



FIRST FRIDAY LETTER

The World Methodist Council March 2019

Greetings from the General Secretary

Warm Christian greetings!

February saw me traveling to Mexico City to meeting our host for the Steering Committee meeting in August. I had the opportunity to meet with church, political and community leaders. My sojourn also took me to our headquarters in Lake Junaluska as well as a wonderful time of sharing at the African Methodist Ubuntu Educational Summit in Cape Town.

This week more than 800 United Methodist Church delegates gathered in St. Louis for a special session of General Conference to determine a way forward on the question of human sexuality. To learn more about the Conference decision follow this link: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/general-conference-maintains-language-on-ordination-of-lgbtqi-persons-same>

During the next few days, we begin our Lenten journey which starts on Wednesday, March 6, 46 days before Easter Sunday. On Ash Wednesday priest and pastors all around the world will dispense ashes with the sign of the cross on foreheads with the words, “From dust you are and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19) to remind us that our physical bodies are created from the elements of the earth and in death will return to the earth as dust. More importantly during Lent, we are encouraged to reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and engage in the Christian disciplines of fasting, reading the scriptures and prayer.

As a child, every Lenten season an empty tin or “money box” had a central place on our family dinner table and every evening we were reminded to give alms, dispense with our small change and remember those less privileged than ourselves. This Biblical, time-honored way of repentance has remained with me until this day. We were also encouraged to engage in “acts of mercy”- good deeds to give concrete expression to our faith.

Slow down and begin your Lenten journey with an open mind allowing Jesus to touch, heal and restore you. Make yourself available today, and look and listen for what the Holy Spirit wants you to do, so that this season might be filled with hope and joy.

Yours in Christian love and fellowship.
Ivan



Living Together in Peace

“We, who believe in God and in the final meeting with Him and His judgment, on the basis of our religious and moral responsibility, and through this Document, call upon ourselves, upon the leaders of the world as well as the architects of international policy and world economy, to work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace.” (from “A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together”, 2019)

I have been part of the Global Conference of Human Fraternity held in Abu Dhabi, Feb. 3-4, 2019. More than two hundred leaders of world religions came to have open dialogue and discussion on the role of religion facing our contemporary dichotomy between secular humanism and religious extremism. Encountering Muslim and Jewish leaders, I discovered that the three Abrahamic religions, despite their misunderstanding and conflict, are always summoned by God to abide by the two great commandments of love; i.e., loving God and loving neighbor. Yet in reality extremists from each religion absolutize their dogma at the cost of the moral calling of tolerance and of living together in peace with their religious neighbors.

In the workshop on ‘Human Fraternity: Challenges and Opportunities’ I also came to the agreement with other speakers that the ‘dogmatic’ secularists and humanists tend to ignore and even suppress the ‘need to believe’ so that they end up with the exclusion of religious morals, invoking individualism and materialism. Jesus’s teaching of the forgiveness of our neighbor’s sins against us is not a mere humanism. It is rather grounded on the faith in the faithfulness of the merciful Father in heaven. The humanistic, psychological interpretation of faith is derived from the child-parent relation in our early childhood.

I proposed in the workshop to reach out to the deepening of the humanistic understanding of faith in both the enlightened West and in the Confucian East, especially China. One of the most precious gifts of the New Testament offered to humankind is the Prayer Jesus taught: ‘Our Father.’ We need to learn again how to pray together to our Father in heaven. Our Father in heaven is the One God of Jews, Christians, Muslims, and the rest of all humankind regardless of their faith traditions. Appropriating Jesus’s parable of a merciful father who had two sons (Luke 15:11-32), the apparent believers in God ought to reflect self-critically on the sin of the unconscious, unnoticed obstruction of the mercy of the Father for the prodigal sons and daughters in our time.

Rev. Dr. J. C. Park, President of the World Methodist Council



Preparing Young Adults In Missional Evangelism



The next generation of Christian leaders will face challenges in faith-sharing that are foreign to the previous generations of pastors. The increase of secularization in the West, the diminished role of the church in many parts of the world, and the effects of religious pluralism will create new landscapes in evangelism and mission that we have not seen before. It is vital to invest in the next generation of leaders to help prepare them for an increasingly global, multi-cultural ministry context.

To help meet this challenge, World Methodist Evangelism is launching our Residency In Mission program. RIM is designed to foster evangelistic and missional engagement and learning among young adults in the Wesleyan Family through intentional service, guided mentorship, and robust theological reflection. This pilot program will begin in New Zealand in August of 2019. The twelve-month internship 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.

We are proud to introduce one of our Residents, Miss Eliza Edge. A life-long United Methodist, Eliza is projected to graduate from the University of Cincinnati in May 2019. She will serve with leaders of the Wesleyan Church of New Zealand during her RIM placement.

We are accepting applications for the 2019-2020 RIM program through 15 March 2019. To learn more, to apply, or to meet Eliza visit www.ResidencyInMission.org

UMC Special Session General Conference - Human Sexuality

ST. LOUIS – The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church would like to thank the delegates to the Special Session of the General Conference for their diligent work during the 2019 conference, which ended today in St. Louis, in the United States.

The General Conference is the highest legislative body in the church and the only group who can decide church law and speak officially for the global denomination.

The 864 delegates (half lay, half clergy) from all over the world met from Feb. 24-26 to discuss and act on the report of the Commission on a Way Forward over the issue of human sexuality. The delegates also considered petitions other than the report from the Commission.

The decision of the General Conference was to offer a majority support for the Traditional Plan. The vote was 438 to 384. The delegates then voted to ask the Judicial Council, the highest court in the denomination, to review the constitutionality of the approved legislation.

What is the Traditional Plan?

The Traditional Plan keeps the current language around sexuality and increases accountability by streamlining the processes to enforce penalties for violations of The Book of Discipline related to marriage and ordination of LGBTQI persons. Some parts of the Traditional Plan were ruled unconstitutional, and it will take some time to clarify which parts will become part of our church law and which parts will not.

“We continue to teach and believe that all persons are

welcomed in the church, all persons are persons of sacred worth and we welcome all to receive the ministry of Jesus. Human sexuality is a topic on which people of faith have differing views,” said Bishop Ken Carter, president of the Council of Bishops, after the conference ended. “Despite our differences, we will continue to work together to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and share God’s love with all people.”

What is the next step for the UMC?

Since the legislation is not the official church law until January 1, 2020 for churches in the United States, the bishops are urging all Methodists to stay focused on the mission that glorifies God and reaches new people with the gospel. Bishops will be holding meetings with clergy and laity in their annual conferences on how details will be handled in each area. The legislation takes effect in churches outside the U.S. after the 2020 General Conference.

This press release was originally published on www.umc.org on 2/26/19



Photo by Maidstone Mulenga, Council of Bishops.

Bishops pray with delegates during the last day of the Special Session of the General Conference Tuesday in St. Louis, Missouri.

General Secretary presents at UBUNTU of the AME

Bishop Abrahams offered the biblical presentation for the opening plenary of the UBUNTU Christian Education Summit held in Cape Town, South Africa February 17-19, 2019. Having participated in the opening worship service on Sunday, February 17, Bishop Abrahams led a time of biblical reflection for those members of the AME Church from the United States of America, the Caribbean, and Africa assembled for this gathering.

The presentation was based on two passages 2 Kings 7:3-11 and Luke 8:22-36. It offered encouragement to those pastors and lay leaders involved in Christian education and life-long faith formation. Bishop Abrahams also shared a testimony about his own coming to faith and ministry in the context of apartheid. His reflections helped the summit attendees understand better what a justice-seeking faith looks like in the South African context. Finally, the general secretary presented a biblical reflection on liminal people and the challenges for Christian education.

Bishop David R. Daniels, Jr. was the host bishop for this pre-conference as well as for the Global Development Council General Assembly, of which he served as president, and several other connectional meetings and fora of ministry components of the AME Church. Daniels, the AME bishop for Cape Town and other parts of South Africa, Namibia, and Angola, said, “We are so thankful for the presence and contribution of the general secretary to this historic gathering; he has challenged us to consider seriously the important influence of the teaching ministry of the church.”

Rev. Garland F. Pierce, executive director of the AME Department of Christian Education, said, “We are happy that we were able to bring this annual gathering to Africa and to Cape Town. We could think of no better voice from which to hear as we began our time together than our general sec-

retary, Bishop Abrahams. His presentation reminded and challenged us to recommit to formation that truly lead to the holistic liberation of all God’s children globally.”

The AME Department of Christian Education designed the Christian Education Summit as a pre-conference to the Global Development Council General Assembly. It was an intensive learning time designed for the leaders of AME congregations in Africa, the countries of the Caribbean, South America, and Europe. The Summit was a response to the request of the Global Development Council to strengthen connectionalism and the work of faith formation and leadership development. There were plenaries that helped participants to go deeper into God’s word for a stronger witness for liberation, justice, and peace. There were also learning labs (workshops) on various relevant themes and topics. The various ministries of Christian Education held strategy sessions for their future work. It was a time of worship, fellowship, learning, organizing, and planning.

The Global Development Council is comprised of bishops, clergy, and lay leaders from congregations in Africa, the countries of the Caribbean, South America, and Europe with the purpose of strengthening the witness of the AME Church globally.



Christian Leaders Meet to Address Common Challenges



Members of the Global Christian Forum meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Photo Credit: Rosemarie Wenner

Fostering Common Ground Globally was the headline of an article in a Malaysian public newspaper on the meeting of the Global Christian Forum (GCF) Committee held February 10-13, 2019 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

I am privileged to represent the World Methodist Council in the GCF Committee. About 25 people are representing “old” Churches like Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican, Lutheran, Mennonite, Baptist, Reformed and Methodist Churches, “young” churches like Pentecostal, Evangelical, African Instituted and Independent Churches as well as some global Christian Organizations like World Vision International. With thanksgiving we looked back to the 3rd Global Gathering that took place April 24-27, 2018 in Bogota, Columbia. Relationships were built by listening to one another’s faith stories. Church leaders, who so far were unfamiliar with the Global Christian Forum, experienced the value of creating space to listen and learn together with people whom we do not often have the opportunity to meet in our networks.

The newly appointed Secretary, Rev. Casely Essamuah, who took office July 1, 2018. grew up in the Methodist Church in Ghana and currently resides in the USA. He challenged the Committee to gain more clarity and to build on what has been achieved since the GCF began.

We worked on a communication strategy to let church leaders know that GCF is a movement of representatives from diverse Christian churches, organizations and traditions. All meet with an equal basis to foster mutual respect and to address common challenges. Regional meetings will continue and we committed ourselves to plan for national meetings in order to bridge the gap between churches belonging to ecumenical councils and others who are hesitant to formally engage with Christians in other denominations.

The Global Christian forum is a platform, not an organization with members, rules and restrictions. All are invited to participate and those who gather frequently ask themselves “Whom are we missing at the table?” We encouraged the GCF Secretary to increase the efforts to reach out to younger leaders so that they will carry on the vision to work for unity.

The meeting was hosted by GCF Committee member Rev. Prince Guneratnam, the senior pastor of Calvary Church

in Kuala Lumpur. We enjoyed warm hospitality in the big Calvary Convention Center. At the beginning of our gathering, church leaders from Malaysia joined us for dinner. We learned how the Christian minority of about nine percent in a dominantly Muslim country works for the good of all people in a multiethnic and multireligious nation. Methodists have served in Malaysia since 1885 with the Methodist Church there today being influential in mission, social work, education and ecumenical cooperation.

Before leaving the country, I had the opportunity to meet with several Methodist leaders. Bishop Dr. Ong Hwai Teik had asked the Secretary of the General Conference, Anthony Row, to welcome me and I could not have had a better guide to the conference offices in Kuala Lumpur including the Ecumenical Center. The work of the Methodist Church Malaysia is done in six conferences and one Mission Conference for the outreach to indigenous tribes in Malaysia, which hopefully will become a full Annual Conference quite soon. The conferences are organized according to geography and the languages used in worship life, namely English, Tamil, and Chinese. There are many common programs bringing the ethnic groups together. Serving migrants and cooperation with Methodists who come as missionaries, mainly from Korea, have a high priority in the Methodist Church in Malaysia. “We are called to be a church after God’s own heart in turbulent times”, is how Methodists introduce themselves.

I wish I could have spent more time with my fellow Methodists in order to learn more how they engage in mission including overseas mission, evangelism, overcoming poverty i.e. through education, interreligious dialogues and cooperation, migrant ministries and many other activities. Once more I saw the value in doing both: Reaching out for broader ecumenical cooperation and reconnecting with Methodist sisters and brothers who are locals. “Fostering common ground” is equally important locally and globally and very often the global and the local meet each other in our age of migration.

I am grateful for the inspiration I took with me from Malaysia.

Rosemarie Wenner, Geneva Secretary of the World Methodist Council

Mexico to Host Steering Committee

Our general secretary, Bishop Ivan Abrahams, made an official visit to the Methodist Church of Mexico from January 31st and until February the 4th, in coordination and hosted by Pastor Samuel Murillo, Mexican Methodist, currently Youth and Young Adults President in the World Methodist Council. The purpose of the visit was to strengthen our relationship with Mexican Methodism as members of the WMC and to work on the logistics and venue for the Steering Committee meeting in Mexico City, August 2019.

During the visit, Bishop Ivan met with Bishop Moises Morales Granados, who is the current bishop of the Conference of Mexico (Mexico City and surroundings) with whom we shared about possible ways of working and serving together, considering the need of encouragement for our Latin-American brothers and sisters to bring their gifts to the global agenda and work of the WMC.

During his stay in Mexico, bishop Ivan witnessed and spoke strongly on hope on behalf of the WMC with the suffering, all this by meeting with many of the current families looking for their disappeared relatives. The current statistics in Mexico is a number of over 40,000 people missing and many other thousands killed, all this is caused by a very corrupted economy which involves narcotrafic, government, and even international companies that want to own the land because of its richness in minerals. Bishop Ivan had the opportunity to take part on the closing worship and public demonstration of the 4th National Brigade of Search for Missing People, where more than 200 people spend more than two weeks searching in the region of Guerrero, Mexico. Tita Radilla (activist and leader of the social movement in Mexico since the 70s) and Mary Herrera (strong leader of the national search for missing people) gave us the opportunity and privilege to pray and walk with them in this very painful reality. We encourage our Methodist / Wesleyan family to advocate and pray for peace in

350th Anniversary of Susanna Wesley

On 20th January 2019 there were two special events held in the UK to mark the 350th anniversary of the birth of Susanna Wesley.

In London, following morning worship at Wesley's Chapel, 50 pilgrims set out on a short pilgrimage through the London streets, led by former Vice President of the British Conference, Jill Baker. The pilgrim band, including members of the Susanna Wesley Mission Auxiliary, called at the site of the Foundry, where Susanna died, before moving on to Spital Yard to see the house where she was born, finishing at her graveside in Bunhill Fields. Prayers were offered, flowers laid by her grave and thanks given for a life which has inspired so many.

At Epworth Old Rectory visitors gathered in the candlelit rooms, pausing and praying in each room to focus on a characteristic of Susanna. The evening concluded in Susanna's kitchen with a special prayer, written by Jenny Carpenter, trustee at the Old Rectory.

the world, in the region and specially for this very violent reality in some parts of Mexico.

Bishop Ivan were invited to the National Senate of Mexico, to meet with the current chairperson of the commission on Human Rights, Senator Emilio Alvarez Icaza Longoria, with whom we shared our common vision from faith and our Wesleyan identity related with current media and politic manipulation of fear on topics like migration and violence in the region. Senator Icaza is very keen to contribute and be close to the work of the WMC and to invite our current Steering Committee while we meet in Mexico City to speak about our historical involvement in peace processes, social holiness, freedom of religion and human rights.

On Sunday Bishop Ivan preached at the Methodist local parish, "El Creador" in Mexico City, where Pastor Samuel is currently assigned. It is the first time in the history of the WMC and Mexican Methodism that the steering committee makes an official visit, therefore, as Mexican Methodists we feel very encourage to welcome and host our global leadership to witness and worship together guided by the Spirit as one Communion around the world.



Prayer to mark 350th Anniversary of Susanna Wesley's Birth

Living, loving God, Trinity in Unity,
We praise and thank you for the life of Susanna Wesley, Mother of Methodism.
Inspired by her regime of private prayer and meditation, may we grow in our devotion to you.
Following our conscience as she did, may we think for ourselves and dare to act on Kingdom values.

Aware of her programme of teaching her children, girls and boys alike, may we value and nurture all in our care, sensitive to individual needs. Encouraged by her determination to build up the faith of her family and the parish of Epworth, may we lead others to follow Christ more closely.

Discerning the Holy Spirit moving powerfully in the life of the nation as she did, may we be open to new challenges and expect great things from you.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit. AMEN.

Fully-funded Overseas' Scholar

King's College London Theological Trust was founded in 1980 with funds realized as a result of the transfer to the general purposes of the College of the former Theological Hostel. The Trust is empowered to provide financial assistance to students and former students of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies/ Department of Education & Professional Studies under the following headings:

- (1) Furthering the education of students and of former students of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies/Department of Education & Professional Studies in such ways as the Trustees think fit;
- (2) Furthering the vocational training of such students and former students and in particular of those who intend to seek ordination in the Church of England;
- (3) The advancement of the Christian religion, particularly in accordance with the doctrines of the Church of England, among such students and former students.

The Trustees fulfil the terms of the Trust in the Overseas Scholarship and Individual Small Grant scheme. Details of the Overseas Scholarship can be found below.

Overseas Scholarship

The King's College London Theological Trust awards one scholarship each year to a student from outside the UK who has been accepted to study in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. There are no geographical limitations but the Trustees aim to award the scholarship to a student who is unable to obtain an education at this level in their own country and whose own financial situation would make study in London difficult. On completion of their studies, overseas scholars are expected to return home in order to make a significant contribution to the religious life of their region through the medium of one of the Christian denominations.

The scholarship which is open to both undergraduate and post-graduate students meets the full cost of fees and provides a maintenance grant at a rate which the Trustees aim to keep broadly comparable with those provided by the British Academy and Research Councils. Scholarships are awarded for one year in the first instance but may be renewed subject to satisfactory academic progress.

It is a condition of the scholarship that successful applicants must return to their home country to live on completion of their studies. In the event that the scholar does not return to their home country, they will be expected to repay their full tuition fees and maintenance grant back to the Trust.

How to apply

The application pack includes an application form and two reference forms. You are required to provide one academic reference and another from a bishop or another senior minister who is able to cope on your expected contribution to the life of the Christian Church on your return to your home country.

Please note: it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the application form and references are returned to the Clerk to the Trustees by the specified deadline as late documentation will not be processed.

Application packs for the Overseas Scholarship may be downloaded from:

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/trs/study/funding/trust.aspx>

Application forms may also be obtained from the Clerk to the Trustees:

Email: theoltrust@kcl.ac.uk

Address Clerk to the Trustees

c/o Finance & Planning Division

King's College London

Room 8.20

James Clerk Maxwell Building

57 Waterloo Road

London

SE1 8WA

The closing date for applications for the Overseas Scholarship for the 2018-19 academic year is 12.00 (noon) on 22 February 2019. Applications and references need to be returned to the Clerk to the Trustees either by email or post by this deadline.



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 methodismuseum.org.

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

About the First Friday Letter

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