First Friday Letter

The World Methodist Council May 2019

Greetings from the General Secretary

Greetings in the name of our Crucified and Risen Lord, Jesus Christ! No matter where in the world you find yourself at this time, I trust you are enjoying my favorite seasons, Autumn or Spring!

I am currently attending the Anglican Consultative Council in the "fragrant harbor," Hong Kong. It is very appropriate that the daily Bible Studies at the Council gathering focuses on the disappointment and confusion of the two disciples on their "Walk to Emmaus."

The Easter terror attacks on churches and hotels in Sri Lanka that claimed the lives of more than three hundred people and scores injured left many of us horrified and sad. Just like Cleopas and the unnamed disciple as they discussed events in the wake of the crucifixion with the unrecognized Jesus. The World Methodist Council joined other major religious communities, governments and individuals to convey condolences to the bereaved families as well as offer prayers for the wounded. (https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/statement-on-easter-attacks-in-sri-lanka/)

It was also sad to note that more people searched information on the internet about the fire at Notre Dame than the event in Sri Lanka or Malawi, Zimbabwe and Mozambique where two cyclones left hundreds dead and thousands homeless. Are we more interested in a burnt steeple than human tragedy? What does this say about our humanity and commitment to justice?

In a provocative article, Ched Myers claims that in many instances, the meaning of Easter has been lost to the spring-rites and the events of the season which are too easily "chocolate-coated." He further asserts that "our perspective on traumatic historical events is not ultimately a matter of rational persuasion." It was only when "the stranger" joined the two disciples on the Emmaus road that their lives were completely changed.

It is my hope and prayer that even in the shadow of death, Jesus will open our blind eyes, deaf ears, and hard hearts to burn within us a renewed commitment to the demands of discipleship.

In this edition of the First Friday Letter you will find stories on Vibrant worship in Germiston, Eight baptized at second Chile national NYI conference, 'No Deal' Brexit endangers poorest families and WMC Geneva Secretary Report. Other stories you might find interesting would be VIP Week at Epworth Old Rectory, Creative spirit lifts Philippines' churches and a report of Notre Dame Consultation by President J.C. Park.

Paul declares: If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is our faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins. (I Cor 15:14)

Christ has risen from the grave and stands ready to transform our lives.

Let us bear testimony to our Risen Lord in our day and age.

Blessings,

Ivan

Notre Dame Consultation Report by President J.C. Park

I represented WMC in Notre Dame Consultation on the JDDJ (The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, 1999) along with four Methodist representatives (Dr. Simangaliso R. Kumalo, Rev. Dr. Tim Macquiban, Rev. Dr. Karen Westerfield Tucker, Rev. Terrell A. Jackson) and the other representatives of four other world communions, Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed. The meeting was held at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana USA, from 26th to 28th March, 2019. Re-affirming the basic truths of the doctrine of justification which are expressed in the JDDJ, the Notre Dame Consultation Statement incorporates the Methodist emphasis by affirming "that justification calls for sanctification, a holiness of life which is both personal and social"

It is significant to note that the trinitarian formulation of the basic truths of justification and sanctification provides the ecumenical momentum to move from conflict to communion. "Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works" (para. 15, the JDDJ). In her concept paper Roman Catholic theologian Susan K. Wood, SCL shared her vision: "The further we get from 1999 and the original document, the more we see that the doctrine of justification is brought to bear on the life and teachings of our churches in practical and concrete ways through translation into ecclesial and ethical implications of the doctrine."

The Notre Dame Statement also affirms that "We are convinced that we should apply this method (of the differentiating consensus in identifying common substance and distinguishing from its different confessional expressions) to other controversial questions within and between the churches but also to conflicts in the wider society." It is in this spirit that I proposed in my presentation the first principle of 'sola gratia' (grace only), namely, "The filial is prior to the judicial." (McLeod Campbell) Justification is God's declaration that "in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith" (Gal 3:26) as well as our assurance that we are the children of God since "God has sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:6)

As long as the ministry of any denomination keeps their members in justifying faith, neither the juridical lack of validity of apostolic succession (Catholic perspective on Protestants) nor the unnecessary addition of doctrines not revealed in the Bible (Protestant view on Catholics) matters. But only the salvific efficacy of the justifying and sanctifying grace matters: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love." (Gal 5:6)

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

Final preparations continue for the WMC Consultation on Diaspora/Migrant Churches

Representatives from WMC member churches from around the world will be meeting June 3-6 in the High Leigh Conference Centre near London for a Consultation on Diaspora/Migrant Churches. The group of approximately 50 will focus on the churches' ministry with migrating people and explore ways how the member churches can better cooperate as they are called to welcome the gifts and respond to the special needs of these people. Participants will engage in worship, Bible studies, listening sessions and discussions. They will share best practices and develop models for mutual learning by long-established churches and the migrants and refugees seeking a place to belong.

Churches and individuals will be encouraged to send in brief reports in response to the following questions:

How does migration impact what you are doing as church?

• The biggest challenges

• New opportunities

• One example for new cooperation's and mutual relationships with migrating people and/or other WMC member churches

Prayers for travel mercies for those attending the Consultation and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the deliberations are requested.

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Final preparations continue for the WMC Consultation on Diaspora/Migrant Churches continued

WMC Water and Peace Conference Follow-up

The Interreligious Relationships of the WMC committee, in corporation with the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem, organized a Water and Peace Conference in October 2018. A follow-up meeting was held in London to discuss what should be the next steps. An interfaith group met in Harlesden Methodist Church with the directors of EcoPeace from Jordan, Palestine, and Israel on ecological peace in the Jordan Valley. Peace building efforts by seeking to meet the interests of conflicting partners and possibilities to learn from EcoPeace Middle East in other parts of the world were covered.

World Methodist Council representatives Geneva Secretary Rosemarie Wenner, Vice President Gillian Kingston, and committee chair Rev. Dr. Reynaldo Leão Neto met with the directors of EcoPeace and members of the EcoPeace International Advisory Board at Westminster Central Hall. Rev. Dr. Leão Neto led the effort on how to continue the cooperation between the WMC and EcoPeace. Participants committed themselves to explore with the WMC member churches and agencies the possibilities for internships in the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem and the EcoPeace Offices in Israel, Jordan and Palestine. The future would include young people from the Middle East trained by EcoPeace in some of their churches and institutions. Future training for tour guides and more participation at events such as an Interfaith Conference organized by EcoPeace in February 2020 and the World Methodist Conference August 19-21, 2021 in Gothenborg, Sweden were discussed.

The World Council of Churches publishes its Annual Review 2018

The newest edition of the Annual Review of the World Council of Churches is online: https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/other/wcc-annual-review-2018/view

It reports on the celebration of the 70th anniversary and the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism March 8-13, 2018 in Arusha, Tanzania. It also includes programs the World Methodist Council share with the WCC, such as Peace for the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East, the Churches' Commitment to Children, the Thursdays in Black Campaign, Overcoming Xenophobia and other aspects of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

'No Deal' Brexit endangers poorest families

As Church leaders, we have chosen not to make political statements around Brexit. Members of the Churches we represent have in good conscience come to different conclusions; some voted remain and others voted to leave.

At present the risks that flow from an unplanned "No Deal" Brexit endanger the poorest families in our nation and therefore we feel compelled to speak up.

As Christians we are called to demand justice for the millions locked in poverty. A No Deal Brexit risks tightening poverty's grip on families up and down the country.

Over the past decade, our Churches have witnessed and responded to the slowly rising tide of hunger in the UK. A No Deal Brexit risks restricting the nation's supply of food and increasing prices. This, alongside further cuts to benefits on Monday 8 April, could have grave consequences for many in our communities.

Many charities are warning us that food supplies to the most vulnerable are most at risk: hospitals, prisons and those reliant on surplus or donated food. Supplies of essential medicines are likely to be disrupted. Again the most vulnerable will be the least able to cope with this.

We urge that all possible efforts continue to be made to avoid an unplanned No Deal Brexit given the consequences for the most vulnerable in our society. Should the decision, or indecision, of political leaders, together with a lack of preparation, expose the poorest to these risks, it will be the responsibility of Government to ensure these families are protected.

We continue to pray for our politicians and for all who are experiencing poverty.

This article originally appeared on www.methodist.org.uk

VIP Week at Epworth Old Rectory

Tuesday the 26th of March saw the arrival at The Old Rectory in Epworth of the Youth President of the Methodist Church in Britain, Miss Jasmine Yeboah, who was shown round the Rectory by Ms Gillian Crawley, the curator and manager. Jasmine was in Epworth to help publicise the launch of a new book, "From a Mother's Pen," a collection of prayers and writings by Susanna Wesley edited by Charles Wallace. The book will be released at the beginning of May.

Jasmine told me that her presidency is for a period of one year and her role is to be the voice of the young people within the Methodist church. She attends annual events such as conference and Council meetings, and visits the sites such as the rectory as well as visiting church groups all over the country. She has taken Courage as her theme for the year. She explained that this was not just about being brave in difficult circumstances, but in helping to build confidence in, and empowering them to express their Christian beliefs. As she so succinctly put it, "being Courageous in, and for, Christ."

Wednesday the 27th of March was even busier with a host of national and international trustees of the Rectory arriving for the dedication of the newly decorated room in the Rectory, based on the life of Susanna Wesley and her family here in Epworth. Rev. Dr. John Beyers, one of the American Trustees led the dedication service asking for blessings on the work done at the Rectory, and the volunteers who work there, which was followed up with one of Susanna's own prayers in which she says that religion is not to be confined to church alone but should continue into one's whole life. Also present were Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary of the World Methodist Council, and Sarah Friswell, the Chair of the Rectory Trustees along with around 16 other trustees. All who were there admired the new decor and the way the artifacts were displayed to show episodes in Susanna's life.

This was a very good day for special visitors as the Lincoln Diocesan Pilgrims came to us at lunch time while the trustees were still holding their meeting. The Pilgrims had a look at the newly dedicated room and heard a little talk on the contents then adjourned down stairs to Susanna's kitchen where they were regaled with the story of how she educated her children in that very room, and led the way for women lay preachers by preaching sermons and Bible study to approximately 200 people from her kitchen, despite the rules that women were not allowed to preach nor should it be done anywhere other than in church.

These two days took us from the early eighteenth century up to today with a continuing link from one highly educated, spiritual, strong willed woman, Susanna, to her modern counterparts with Jasmine, our trustees and manager to the women of the Pilgrim group, of whom at least two were ordained vicars.

Please contact the Rectory for more information on how to visit, details of events throughout the year, and how to volunteer. Telephone 01427 872268, e-mail curator@epworthold-rectory.org.uk or our facebook page.

Vibrant worship in Germiston as told by Rev. Stephen Day

Easter is, without doubt, the Christian festival in Germiston. While much of the worship which accompanies Holy Week would not seem out of place in the UK, there are two defining times of worship which are radically different.

We may associate Good Friday with solemn, meditative services. In Germiston, we experienced vibrant Seven Words services, focusing on seven words of Jesus from the cross. These services last between three to six hours and involve nine preachers.

The first preacher invites worshippers to walk the Via Dolorosa with Jesus, which leads to Golgotha. Seven preachers then preach on one of the seven words, concluding with another preacher who invites a response. I have found these services to be inspirational, offering a different model for Good Friday worship.

The Saturday night leading into Easter Day is spent in an "all-night revival". This includes a memorial service for members who have died since the previous Easter and also a healing service. Much time is spent in song and with people preaching on a set theme.

When the revival draws to a close, around 6 am, the church lights are turned off. Women bearing candles enter crying out "Uvukile!" which means "He is risen!". Some of these women then share the good news that Jesus Christ is risen. In the mood of celebration, we then go outside and have a short service of Holy Communion. We have been blessed by these new experiences of Holy Week and Easter worship, which will hopefully enrich our ministry when we return to the UK later this year.

This article can be found on www.methodist.com.uk

Creative spirit lifts Philippines' churches

The United Methodist Church in the Philippines faces plenty of challenges, including a large number of annual conferences and a struggle to pay workers a living wage.

However, an assessment of the country's three episcopal areas found overall "a very strong and healthy UMC in the Philippines, with leaders working hard with an entrepreneurial spirit and creativity."

Members of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, which works with the church regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines, presented the assessment during the committee's meeting in Manila.

The seven-member team made the report as part of gauging whether the Philippines Central Conference should have more than three bishops.

Bottom line: The team recommended no increase to episcopal leadership.

"Based on what we have seen and the current climate of deep budget reduction at the general church level, we feel confident that the current three episcopal areas are fully adequate to provide the leadership needed in the Philippines Central Conference," the report said.

The team did recommend Filipino United Methodists further discuss the size and number of conferences in their country. The team's report also advised continued cooperation among the episcopal areas "to learn from one another and to increase the resources they bring to their common struggles."

The committee must also complete further analysis of the context and missional potential for changes in the episcopal areas.

The report follows team members' travels across the country March 16-19 to visit United Methodist ministries. Team members included United Methodists from Germany, the United States and Zimbabwe.

The full article originated and can be found on umnews.org

A United Methodist deaf choir signs the words of a hymn during worship in the Baguio Area in northern Philippines. Across the country, an assessment team saw evidence of church vitality. Photo courtesy of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

Eight baptized at second Chile national NYI conference

The second Chile national Nazarene Youth International conference was held 20-24 February at the Paine Evangelical Event Center in Santiago. The conference was called Inspira 2019, and 15 youth leaders from 10 countries in South America came alongside 12 Chile youth pastors to host the event.

There were more than 230 youth present from the four districts in Chile. Eight of the youth were baptized during the event.

"[The baptisms were] an inspirational act of faith, both for the other youth participating in the event and for the organizers, pastors, and members of the public who were present," said Jaime Román, Chile NYI coordinator.

Participants had the opportunity to attend 15 workshops led by a variety of presenters and eight plenary sessions led by several international presenters, including NYI Global Council Chair Adiel Teixeira, Regional NYI President Christiano Manta, Chile Holistic Ministries Coordinator Alessandro Polonio, Peru Youth Pastor Gabriel Aparicio, and Chile NYI Coordinator Román.

Inspira 2019 was organized by more than 70 youth volunteers, and the worship was led by several representatives from the four districts in the country. Chilean musicians Emi and Gene Valenzuela and Nehemias and Mical Marchant also performed at the conference.

--Church of the Nazarene South America

The original article can be found on www.nazarene.org

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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