difference.

So far, the church has planted trees in five communities in the Southern Nigeria Conference. The acacia, eucalyptus, guava, iroko, mahogany, mango, orange and papaya trees are expected to protect degraded environments, safeguard habitats and enhance rural livelihoods.

Climate change starts a cycle of extreme heat, endangering human health and killing livestock. Local streams disappear. As the duration of dry and rainy seasons changes, traditional planting times become less reliable and crop yields suffer.

Charity Aweh lives in Bakin Dutse, a village in which 5,000 trees were planted. Expressing gratitude, she said The United Methodist Church would benefit “if they continue to take good care of the young trees,” adding that “at the end, they will be the ones to enjoy the fruits.”

“Forest covers one-third of the earth’s landmass,” noted Nelson Andrew, an active United Methodist and government agricultural technology officer. He pointed out that indigenous people depend on forests for food, shelter, livelihood, medicine and tools.

Tanko Labuje, a well-digger, said everyone witnesses the consequences when all across Taraba state, the water level drops and wells became dry.

Trees furnish humanity with two of life’s essentials, food and oxygen. They reduce desertification and other forms of climate change. Healthy trees beautify surroundings, conserve energy, create economic opportunities, prevent soil erosion and purify the air.

Mango seedlings ready for planting in Jalingo, Nigeria, are sheltered under thatch from the hot sun. Photo by Sharon Adamu Bambuka, UMNS.
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.

To subscribe to this newsletter, please email communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org.

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