First Friday Letter

The World Methodist Council January 2019

President's Greeting for the New Year

In this season of Epiphany I bless you in the glorious name of our Lord Jesus Christ!
We are the people of God incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth. Ever since the dawn of the birth of our King on Christmas the light of life has been increasing and never failing to illuminate and guide us along our pilgrimage of justice, peace, and life.

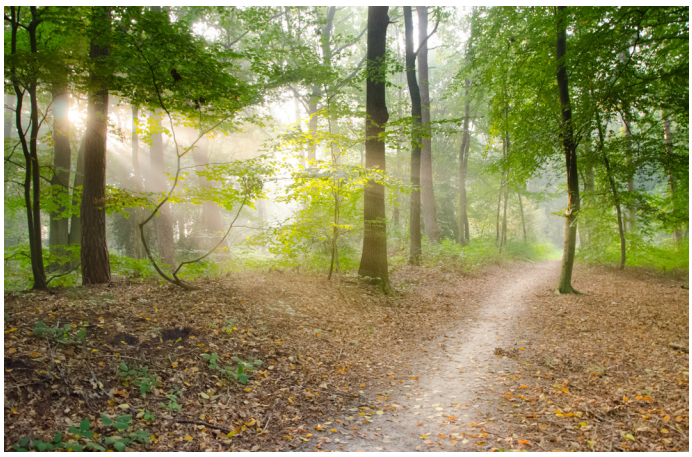
The Christian New Year already began in the Nativity of Christ. And we proclaim as well as celebrate a kairos (God's timing) of 2019 with its 365 days. This year is a gift of God for us to call for our vocation to fulfill. In every corner of the globe we people called Methodists are charged to get the most out of all the opportunities for peace-making evangelism.

Our contemporary Church is at the crossroad of new realities. On the one hand, we are facing the global dichotomy of migration vs. economic nationalism. On the other, we are caught up with the dilemma between secularism and religious fundamentalism.

First of all, let's make our journey to nurture our collective wisdom of living together as we pay our holy attention to the Word of God concerning the child Jesus: "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him." (Luke 2:40) My earnest appeal is to both Christian and secular teachers and mentors for the young people of both migrants and natives. Most of the adolescents in our age can be easily victimized by the false ego-ideals uncritically provided by their conventional dominant cultures such as rightwing extremism and Islamic jihadism. The religious and moral education of global citizenship is so crucial that the future of the one household of God entirely depends on it.

My last and not the least prayer concern is for the coming special general conference of the United Methodist Church. Let me share with you the following words of Rev. John Wesley: "Never dream of forcing men into the ways of God. Think yourself, and let think. Use no constraint in matters of religion. Even those who are farthest out of the way never compel to come in by any other means than reason, truth, and love." Stop demonizing your sisters and brothers in Christ. Both of you, dogmatic traditionalists and dogmatic progressives, have the same definition of truth which excludes all other truths. Remember that the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. It is crucial to enlarge your mind by putting yourselves in the place of others. May your heart of stone be replaced by a heart of flesh to realize that all are welcomed by Jesus in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Let's continue our journey together toward life!
J. C. Park



Christmas story crosses all borders

The Door of Hope was wide open and filled with the laughter of children.

The Salvation Army shelter, Casa Puerta de Esperanza or Door of Hope, had a Christmas party Dec. 15 for the migrants living in the shelter and their neighbors. Loud speakers pointed toward the neighborhood poured out Christmas carols and seemed to draw people inside.

The shelter is currently housing 24 women and children. More than 70 children with their parents in tow were enjoying a morning of carefree play.

Members of Iglesia Methodista Nuevo Pacto were front and center of all the festivities with an energetic group of young people who led the children through games for more than two hours. The Rev. Noel Caudillo, associate pastor, also brought his two young sons.

The small shelter in the middle of a neighborhood was decked out for the season with red and green balloons, star-shape piñatas and tables dressed in green and red tablecloths. The tables overflowed with pizza, fruit-filled gelato, churros, bags of candy and two beautiful Christmas cakes.

The youth group members led the children in songs, taught some dance moves, held hula-hoop and jump-rope competitions and were in great demand for their face-painting skills.

A highlight of the games featured balloons tied to one of each child's shoes. The point of the game was to pop someone else's balloon without losing your own. Squeals of laughter were punctuated with the loud pops of balloons that left little slivers of colorful tattered rubber tied to shoelaces.

Bishop Felipe Ruiz Aguilar of the Methodist Church in Mexico greeted the children and led the group in a prayer. It was a moment of quiet in an otherwise rollicking time. Little faces painted with mustaches, superhero emblems, stars and spiderwebs bowed their heads. The children clasped their hands together to hear the bishop's prayer.

There was no evidence of the hardships some of the children had undergone in their long, perilous journey to Tijuana. One young migrant mother watched as her little girl and boy played with the other children. The small family is from Guatemala and didn't want to talk about their reason for being at the shelter.

This shelter is much nicer than those thousands of recent migrants are living in. The Methodist Church of Mexico works with the Salvation Army and other organizations to offer love and comfort.

Children watch a skit during the Christmas party.

'New Birth' for United Methodist Mission in Vietnam

By Elliott Wright*

ATLANTA, December 11, 2018—"I believe the Vietnam Mission Initiative is experiencing a new birth," said the Rev. Sam Peters, a United Methodist pastor from Ohio, as he returned Dec. 2 from Ho Chi Minh City.

Peters was one of several mission partners from the United States attending the Nov. 27-29 annual meeting of the nearly 20-year-old United Methodist Vietnam Mission, related to the General Board of Global Ministries. The meeting measured the extent of indigenous commitment to being "United Methodist" in the wake of action by a retired denominational missionary to form a competing Vietnamese "Methodist" denomination. The Rev. Ut To surrendered his United Methodist clergy credentials in November.

One hundred clergy and laity from 50 churches attended the annual meeting. The emergence of new, young leadership impressed Peters, pastor of South Webster Christ United Methodist Church in the West Ohio Annual Conference. The visit, his third to the Vietnam mission, gave him a sense that the stressful transition was "a necessary experience for the ministry to move forward with more strength, clearer vision and empowered leadership."

WCC sends greetings as Taize youth reflect on hospitality

World Council of Churches general secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit sent greetings to hundreds of young people from the Taize community as they gathered in Madrid from 28 December to 1 January to reflect on the theme "Let Us Not Forget Hospitality!"

Participants are observing the Taize's 41st European Youth Encounter.

"With Taizé we see that ecumenism is not only about navigating differences or overcoming longstanding divisions among Christians," wrote Tveit. "It is about fully experiencing the grounding that comes with shared faith, shared living, shared prayer and song and silence."

In so many ways, Taizé embodies all that is best in the ecumenical movement, Tveit reflected.

"May these days be for you a time of meeting and growing friendship, a time of gracious sharing, a time of fellowship and spiritual learning, a time of inspiration and renewal," he wrote.

"May they be, in other words, an encounter in which you receive and offer hospitality, so that, as the Bible says, you are no longer strangers but friends, and members of the larger household of God."

Hospitality is not just a form of politeness, Tveit wrote. "Hospitality denotes not just a virtuous trait in us but a relationship into which we enter—of gracious and trusting welcome, mutuality and friendship, and sharing of food and shelter," he wrote. "It inevitably involves vulnerability, too, and sometimes even risk."

Hospitality is the widest, most all-encompassing form of love, Tveit concluded. "Never has such hospitable love—freely offered, humbly received—been needed as it is today," he wrote.

"Whether in offering welcome to immigrants, safety to refugees, sustenance to the homeless and needy, or understanding and dialogue and empathy to those who are different from us, our loving hospitality can rescue lives, create community, and redeem the times."

Pakistan village now has nearly 300 believers

Located in a desert area of Pakistan where farming is difficult and clean water is scarce, there is a village where people live in mud huts and do not have electricity or access to education.

The village is so impoverished that there are no worship centers for the local religion. As a result, most people identify with their religion because of their family or cultural tradition without actually understanding or practicing it.

In 2003, a denomination opened a seminary to train pastors in the village. Although a number of people were trained, the denomination's leaders came to believe that the extreme poverty of the area made an evangelical mission to the residents financially impossible and any churches planted could never become self-supporting. After 10 years, the denomination left the area.

The Catholic Church attempted to work in the area by opening a school but was also unable to plant a church.

According to Nazarene leadership in Pakistan, the Church of the Nazarene is the first to go into this area with the main focus on evangelism, church planting, and constructing worship centers.

After a while, nearly 300 people began regularly participating in outdoor worship services since they could not afford to construct a church building.

This Pakistani church plant is one of many that are growing throughout the country.

"The story of [this village] is the story of many other communities in Pakistan where the district superintendent and his team trying to work together with the local church leaders to build places where people can come together and worship the Lord of Lords," said Trino Jara, South Asia field strategy coordinator. "This is a partnership between the local church and the mission of the church, as well as people around the world who invest in this precious ministry."

Gather Stresses Mutual Love

Photo by Albin Hillert

The Global Christian Forum held its third Global Gathering in Bogotá, Colombia. The theme was 'Let mutual love continue' (Heb 13:1).

It brought together the widest variety of Christian traditions, with 251 church leaders from nearly every stream of global Christianity and 55 nations. Against the backdrop of growing division in the world, the meeting itself became a message of careful listening and respectful engagement across barriers of old enmities and historic separations. In recognition of the churches of the host nation, the Message said participants "have listened to, and been inspired by, witnesses working for peace. We pray that the peace process may continue in Colombia and bring hope and reconciliation.

For more information click here: https://gcforum.worldsecuresystems.com/docs/GCFNews-2018-01-EN.pdf

Condolences

Condolences to the family and friends of the Rev. James H. Humphrey of Ohio, who succombed to injuries from an automobile accident on December the 29th. He was a member of the World Methodist Council, from 2006 to the present and attended the most recent meeting in Seoul, South Korea. A long time United Methodist minister, many people were blessed by his Christian service and love.

Bishop Emeritus Nélida Ritchie, from the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina (IEMA), passed away on December 22nd 2018. She served as vice-moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee between 1991 and 1998.

Bishop William B. Oden passed away on Saturday, December 22, 2018. He was elected to the episcopacy by the South Central Jurisdictional Conference in 1988; he served the Louisiana Area (1988 -1996), and the Dallas Area from 1996 until his retirement in 2004. He served as Ecumenical Officer of the Council of Bishops from 2004-2008. Bishop Oden was president of the Council of Bishops from 2000-2001.

We welcome your press releases, articles and resources! Please keep submissions to less than a page. 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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About the First Friday Letter

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