First Friday Letter

The World Methodist Council December 2019

You will notice a new format this time as the WMC wants the translation to be available in your language.

Greetings from the Vice President

'Great Lectionary readings for tomorrow!' emailed the General Secretary, persuading me to reflect on Advent, and, looking at those readings for the first Sunday in Advent, I must agree.

Particularly compelling are verses from Isaiah of Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:1-5) where the prophet shares his vision of how it will be when the peoples of all nations unite in pilgrimage to the mountain of the Lord.

For the people of Israel, mountains were significant. In the majesty and beauty and severity of the mountain, God was present. Abraham, Moses and Elijah experienced God in the mountains – El Shadd-ai, God of the mountains; the Psalmist lifted his eyes to the mountains; for Jesus too, mountains were significant – the mountain of the Beatitudes, the Mount of Transfiguration, the Mount of Olives.

Isaiah's vision of the mountain of the Lord is of a place of peace, shalom, a place where all may flourish and live in security. It is a vision shared by Third Isaiah as he, in turn, reflects on what makes for true well-being – read Isaiah 65:17-25

Recently, I represented the World Methodist Council at the 25th Conference of EcoPeace in Jordan. Prior to the conference, a number of us had a tour of the Jordan Valley from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, or the Salt Sea as some call it. We saw for ourselves the combined effects of injustice, climate change and pollution; we wondered, in the fullest sense of that word, at how those deprived of water both systematically and climatically managed to raise families, to tend flocks, to farm crops, to live.

As Isaiah of Jerusalem sees, in his mind's eye, the people going to the Mountain of the Lord, he sees too that the weapons of war will become tools of peace; that what has destroyed community will be used to build up community; what has brought death will bring life. Jerusalem, vision of peace, is in the eye of the prophet, as he considers the city built on the hills above the desert and sees the pilgrims streaming up towards it. His vision is earthed in his own reality. For Isaiah, God was there, 'high and lifted up', and calling him to challenge the people with a vision of what made for their peace. God calls us to do the same as we wait, in joyful expectation, to celebrate the First Coming of the Prince of Peace.

Blessings for Advent,

Gillian Kingston

Peace Award recipient speaks of promise for peace-filled future

Upon receiving the 2019 World Methodist Peace Award, Rev. Dr. James T. Laney stated that "Korea has figured in my life ever since I turned 19. It has figured prominently and in the most profound ways." His experience of Korea as a place defined by "one people, one language, one culture, and yet, a division" sent his life on a path of pursuing peace for the Korean peninsula.

Laney offered three key lessons learned from his lifelong endeavor for peace. "Peace is not possible as long as we demonize the other side," he said. "Peace is best achieved through face-to-face conversations. We have to move in peace stage by stage."

These lessons in peacemaking, honed and refined over decades of experience, will find future expressions through a commitment to peacemaking by new generations. The legacies of peacemakers such as Laney and others are not just stories to tell, but also models to follow.

Sensing an urgent need for peacemakers in our world now and into the future, Laney offered in closing a charge to those gathered in his honor. "I accept this award humbly and gratefully and with a fervent prayer that all of us are called to be peacemakers," he said. "Peace is the foundation of all human flourishing. Modern warfare is the Armageddon of life. Let us all promise each other that in our sphere of life, we will seek to be instruments of God's peace and justice."

Upon receiving the World Methodist Peace Award, Dr. Laney offers a word of thanks and encourages those gathered in his honor to pursue peacemaking in their own spheres of life.

Photo: Cindy Brown

> Laney's work as a peacemaker and bridge builder beautifully exemplifies the call of missionaries and the church's longstanding hopes for its witness in mission.
>
> -Thomas Kemper
> General Secretary of Global Ministries, UMC

Recipients of the Peace Award must have displayed Courage, Creativity, and Consistency towards peace.

To submit a nomination for the World Methodist Peace Award . . .

Nominations may be made by submitting a letter highlighting the reason for the nomination and giving evidence of the fruit of the nominee's efforts toward peace, etc. A photograph is requested, along with appropriate endorsements for the nomination. Nominations for the Award are considered at the annual meeting of the Steering Committee of the Council.

Albania UMCs offer aid after major Earthquake

Early Tuesday morning, November 26, 2019, Albania was struck by a violent earthquake that claimed many lives, injured many people, collapsed buildings and deeply shocked people.

It is far from being just this one earthquake - the seismological department of the Institute of Science in the Albanian capital of Tirana has registered more than 500 earthquakes in the last two days. A dozen of them had a magnitude of at least 4.0 on the Richter scale.

November 28 is usually celebrated in Albania as Independence Day. This year, however, all celebrations were cancelled. Instead, rescue workers feverishly search for survivors. Rain and the many aftershocks make their work much more difficult. Miracles do happen - but in more than 30 cases the buried people could no longer be helped.

Durrës is the closest town to the epicenter with a local church of the UMC. But the earthquakes also caused considerable damage in Tirana. Wilfried Nausner, Superintendent of the UMC in Albania, reports on a district of Tirana in which many houses are relatively old. Since the earth had already shaken in September, the houses had not been extensively inspected at that time. This is now avenging itself, because many existing damages have now become even greater as a result of the recent earthquakes. Above all, it is the poorest who will now lose their homes. But even of those who were still allowed to enter their homes, many did not dare to enter. Tents were erected – but this is not even a medium-term option given the increasing cold of the night…

According to Superintendent Nausner, the buildings used by the UMC in Albania did not suffer any major structural damage. As far as people are concerned, however, things are different. All members of the UMC have relatives and friends who have been affected by the earthquakes. Wilfried Nausner's wife Jean adds that many of these victims are now seeking refuge with relatives and friends who live further away.

The people of the UMC in Albania want to help. They are collecting blankets and clothes, according Superintendent Nausner. Women, who are part of the sewing project in Pogradec, are sewing bags today despite the national holiday - the proceeds will be donated to the earthquake victims in and around Durrës. Next Sunday, there will be an offering in all five United Methodist congregations for the same purpose. Mustafa Isufi, pastor of the Methodist congregation in Pogradec, puts it this way: «In view of this national disaster, we want to be close to the people and make a contribution to alleviating their need and distress».”

We are grateful to all those who, in prayer and solidarity, accompany the people and the UMC in Albania.

Source: Supt. Wilfried and Jean Nausner, Tirana / Urs Schweizer, Assistant to the Bishop Patrick Streiff

Church makes history with first female bishop

JOHANNESBURG - The Methodist Church of Southern Africa is making history.

Purity Malinga was inducted on Sunday as Presiding Bishop – becoming the first female Bishop in the church. Malinga was elected in May, taking over the reins from Reverend Ziphozihle Siwa. The groundbreaking moment for the church hasn't been without its challenges. Malinga says she's learnt valuable, but hard lessons during her long spiritual journey.

“Disrespect, mostly being doubted and being seconded guessed even when you have been given responsibility to minister,” Malinga said. “There will be people or groups of people who see you as only belonging to women because you are a woman. Being yourself, trust God, don't try to please anybody except God. Focus on your calling and your gifts, and those have been for me the main.”

Those in ministry have praised the move. “To have a woman as the presiding Bishop for the first time, it's an extraordinary thing,” said Reverend Frank Chikane from the South African Council of Churches.

Malinga says this is just the beginning and looks forward to more women in leadership positions in the church.

Check out https://www.enca.com/news/church-makes-history-first-female-bishop for more.

Colorado church embraces Myanmar refugees

While Pastor Chuck Hayes was praying for God to open doors to multicultural ministry in his community, Taw Taw Soe was praying that God would lead his family to the right church in their new town of Greeley, Colorado.

Soe and his family settled in the United States after spending years in a refugee camp in Thailand during a civil war in their home, Myanmar's Karen State.

After a positive and welcoming first visit to Greeley First Church of the Nazarene, Soe returned with his immediate family. On the third Sunday, he had about a dozen people with him. Soon, he was bringing up to 35 Karen-speaking people each Sunday.

Hayes had initially prayed for an open door among Spanish-speaking people in Greeley, but when the Karen-speaking group kept growing, Hayes realized that God was opening the door there.

First Church is now home to nearly 100 Karen-speaking immigrants, most of whom are refugees. With Hayes' blessing, Soe started a Sunday afternoon Bible study in the Karen language because most of the adults still struggle with English.

"That slowly morphed into a worship service on Sunday afternoon," Hayes said. "It kept growing. The board even voted at one point to give up our English-speaking worship time at 10:30 so the Karen could hold a service then. They said, 'No, we like 1 p.m.'"

Today, the Karen-speaking group is almost as large as the English-speaking group. Some were already Christians, but others came to the United States with traditional faiths and are giving their lives to Jesus Christ through First Church's ministry.

About 40 of the Karen attendees have become members of the denomination, and a number of them have been baptized, including a man from another faith who got baptized last Sunday. Another Karen member recently received a local pastor's license.

Soe closely studied the Church of the Nazarene's doctrine and Articles of Faith, and he is now working through the Nazarene Course of Study toward ordination as a Nazarene elder.

Hayes and Soe envision a future when the two groups become one.

"I think God will do everything in His own time," Soe said. "I think we can grow, and in a few years we can probably even have the same service instead of two different services."

A number of Nazarene churches across the United States are experiencing a movement of God among growing populations of refugees. Like Southside Church of the Nazarene in Indianapolis, Indiana, the Greeley church has blended its children and youth programs.

Some of the Karen teens and young adults have switched to attending the English-speaking worship service, and some of the English-speaking attendees attend the Karen service and help to run the sound system or PowerPoint.

"They welcome us as much as they can and they encourage us," Soe said of the English-speaking congregation and leadership. "God is pouring out His Holy Spirit among us here, between the Karen and English [members]."

Check out this story and more at https://www.nazarene.org/

Bishops encouraged to break down barriers

United Methodist bishops held a special service Nov. 5 to mark the 30th anniversary of the Berlin Wall's fall and the peaceful revolution that led to reuniting East and West.

"People risked their lives to make change happen," said retired Bishop Rosemarie Wenner of Germany. "The churches played a very important role."

Wenner led the service alongside Bishops Harald Rückert, also of Germany, and Eduard Khegay of Eurasia. The three grew up on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain — Rückert and Wenner in what was then West Germany and Khegay in what was then the Soviet Union. They testified to the role faith played in overcoming the divide between East and West.

In 1989, churches such as St. Nicholas Church in downtown Leipzig provided a safe place for dissatisfied East Germans to pray and discern a better future. From the church, these Germans launched weekly nonviolent demonstrations that pressured politicians for freedom.

Rückert recounted how an East German hymn written a few months before the wall's fall also became an anthem across Germany for change. He translated the hymn's title: "Trust into the New Path in which God Will Lead You." Faith kept peaceful protesters going even amid fears they might face a bloody crackdown like that Chinese demonstrators had experienced earlier that year in Tiananmen Square.

On Nov. 9, an East German government official called a press conference to announce citizens would receive one of their demands — freedom of travel. A reporter asked when the change would take effect, Wenner said. The official's response was none too certain: "I assume now."

"So people just went to the checkpoints, and the soldiers were brave enough to open the gates," Wenner recalled. "People were dancing in the streets of Berlin."

Thus a barrier first erected in August 1961 began tumbling down on Nov. 9, 1989 — with more peaceful results than the collapse of Jericho's wall in the Book of Joshua.

However, it doesn't require stone or graffiti-covered concrete to set up powerful barriers between people. During their meeting on Nov. 6, bishops made plans to help remove modern-day roadblocks faced by refugees forced from their countries by war, violence or persecution.

According to Public Radio International, about 190 US communities currently resettle refugees. Some governors and mayors have stepped forward to offer consent.

The Immigration Task Force recommended U.S. bishops take action by sending letters by Dec. 26 to their governors and city officials urging them to welcome refugees. The task force also asked that local churches likewise join the letter-writing campaign, which the group has named "Room in the Inn."

The bishops raised their hands in support of the recommendation.

"We believe that there is room in the inn and what a wonderful way to celebrate the birth of the Christ child by doing this work," said Bishop Minerva Carcaño, the task force's chair and leader of the California-Nevada Conference.

At the 30th anniversary service, bishops spoke of their fears that walls — both literal and metaphorical — are rising once again.

"The joy, confidence and passion in God who wants walls that separate people to come down … is heavily challenged in these days," Rückert said. "You hear 'America First,' 'Russia First,' 'Germany First.' The joy, confidence and passion in God to bring people together is even challenged in our United Methodist Church." However, he said, faith in God helped bring people together then and can overcome divides again. "With God, we can leap over walls," he added.

Khegay, who leads United Methodists from Ukraine to Russia, echoed that sentiment in his Holy Communion supplication. The bishop prayed that God would break down the walls of prejudice and walls that separate families.

"Lord, we repent that we may have built walls in our minds and hearts," Khegay prayed. "Help us, Lord, to build bridges — not walls."

Bishops Harald Rückert and Rosemarie Wenner of Germany recount the role the Christian faith played in the fall of the Berlin Wall 30 years ago.

Church ratifies women's equality amendment

After a revote, United Methodists around the globe have amended the denomination's constitution to proclaim "men and women are of equal value in the eyes of God."

The newly adopted measure also commits United Methodists to work toward ending discrimination against women and girls.

"While we still have much progress to make, this is an indication that we as a church do acknowledge and embrace women at every level of the church," said Bishop Tracy Smith Malone, president of the United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women. She also leads the East Ohio Conference.

The amendment now has received 92.2% of the annual conference votes submitted to the Council of Bishops, the council's secretary Bishop Mande Muyombo announced Nov. 6. Muyombo leads conferences in the North Katanga area of Congo.

The full amendment United Methodists have ratified says:

"As the Holy Scripture reveals, both men and women are made in the image of God and, therefore, men and women are of equal value in the eyes of God. The United Methodist Church acknowledges the long history of discrimination against women and girls. The United Methodist Church shall confront and seek to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, whether in organizations or in individuals, in every facet of its life and in society at large. The United Methodist Church shall work collaboratively with others to address concerns that threaten the cause of women's and girl's equality and well-being."

Carol Napier, a member of Glenn Memorial United Methodist Church in the North Georgia Conference, submitted the original amendment to the 2016 General Conference. "I introduced this constitutional amendment for all the girls around the world who are raised in churches that tell them in subtle and not so subtle ways that they are second-class citizens — and for the women, who have worked so hard to eliminate sexism in the church," said the longtime Sunday school teacher.

Dawn Wiggins Hare, top executive of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women, said Napier's amendment shows the power of one person to make a difference. The commission, created by General Conference in 1972, has the task of working toward the elimination of sexism in the life of the church.

"This is so significant that the church has affirmed the biblical teaching that women are created in the image of God," Hare said. "The fact that this was from a laywoman in North Georgia just represents the full inclusion as well as the power and spirit of women in the church, including our wonderful laywomen."

Still, Hare acknowledged the ratification was somewhat bittersweet. The commission had submitted another amendment promoting women's equality that faced defeat in 2018.

The new amendment takes effect immediately, and the United Methodist Publishing House plans to issue the addition to the Book of Discipline as soon as possible. The Discipline contains the constitution and other church policies and teachings. This will be the Discipline's new Paragraph 6.

Connectional Youth and Young Adult Conference 2020

With excitement, CME announces the Connectional Youth and Young Adult Conference (CYYAC20) will be held June 29-July 3, 2020 at the Sheraton Greensboro at Four Seasons Hotel located at 3121 W Gate City Blvd, Greensboro, NC 27407. CYYAC20 will be hosted by Bishop and Mrs. James B. Walker and the Seventh Episcopal District. The theme is P.R.E.S.S. (Passionate Relevant Essential Sincere Service).

For more information about the event and happenings, check out https://thecmechurch.org/cyyac20/

From Bogotá: Rev. Samuel Murillo

A reflection on the 3rd Global Gathering's continued place in a participant's life

Latin America could be the region in the world with the highest inequalities. This has been more evident lately through strong social protests and movements clamoring for justice in the region; Colombia, Bolivia, Chile, Honduras, etc.

The demand is for better and equal opportunities for everyone while the region experiences forced displacement and migration. All this is part of the concern of the public agenda which include ministries among churches according to our common call.

The Global Christian Forum gathering in Bogotá and the statement for mutual recognition and witnessing are part of the huge needs for Christianity in the region to give ourselves the opportunity to engage in deep listening and commitment for the common good. The invitation to share our stories of life and faith, with our own light and darkness, is a good opportunity for us to engage in the long journey of discovering our common humanity, while recognizing how much we need and can help each other. Experiencing that who Christ is for me is the same for others.

Let mutual love continue, the motto for the 2018 Global Christian Forum gathering in Bogotá, should still engage our churches widely to continue exploring our common challenges and to move together towards mutual discernment of recognition, witnessing and unity as an answer to the call from God to discipleship.

Residency in Mission Applications for 2021 in New Zealand due

World Methodist Evangelism recently celebrated the successful launch of a new initiative aimed at developing evangelistic and missional engagement and learning among young adults in the Wesleyan Methodist Family. The Residency in Mission (RIM) is an immersive mission and evangelism experience designed for young adults who are called to serve beyond their home country in partnership with ministries in the Wesleyan Methodist family. RIM is a 9-12 month commitment that includes guided mentorship from mission and evangelism leadership experts. RIM also 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.

The next deadline for RIM applications is 31 December. Residents in Mission must be 21 years of age at time of placement. Current or future university and/or seminary students are welcome to apply. The Resident in Mission should be a citizen or resident of Australia, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, or the United States.

The first Resident In Mission, Eliza Edge, was installed at the Millwater Wesleyan Methodist Church in Auckland, New Zealand. In November Bonnie Hollabaugh, WME Director of Development and Rev. Dr. Robert Haynes, WME Director of Education and Leadership met with Eliza regarding her ministry with the people of Auckland. While there they met with leaders of churches in the South Pacific region of the Methodist family to explore further ministry opportunities. The next Resident, Annie Kate Leinius, will begin her service in New Zealand at the first of the calendar year. **You can learn more at www.residencyinmission.org.**

To apply or to find out more about RIM visit www.ResidencyInMission.org or contact Rev. Dr. Rob Haynes, Director of Education and Leadership: rob@worldmehtodist.org.

Submitted by *Libby Wyatt, World Methodist Evangelism*

(L-R) Bonnie Hollabaugh, Eliza Edge and Robert Haynes

Churches Witnessing With Migrants (CWWM)

Speakers at the CWWM

Different churches and faith traditions as well as Non-Government Organization's working with migrants gathered in Quito, Ecuador, for the 10th Consultation of "Churches Witnessing With Migrants" (CWWM) held on November 14-17, with 60 persons present. At least 10 of them belong to a WMC member Church. CWWM works within a structure which includes migrants, migrant serving institutions and churches or faith-based organizations. A special focus was the situation of migrants in Latin America and responses through churches and interfaith organizations.

Bishop Felipe Ruiz Aguilar from the Methodist Church in Mexico gave a report how Methodists in Mexico accompany migrants from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala as well as refugees from Haiti and the DRC along their journey through Mexico. The Methodist Church responds holistically by meeting the basic needs of the migrating people through shelters and food stations, offering counseling and legal support, enabling them to contact their families, establishing joint programs with mainly the United Methodist Church in the USA – and in all of that taking into account one of the basic principles of CWWM: "Nothing about Migrants without Migrants".

November 15, the organizers of the 10 th CWWM Consultation together with the Lutheran Church in Quito invited to a High Level Public Event addressing "the Moral and Ethical Imperatives of Sustainable Human Mobility". Twenty-seven speakers of several faith traditions expressed their commitment to work with migrants: The freedom to move is a human right; it is a scandal though that so many people are forced to migrate because of violence, war, climate change, poverty, illnesses etc.

In support of migrating people the participants committed themselves to further develop an infrastructure of care and protection on national, regional and global levels and to work towards economic justice and peace in order to combat root causes for forced migration. The CWWM network provides unique opportunities for learning and engagement: practitioners from around the world, religious leaders and migrants learn from one another and support each other in advocacy towards the Global Forum on Migration and Development and in the monitoring process of the UN Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Meanwhile, a regional CWWM was established in Africa and leaders from Latin America are discussing how to best work together in this region. CWWM is a growing movement and it is supported by various Methodist individuals and churches. More information can be found at *https://nccphilippines.org/cwwm/*

Disaster Chaplaincy updates

The Assembly's National Disaster Recovery Officer Rev. Dr. Stephen Robinson is providing regular updates on disaster chaplaincy responses to bushfire and heatwave emergencies across Australia. In a number of states of Australia, the UCA and its agencies coordinate ecumenical and interfaith chaplaincy for state governments. Uniting Church ministers are front and centre of what is historically the largest scale chaplaincy response on record.

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.

About the First Friday Letter

The First Friday Newsletter is a monthly publication of the World Methodist Council.

Publisher: Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary

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