



FIRST FRIDAY LETTER

The World Methodist Council July 2019

Greetings from the General Secretary

We are halfway through 2019, and for many of us, it's a time of taking stock of tasks accomplished and what is left undone!

Depending on where we are in the world, some have experienced shorter days and longer nights (winter solstice) while others have longer days and shorter nights (summer solstice). Jesus reminds us in John's Gospel; "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work." (John 9:4). If Jesus was conscious of the fact that his time was short and that he had to give himself wholeheartedly to the task assigned to him, how much more for us called to be co-partners with God in mission.



Bishop Abrahams

During the past month, the Officers used every opportunity to represent the World Methodist Council at various events. The President, Treasurer, and I were present at the Susquehanna Annual Conference in Hershey, PA (https://susumc.org/files/annual_conf/2019/DL%20SAT%20Wrapup%206_1_19_web.pdf).

It was a privilege to gather with the Vice President, Geneva Secretary and colleagues from around the world at High Leigh Center, London, for a Consultation on Diaspora/Migrant Churches. We listen, learned, and planned how to be more effective agents of mission in an ever shirking world (<https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/god-is-on-the-move-a-call-to-be-the-church-in-a-new-way/>).

Towards the end of June, I participated in the Lutheran World Federation Council Meeting in Geneva as well as the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2019/documents/190603-joint_declaration_on_the_doctrine_of_justification_20_anniversary_edition-en.pdf). There are now five world communions who affirm this fundamental doctrinal agreement which I trust will guide us on our journey to full communion and common witness in the world.

There are also many other exciting things that have happened in various parts of the world, like Thursdays in Black at Kirchentag, a new Senior Bishop for the AME Church, and Guinea Bissau churches minister through health clinic, education captured in this edition of the First Friday Letter.

Time is a precious gift. Jesus' words are a call to action. Let us seize the moment and pursue the opportunities that God places before us with enthusiasm, passion, and commitment while it is still day because night comes sooner than anticipated.

Shalom

Ivan

A Call to Be the Church in a New Way

Grace and peace in this Season of Pentecost and greetings from the attendees of the WMC Consultation on Diaspora/ Migrant Churches in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From June 3-6, 2019 a group of 40 people representing about 20 WMC member churches from all continents gathered in the High Leigh Conference Centre near London to consult on the churches' ministry with migrants and how we can cooperate better as we are called to welcome the gifts and respond to the needs of migrating people.



As a summary of our work we offer the document **GOD IS ON THE MOVE – A CALL TO BE THE CHURCH IN A NEW WAY** to the churches that are part of the World Methodist Council and to our Ecumenical partners. We hope that it will inspire many churches to intentionally re-think theology, relationships and practice in the light of migration. We therefore kindly ask you to share the document with the leadership groups and with the local congregations of your churches.

GOD IS ON THE MOVE – A CALL TO BE THE CHURCH IN A NEW WAY is meant to be a living document. Words will come to life as soon as you create space for conversation and cooperation between people from different nations, ethnicities and cultures that are currently staying in your areas. Start where you are, discuss the principles that we developed and work on concrete next steps towards a new way of being church.

We are very much interested in receiving your comments, questions and your reports on what went well. Please send us resources that you found to be helpful for intercultural work and ministries with migrants. I as Geneva Secretary of the World Methodist Council will serve as your contact person on this topic.

In one of our Bible studies at the recent Consultation Archbishop Michael Stephen from the Methodist Church in Nigeria challenged us to read the parable of the father and his two sons (Luke 15: 11-32) through the lens of migration: Many people who leave their homes because they are longing for a better place find themselves in desperate situations. Several of us react like the older son in the parable who was not willing to embrace his brother when he came back. The Church, however, is called to do the work of the father who loves all of his children!

May we be church in a new way and together work for unity, justice and peace.

Rosemarie Wenner, Geneva Secretary (rosemarie.wenner@emk.de)

Five Christian traditions celebrate historic Joint Declaration on Justification

(LWI) - Leaders of Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Reformed and Anglican global church bodies today reaffirmed commitment to unity, joint witness and service as they co-presided a special prayer service in Geneva's St Pierre Cathedral, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the historic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ).

"We gather around the font remembering that in baptism we have been incorporated into the one body of Christ," The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) President Archbishop Dr. Panti Filibus Musa, said in his welcome to hundreds of worshippers gathered in the historic cathedral of the Protestant Church of Geneva. The congregation included members of local churches from the five Christian traditions that have affirmed the JDDJ, and representatives of LWF member churches around the world, who are in the city for this year's Council meeting, 13-18 June.

The JDDJ was signed by the LWF and Roman Catholic Church in 1999. It was a landmark agreement, effectively resolving one of the key theological conflicts of the Reformation, the understanding of salvation. The agreement was subsequently affirmed by the World Methodist Council (WMC), the Anglican Consultative Council, and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

New insights

Greeting the congregation, LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr. Martin Junge expressed gratitude for the journey the five Christian traditions have "traveled together." He emphasized: "Our common way of listening to the word of God in Scripture has led to such new insights."

Quoting the JDDJ, Father Augustinus Sander of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said, "We confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation."

WMC General Secretary Bishop Ivan M. Abrahams intoned "the deep connection between forgiveness of sins and making righteous," and "between justification and sanctification" that has always been crucial for understanding the biblical doctrine of justification.

On behalf of the WCRC, Executive Secretary for Justice and Witness Rev. Philip Vinod Peacock, expressed joy "that the historical doctrinal differences on the doctrine of justification no longer divide us." He described the joint leadership in the prayer service "as a moment of self-examination, conversion and new commitment to one another manifesting new unity and advancing our common witness for peace and justice."

Archbishop Dr. Josiah Idowu-Fearon, Secretary General of the Anglican Communion said the Anglican Consultative Council "welcomes and affirms the substance of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification."

The church's prophetic voice

In his sermon, Rev. Emmanuel Fuchs, president of the Protestant Church of Geneva, reminded the congregation of the greater significance of the JDDJ. He said though the question of justification may appear technical and of interest only to a few specialists, it is as relevant today because, "it concerns the possibilities for the human being to be happy, free and joyful" despite limitations in a world driven by competition and personal achievement. All Christians must remind themselves with conviction of the truly liberating good news that "In Christ, God loves me as I am and that is what gives me the confidence, the strength, the tenacity and the peace to face the world and all its challenges."

"Christianity cannot assert itself without the values of the gospel." - Rev. Emmanuel Fuchs, President, Protestant Church of Geneva

Referring to resurgence of discourses that defend a Christian identity of withdrawal and exclusion, he cautioned that "Christianity cannot assert itself without the values of the gospel" and this message should not be diluted "in order to please or appear more accessible." The church has no choice but to carry out together the prophetic mission of serving others and especially the most vulnerable, he added.

The liturgy included readings from the March 2019 Notre Dame Consultation Statement by the five ecumenical partners, charting their way forward together. Emma van Dorp, a theology student from the Reformed congregation, lit five symbolic candles on the altar as the church leaders affirmed the "wish to make more visible our common witness in worship and service, on our journey together towards visible unity."



Emma van Dorp lit five symbolic candles on the altar, as the church leaders affirmed the "wish to make more visible our common witness in worship and service, on our journey together towards visible unity." Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

African Methodist Episcopal Church Installs New Senior Bishop

The Right Reverend Adam Jefferson Richardson, Jr. was installed as the Senior Bishop of the AME Church at its Annual Council of Bishops and General Board Meeting Worship Service on June 26th in Birmingham, AL.

The Senior Bishop position occupies a key role in the polity and practice of the AME Church. While a Senior Bishop has existed since the incorporation of the church as a denomination in 1816, the first formal investiture ceremony occurred at the 2004 General Conference. The ceremony includes the passage of the Senior Bishop's regalia—a solid gold medalion with the logo of the denomination donated by the family of Claude Stephens.

During his investiture, Senior Bishop Richardson commented, "I am honored for service at this time in the history of our church I seek an interest in your prayers that I may rise to the occasion, that inadequacies may not be too glaring. Whatever successes, whatever achievements, the credit, the glory will belong to God in Christ."

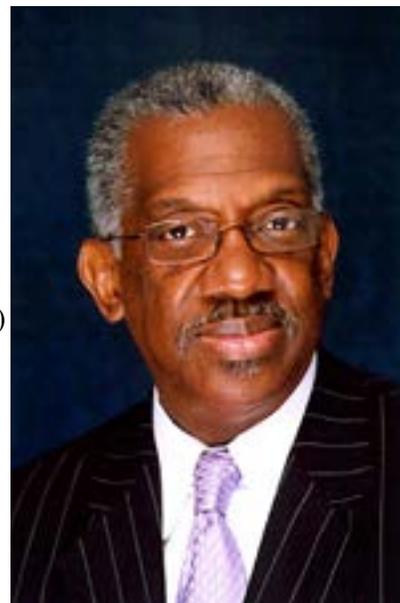
Bishop Richardson was elected the 115th Bishop at the 1996 General Conference. With service in pulpits throughout Georgia and Florida, the last church he pastored prior to his election was Bethel AME Church in Tallahassee, FL where he served for 18 years. He obtained the Bachelor of Arts degree from the Florida A&M University (where he was noted as the head drum major of the "Marching 100" Band). He received his Master of Divinity and Doctor of Sacred Theology degrees at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, GA.

As a Bishop, he has served churches in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Liberia, Cote D'Ivoire, Togo and Benin (14th District),

the Republic of South Africa (19th District), Virginia, NC, Maryland and Washington, DC (2nd District) and currently Florida and the Bahamas Islands (11th District). He has served as chair of the Health Commission, Lay, Commission on Seminaries, Colleges and Schools and as President of the Council of Bishops. Richardson has represented the AME Church in a number of Ecumenical bodies including the World Methodist Council and the National Congress of Black Churches. He is a prolific author with articles or chapters in several books.

Bishop Richardson will serve as Senior Bishop until his retirement in 2024. Reflecting on his time as a FAMU drum major he said, "There are quite a few steps (literally and figuratively) between the Patch (the practice field) and Senior Bishop!"

He and his wife Dr. Connie Speights Richardson are proud parents of two adult children Monique (a Leon County Judge) and Trey (a certified hospital radiographer and professional saxophone player).



Senior Bishop Richardson



General Secretary Bishop Ivan Abrahams in Geneva for Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification with the Lutheran World Federation.

Methodists involved in the German ‘Kirchentag’

More than 100,000 Christians visited Dortmund, Germany for a convocation that takes place every second year called: German Protestant ‘Kirchentag’ on June 19-23. The literal translation of ‘Kirchentag’ would be “Church Day.”

‘Kirchentag’ means four days with the Church worshipping, celebrating, reading the Bible, engaging in discussions how to build peace, how to take care for God’s creation, how to respond to migration, how to overcome poverty, racism and unjust relationships and how to witness the gospel in the 21. Century.

This year’s motto was: “What confidence is this” (2 Kings 18:19). The United Methodist Church in Germany is a part of the ‘Kirchentag’ movement and at the recent meeting several Methodists were involved. Following are some examples:

- The UMC in Germany had a booth at the “Market of Opportunities” and invited visitors to explore that “confidence”, though invisible, has power to change situations. The booth was a meeting place for many people who did not know the Methodist family.

- Dr. Jim Winkler, a United Methodist from the USA who is currently serving as President and General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in the USA, lead a Bible Study on Genesis 22: 1-19. He was invited to speak on a panel regarding ‘Violence and Religion’ where he addressed “four aspects of violence: the violent legacy of slavery and racism; gun violence; violence against planet earth; and military violence. The years ahead will require resistance, resilience, and persistence”, Dr. Winkler said. “The earth is in the grip of powerful and demonic hunger-making, war-making, and desert-making systems. Our lives are intimately bound up in a moral and spiritual crisis of profound and unprecedented dimensions. The reigning model of economic globalization threatens earth’s life systems, undermines cultural integrity and diversity, and endangers the lives of the many who are poor in order that some might consume exorbitantly and a few accumulate vast wealth. The only way we can break the cycle of violence is if people of good will, including people of faith, to come together to work for a world based on love, forgiveness, mercy and grace rather than hatred, retribution, war, and cruelty.”

- The former President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who is a United Methodist was at a panel with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Both spoke of the need of

multilateral relationships built on trust and control of power. The two leaders shared many examples for the need of persistence and challenged the audience to work for gender justice.

- Daoud Nassar from the “Tent of Nations” near Bethlehem, the recipient of the World Methodist Council’s Peace Award 2017, was on a panel with Sarah Bernstein from the Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue in Jerusalem. They inspired the audience by their commitment to overcome hatred with love. Nassar received standing ovations after having shared the story of the Nassar family and their creative work for justice through non-violent resistance under their motto: “We refuse to be enemies”.

I also treasured the many unexpected encounters with Methodists from around the world. Women from the Methodist Church in Nigeria were before us one day lining up at the metro, and I have had a conversation with President Bishop Rev. Asiri P. Perera from the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka who asked me to invite the Methodist family to pray for peace in his country. The tensions after the Terrorist attack affect the whole nation and particularly the Methodist Church. Fears of the people are often misused for political interests. Solidarity from International organizations is needed in these days.

The next ‘Kirchentag’ will be an even broader Ecumenical gathering, organized by the Protestant Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the other member churches of the Council of Churches in Germany. The Ecumenical Kirchentag will take place May 12-16, 2021 in Frankfurt.

-- Geneva Secretary Bishop Rosemarie Wenner



Chancellor Merkel and Ellen J. Sirleaf

Guinea Bissau churches minister through health clinic, education

For the past five years, Nazarene missionaries Irma and Mario Martinez have been ministering in Guinea Bissau. Four churches have been planted during their time serving, three of which are in rural communities.

It's estimated that only 10 percent of the population in Guinea Bissau is Christian, and Mario says their goal is to act as the spark that helps spread the Gospel to the rest of the country. The churches in Guinea Bissau are trying to make that happen in a few different ways.

In one rural area, the church is working to build a health center in the community since the next closest clinic is more than six miles away.

Each church is also built to care for more than just the spiritual needs in the community, providing housing and educational centers for children.

The church in the capital city of Bissau hosts a weekly literacy class for approximately 25 women, most of whom come from a non-Christian faith background. The women learn to read and write in three months, and with those skills, many are able to apply for better jobs.

"This ministry has opened the doors for us in the community," Mario said.

Mongolia church presence spreads

The Church of the Nazarene is expanding across Mongolia by planting churches and making connections.

One of the newest churches, Shirenor Church of the Nazarene, held its first service 2 June and offers small group to reach the community.

A leader at the Shirenor church also serves at Habitat Center, a community center created with the help of Bulmal Church of the Nazarene in South Korea. The center recently purchased a new location to accommodate the growing ministry.

During the purchase, the seller learned that the building was being turned into a Christian community center. This was an answer to prayer as his mother-in-law had recently moved in and was looking for a new place to worship.



Simone*, who learned to read and write through the classes at the church, recently got a new high-profile job thanks to the skills she learned. Although she is finished with the class, she is still involved with the ministry by advertising the program and reaching out to other women in the community.

"It's an honor to be here, to be part of this church family with Irma and her husband, who have supported me," Simone said.

Thanks to ministries like this in Guinea Bissau, more than 30 youth were baptized at two churches in March.

"[What we are doing] is very important," said one of the pastors. "We are working for God."

*Names are changed for protection

- This article can also be found on www.nazarene.org



Irma and Mario Martinez ministering in Guinea Bissau

The location of Habitat Center is ideal for outreach since the area is near the Darkhan city center. Local leaders at Habitat are already making plans for community ministries, including a discipleship training led by local church members.

Another church is connected with new church members during a renovation.

"Some Christian carpenters were hired to renovate the church," said Sunny Um, local Nazarene missionary. "They had attended a service, but the distance made it difficult for them to do so regularly. After meeting our Nazarene missionaries however, they were excited to learn of Nazarene churches closer to their area that would allow them to worship regularly."

Sunny, who serves alongside his wife, Lisa Lee Um, expressed optimism for the future of the Church of the Nazarene in Mongolia.

"God is continually showing us His grace, even when the car breaks down and the dust storm comes blowing in," Sunny said.

--Church of the Nazarene Asia-Pacific

Spreading missions across Mongolia

Thursdays in Black at Kirchentag

Stories, music, and many other expressions of solidarity marked a lively observation of Thursdays in Black at the German Protestant church festival. From religious leaders to passersby, many offered words of support and encouragement for the campaign for a world free from rape and violence.

“...I am trying to encourage others to join,” said Bishop Rosemarie Wenner of the World Methodist Council, a strong supporter of Thursdays in Black.

“Thursdays in Black and the fight against violence and rape is something everyone, men and women, in and outside of church can join. We are all affected by it,” said Rev. Dr. Jean Hawxhurst from the Council of Bishops.

Still others were just being introduced to Thursdays in Black. “Sexual violence has many facets and I think it starts with disrespect,” reflected Ines von Keller, who was just learning about Thursdays in Black. “Just the other day I overheard four male teenagers commenting on a young girl walking by. I kept silence, but I think I should have spoken up. We all need to start talking about it and demand respect in these situations. I would like to try and include it as a topic in the parish newsletter I am working on.”

Those attending also talked about the messages sent - intentionally or not - in liturgies, hymns and prayers, and whether those messages are inclusive. “To tackle the problem of violence and rape, the church should stop excluding women. Our church has a week of prayer against gender-based violence. It is time to face up with stories about violence against women in the Bible. Everyone should be concerned about this topic,” said Peter King from the Anglican Church.

Everyone can join

During the event, the World Council of Churches (WCC) organized a sharing on how sexual violence is a part of everyday culture - in songs, media and conversations.

Participant Hana Pandian offered her insights on what Thursdays in Black means in India. “We need to raise our voices and create more awareness,” she urged the audience. “Everyone independent from their gender can support this campaign.”

Sonja Skupch, general secretary from the Evangelical Church in Argentina reflected that sexual violence is a dire issue in Argentina. “We can do better and we wish for something better,” she said.

Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri, deputy general secretary of the WCC, recalled her childhood in Malawi explaining how she grew up in constant fear of rape. When she was working as a professor in Malawi, she conducted research with fellow female lecturers and unveiled the issue of rape happening on campus and in churches.

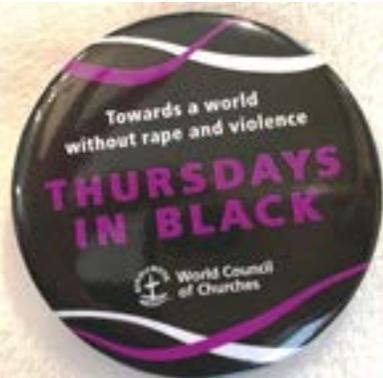
Following that she had to leave her country but found another blessing in her work with the WCC. “It gives me an international platform to address the issue and supporting the fellowship of 350 churches in creating just communities of women and men and ending attitudes and practices that permit rape and violence. It is a sin and there is no space for it.”

She also stressed the importance of mutual encouragement of the member churches to start and keep talking about the issue. “I want my granddaughter to live without fear,” she said.

Additional information about Thursdays in Black can be found on <https://www.oikoumene.org/en>



WCC Women fighting against violence and rape.



Thursdays in Black button



We welcome your press releases, articles and resources! Please keep submissions to less than a page. We also ask that all stories are written, edited and ready to publish. 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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