



FIRST FRIDAY LETTER

The World Methodist Council April 2020

Greetings from the General Secretary

Greetings in the name of our Crucified and Risen Lord, Jesus Christ!

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) has turned the world upside down. People from all walks of life are confronted with unprecedented realities in these challenging times. The global health crisis presents us with a unique opportunity to rebuild a sense of the common good. The notion of the common good is bound up with the idea of active citizen participation, commitment to public service in which the religious and cultural plurality of the human community will be respected.

We need to practice radical hospitality and garner the spiritual resources of all faith communities now more than ever before. For further reading on “the common good” see Michael Novak’s *Free Persons and the Common Good*, and a book by multiple authors titled *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*.

The time has come for us to call on our national leaders to stop playing “the blame game” by politicizing and racializing the Coronavirus. We are all affected as the virus does not respect national boundaries or class and color. Together with expanding testing, self-isolating, acts of courage, kindness, resilience, and solidarity with the most vulnerable, we can make a difference.

In this special issue of the First Friday Letter, we cover stories of how those in the Methodists/Wesleyan tradition are making a difference from Seoul to Seattle, New Delhi to New York, London to Lagos, Cape Town to Cairo...the sun never sets on the Methodist Movement. **We are a global connection!**

On behalf of the World Methodist Council, we express our sincere sympathy and condolences to all who lost loved ones during this global health crisis. Remember, “The Lord is near to those who mourn; he lifts up those whose spirit is crushed.” (Ps 34:18)

We also take this opportunity to thank all medical personnel, law enforcement officers and first responders.

Special thanks to persons who work in supermarkets, factories, pharmacies, farms and, all on the forefront who help us to keep life and limb together.

Despite our many challenges, **may we all have a fresh encounter with the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ, this Easter.**

Stay safe and healthy.

Ivan



Thank you to those of you that have sent in nomination forms for the 2021-2026 council delegates, officers and steering committee members!
(Scroll down to page 14 to access the forms)

At Charity's Almighty Call: Exhortation for People Called Methodists in the COVID 19 Outbreak

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who suffered and died for all sentient beings on earth!

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, we have been living with the unprecedented pandemic in human history for the last few months. This is certainly a crisis for our civilization and yet an opportunity testing human bond and solidarity to survive and flourish. It all depends on how we will respond to this challenge as the body of Christ.

Since I have come back from my visit to Methodist Church Nigeria in Feb. 20, the Corona Virus Outbreak suddenly became very serious. Taegu, a city in the southeastern part of Korea, has been the epicenter of the rapid spread of the virus. Sincheonji, a cult group of more than 200 thousand people, was exposed by the CDC Korea to be one of the main causes for regional infection in Taegu. From the first Sunday of March most of religious gatherings of Protestants, Catholics, and Buddhists have been cancelled. Up until this moment many doctors, nurses, government officials and volunteers have been serving the patients tirelessly even at the risk of their own lives. Furthermore, most of Korean citizens have been sincerely practicing the public manners such as washing hands, wearing masks, and coughing on one's own sleeve besides social distancing.

One of the hottest issues among Christians in Korea today is the meaning of the Sabbath keeping in the catastrophic situation of pandemic. If almost ten million Christians of Protestants and Catholics in Korea would resume their Sunday services, what do you expect to happen? A Christian medical doctor of infectious disease recently warned Korean Christianity of the danger of rampant virus spread which can be caused by restarting corporate worships at churches from the first Sunday in April. And several leaders of major Protestant denominations criticized the local and national governments which have imposed the legal measures to prohibit Sunday worships. For them there is a thin line between religious persecution and political manipulation of public opinions against the Church. Many Christian people of old generation sigh out of their grief over the fact that they kept the Sabbath even in the midst of the Korean War, but now they can't. Most of young people whether Christian or not prefer staying at home for on-line worship service to off-line one, approving and following the scientific advice of medical professionals.

The present situation of pandemic raises a fundamental question of the theological priority of being the Church in the 21st century. What is the place of the Church in the public sphere of our secularized world? Are we on the retreat to the religious, privatizing ghetto from engagement in the social, cultural, political, and economic lives 'extra muros ecclesiae' (outside the church wall)? What is the meaning of "God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor 5:19)? We have to wrestle with these important issues as we struggle to transform the world by shifting the ecclesial paradigm from 'the Church in Exile' to 'the Church on the Move'. The Church in Exile

represents complacent Christianity in the modern separation between the Church and the world. The Church on the Move makes a radically new approach to the world by prioritizing her ecclesial zeal in God's mission.

I would like to illumine the Wesleyan heritage in theological prioritization of our zeal for being the body of Christ in our contemporary world. The entire connected system of Scriptural, Spirit-filled Christianity consists of the five layers of religious zeal which is proportioned to its objects such as "the Church, the ordinances of Christ, works of mercy, holy tempers, and love of God and man." (John Wesley) Zeal for the Church is the basis of the system while zeal for love of God and man is the throne at the top of the system. It is zeal for works of mercy which is the middle between zeal for the works of piety (or the ordinances of Christ) and zeal for holy tempers.

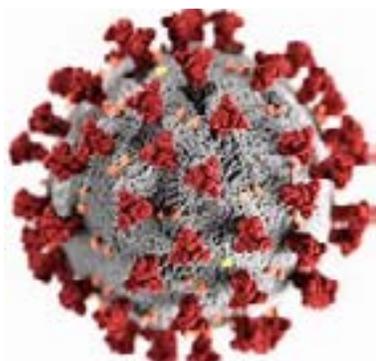
Using another metaphor of Wesley's concentric circles, we can claim that zeal for works of mercy is the first exterior circle which is followed by the two other circles of zeal for works of piety and of zeal for the Church. The center, which is the throne erected in the inmost soul, is love of God and man, and zeal for holy tempers is a circle near the center. Why does Wesley consider zeal for the works of mercy the first exterior circle, namely, the supreme emblem of social religion in healthy tension with the religion of heart which belongs to the interior or inward circle and the very center? This is indeed a crucial question we have to raise in the time like this.

Just remember that social religion consists of works of mercy, works of piety, and the Church universal and local. In other words, the top priority of being the Church in the world is our zeal for the works of mercy, not our zeal for the works of piety. Let me simply quote Wesley: **"Thus should he show his (i.e., every Christian's) zeal for works of piety; but much more for works of mercy; seeing 'God will have mercy not sacrifice' – that is, rather than sacrifice. Whenever, therefore, one interferes with the other, works of mercy are to be preferred. Even reading, hearing, prayer, are to be omitted, or to be postponed, 'at charity's almighty call' – when we are called to relieve the distress of our neighbor, whether in body or soul."** (Sermon 92, "On Zeal", II.9)

At charity's almighty call! We have to remind ourselves of why our Lord told us the parable of the good Samaritan who relieved the pain of a robbed Jew at charity's almighty call while a priest and a Levite passed him by for their works of piety. Indeed, the works of mercy are "those marks whereby the Shepherd of Israel will know his sheep at the last days" (Sermon 92, III.12): "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." (Matt 25:35-36)

By WMC President JC Park

Statement by the World Methodist Council – COVID-19



The World Methodist Council joins the world in prayer. It seeks ways to offer comfort to people who are dealing with the Coronavirus, which the World Health Organisation has declared a global pandemic.

“Our prayers are with the many people around the world who are affected directly or indirectly because of this pandemic,” said Council General Secretary Ivan Abrahams. He reminds us that in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, we are encouraged to build each other up. “We ask everyone in the Methodist and Wesleyan family to pray and to offer support in ways that fit the needs of their local area. Physical and mental health is affected as people are ill, isolated, and uncertain,” he said.

The Council is and will continue to make adjustments, cancel meetings, and reach out to others. The prestigious Annual Peace Award Ceremony planned for 27 March at Central Hall, London, UK, for the Rev. Dr. Inderjit Bhogal has been postponed. May we continue to pray for peace in the world and people’s lives at this time of uncertainty and insecurity.

Prayers from Ireland

Vice President Gillian Kingston shares that each connexional year, the Methodist Church in Ireland produces a prayer handbook, Prayer Focus, On Day 28, we pray for a local church in Ireland, for the church in Myanmar and for WMC. Here is an intro to and a prayer for WMC that appeared:

The WMC is a forum for some 80 Methodist, Wesleyan and related Uniting and United Churches, representing over 80.5 million people from 133 countries. It seeks to engage with, empower and serve the member churches by encouraging Methodist unity in witness, facilitating mission in the world and fostering ecumenical and interreligious activities.

God of all nations and all peoples, we praise and thank you for the vision and witness of the World Methodist Council as it seeks to provide a forum for ‘the people called Methodist’ around the world. We thank you for the comfort and solidarity it offers to small Methodist communities in difficult situations and labouring with few resources. Grant us the gift of unity in our rich diversity and the grace to love as we have been loved. May the light of that love shine in the darkness of poverty and injustice, enabling your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

As the Council receives communications and information regarding the COVID-19, we are aware of the significant challenges arising daily. The virus is spreading rapidly, and there are announcements of an increasing number of cases reported throughout the world.

Everyday life, including church services and meetings, have and will continue to be cancelled and rescheduled to slow down the rate of infection. While it is unfamiliar territory, health care professionals advise that these precautions are necessary.

The WMC General Secretary further encouraged member churches to seek creative ways of dealing with the pandemic, which presents new opportunities for service. He challenged us to spread the love of God through sharing resources during these trying times. He stated that the only way to overcome this pandemic is for all sectors of society (government, private, civil, religious) to work together.

With the awareness that so many are dependent on church ministries, the Council hopes you will continue to support these ministries and missions in new and unique ways.

It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. Deuteronomy 31: 8

A PRAYER JOURNAL FOR THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND



PRAYER FOCUS 2019/2020

The Love Feast

The United Methodist church has been debating online Communion for years. Many have said it shouldn't happen because the embodiment of the sacrament and physical presence of the community of faith are essential elements. Others disagree and want the sacrament to be as open and accessible as possible. Remembering that Wesley preached that Communion is a saving sacrament and not simply a sustaining one, they argue that it should be offered in as many places and forms as possible.

We can't presume to give an answer for all time. But it seems that right now, since the body is prevented from meeting together, we need some sort of resolution. We at Discipleship Ministries are suggesting that we begin with the Love Feast.

Opening Prayer taken from the Didache. (Found in *The Love Feast*, by Richard Stowe). This service is designed by Dr. Cynthia A. Wilson (2018). *Click on the link to read more: <https://www.umdiscipleship.org/articles/the-love-feast>*

An Ecumenical Easter Invitation to Christians

Three of the main ecumenical organizations in the United States of America have come together this Easter to promote a unified witness to our shared faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Bishop Teresa Jefferson Snorton is the President of Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) and the Ecumenical Officer of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. Rev. Carlos Malavé is the Executive Director of Christian Churches Together (CCT) and a pastor in the Presbyterian Church in the USA. And, Mr. Jim Winkler is the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) and a dedicated United Methodist lay person. These three leaders gathered via Zoom video conference two weeks ago to explore what a visible witness to unity might look like for Christians confined to their homes during Holy Week. What they came up with is a campaign that is being shared via social media across the country.

The invitation proclaims the promise from the Gospel of John (1:5) that the "light shines in the darkness, and the darkness [cannot] overcome it." It invites Christians across the country (both of the Western Easter tradition and the Orthodox Easter tradition) to consider sharing in one or more of several acts of visible witness, including:

- *sharing in a home foot washing on Holy Thursday,
- *sharing in prayers at home on Good Friday, that include extinguishing light.
- *hanging Christmas lights, or other lights, on Holy Saturday, then turning them on first thing Easter morning during what might have been the time for a Sunrise Service.
- *writing in chalk on the driveway or sidewalk the

words "Christ is Risen!"

*ringing the church bells at noon on Easter Day.

*standing outside for a few moments to pray outside on Easter Day.

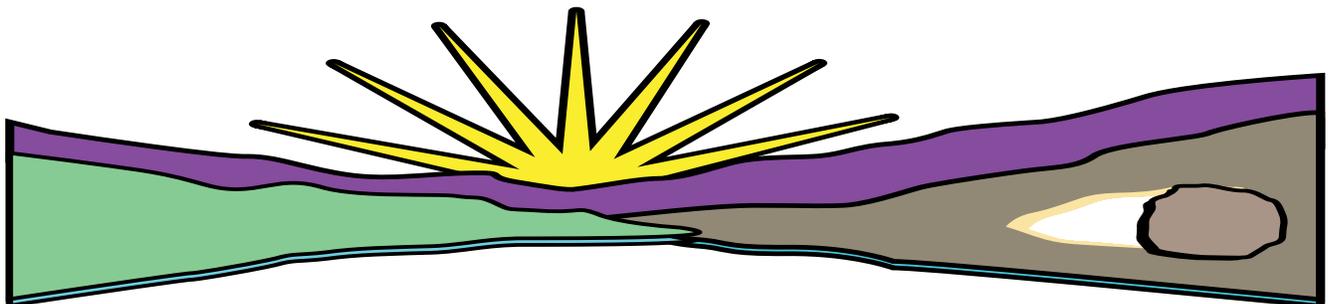
*or, viewing an additional online service of a church of another racial or ethnic background and offering prayers for that faith community.

The invitation includes a poster to be shared as widely as possible, and a coloring sheet that can be hung in the window or on the door. The organizers hope that this witness will spread across their particular country, and they hope that other Christians and ecumenical organizations will pick it up all over the world as well.

Light overcoming darkness is a life-giving message appropriate for all of us during these difficult days. It is the message of Easter, and despite any differences among Christians this year, it may be the perfect time for us to come together and make a powerful witness to Christ's resurrecting power.

Respectfully submitted by Rev. Dr. Jean Hawxhurst, Ecumenical Staff Officer for the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church

Follow the link to check out the coloring page, poster, or to read the invitation <http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/three-ecumenical-organizations-release-unprecedented-letter/>



CHRIST IS RISEN!

Be a sanctuary to yourself, modelling sanctuary for all

“And there were other boats” (Mark 4:36)

I am beginning to think we are all in our Noah's Ark in our own homes with our families (and pets if we have them), our sanctuaries.

Life away from others is a daily reality to people who have been housebound for years. Religious communities have developed spiritualities that have required the need to “come away” for a while. We are familiar with the value of “retreat”.

Every household, every individual, in their own “cocoon” is a new place for us all, and requires us to come to ourselves, and imagine a new world.

Noah and his wife Naamah were in the Ark, with their family, and the animals with them, when it rained for forty days and forty nights. They were in the stormy rain and turbulent waters of the flood which eventually did subside (Genesis 6:14-7:12). They did not have a garden they could take a walk in, or social media for entertainment and communication. The story gives us the beautiful image of the Dove with an Olive leaf in the beak as a sign of cessation of conflict (Genesis 7:11), and then the rainbow (Genesis 9:13), with a spectrum of colours in an arch, as a symbol of hope for all creation. I like the image of a rainbow, insisting that there are many colours, not just one. And it looks like a bigger roof providing a more inclusive shelter.

The next Ark we come across in the Bible is the Ark as a “sanctuary” for God (Exodus 25:8) to symbolise God dwelling in the midst of people. This is image we have to hold in our mind when we read the words of John 1:14 “and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”, a development of the words of Exodus 25:8.

The Ark represents a sanctuary for its inhabitants. Noah's Ark is a sanctuary for all those in a safe space with him.

This image grows into the Biblical vision that everyone will have their own Ark, a house in fact, with their own garden (see for example Isaiah 65:21), so that no one is without a roof over their head; and no one is afraid that their house will be destroyed or their livelihood plundered.

This ideal remains a dream that has not been achieved. History is littered with stories of exactly the opposite. Homes and gardens destroyed.

The shameful fact is that today there are 70 million refugees, a new all-time high, an unprecedented global situation. This includes 28 million people who are internally displaced, trapped in their own countries (of these 11 million are conflict related, and 17 million are disaster related. Disasters include storms, floods, landslides, droughts, wild fires and extreme temperatures). Their homes and gardens have been destroyed.

People who have lost their homes and the protection of their countries value sanctuary and safety expressed in welcome and hospitality and shelter. The global image that has been before us has been of refugees in boats in sea waters, and at border fences and walls, desperately seeking sanctuary. All people with names and families, and histories. There are heart breaking images of children whose lives are in danger, and many people in the water. A traumatic situation for anyone to be in.

In Mark 4:35-39 is recorded the story of Jesus in a small boat with his disciples. They are caught in a storm. In this storm we read that there were “other boats” with him. There was not just one boat as in the Noah story. They were not all in the same boat. There were other boats, carrying other people, all in the same storm. They all went through the fears expressed by Jesus' disciples.

Now, in the deep and choppy waters of the coronavirus, we are all seeking or taking sanctuary in homes and rooms and apartments. We all have fears and anxiety about the wellbeing and safety of ourselves, and our families. Others are going through a similar situation to us. No one is immune to the virus, from rulers to the ruled, rich and poor, women and men, whatever our nationality or ethnicity. Our equality in our humanity, and frailty, and desire to be safe is clear.

The reality of our world is that there are those who have “homes” and many who do not. There are those with lovely gardens, and those without gardens. There are those for whom being in a confined environment will be difficult, and for others this will hold dangers of intimidation and abuse from oppressive others.

The rain stopped in the Noah story. Coronavirus will pass. But as we take sanctuary ourselves, we will keep in our hearts and minds all those in their own other sanctuaries now, with all the surrounding concerns. And we will not forget those who are without homes, or away from homes, and refugees who continue to be “the least important” internationally, and uphold them in our work and prayers. The poorest communities will be the hardest hit by all the circumstances surrounding coronavirus. We will maintain our solidarity with those who feel most excluded and vulnerable. I hope we will not allow enforced social distancing to lead to social division.

Sanctuary in our homes is bringing us to ourselves. We have time to reflect on ourselves, and how we are with others, and to explore our spirituality. In what ways are we individually a home and a garden to ourselves? What are the points at which we are a stranger to ourselves? Where does our deepest nourishment lie? What wells do we drink from?

I love the very first line of Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali*. “Thou hast made me endless, such is thy great pleasure”.

Continued..

Be a sanctuary to yourself, modelling sanctuary for all continued

Each one of us is immense. We grow even more in our relationships with others.

Acknowledge the gift and treasure you are. We are to love ourselves, if we are to love our neighbour and the stranger as ourselves, and in so doing to discover what it is to truly love God. Look after yourself. Your wellbeing is a gift to yourself and to others. Care for your body for it is the Temple, the Sanctuary of God.

This is what it is to be a sanctuary to yourself. Model sanctuary in yourself. Be a wholesome, calm, healing and hospitable presence. So:

Allow yourself space to be. Allow others space to be.

Be compassionate towards yourself. Be compassionate towards others.

Be forgiving to yourself. Be forgiving to others.

Do not be afraid. Help others to not be afraid.

Be safe and non-violent in your words and ways. Support such non-violence in others.

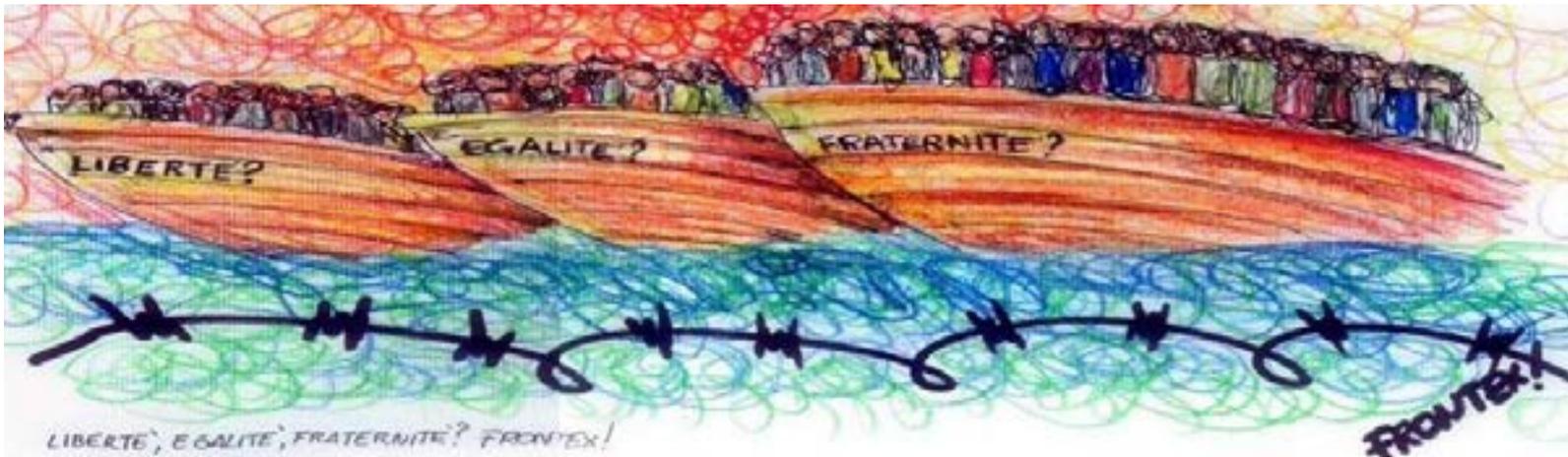
When you do this, you can better support others in being and building sanctuary.

Noah's time in the Ark with his family concludes with God's universal covenant embracing all people, plants, animals and the environment around him (Genesis 9:12).

The gift of coronavirus may be to call us back to the insight of this covenant and God's call to human beings again to commit ourselves to each other and all creation, to imagine and build a rainbow future with each other, as the "oikumene", the household of God, and not least in terms of an ecumenism embracing all faiths, economic equality, and ecological justice, modelling an over-arching sanctuary for all.

Inderjit Bhogal

Communion in times of Coronavirus. Click here to read more reflections www.inderjitbhogal.com



Bread provided for the most vulnerable

The Western Cape Methodist Church of Southern Africa management team and Mission Director are working at how to serve the most vulnerable.

Over the years, Tigerbrands has been the custodian of the poor and making many inroads of breaking the barrier and boundaries of poverty and uplifting the most vulnerable. In this time of COVID-19, all of our Schools and ECD's are closed and most institutions in shut-down mode since the President's appeal to the nation. This leaves many vulnerable children hungry, who have been fed at schools, through various programs.

The question that occurs, "how do we continue to be good cus-

todians of breaking the barrier of poverty and alleviate hunger in this time of need?"

A partnership with Tigerbrands will create a system to have bread available for children in this time, while the schools are closed. Where we can utilize our home systems for home-groups leaders to feed from their homes, in this process, we will work in smaller numbers with children in specific blocks / sectors of community and not large numbers at churches.

Respectfully submitted by Rev. Ralph Afghan, Management team member and Mission Director for the Western Cape Methodist Church

Sydney spreads a message of hope to a world in crisis

As the global community responds to the Coronavirus pandemic, Easter arrives at a time when hope is desperately needed. Wesley Mission in Sydney has been part of Australia's response in recent months to drought, fire, flood and now increasing measures to prevent the spread of virus and looming economic downturn. Providing essential community services to support vulnerable people in Jesus Christ's name, this uniquely shaped Word and deed ministry knows the transforming power of hope.

"Australians have suffered devastating summer bushfires that made headlines around the world. Many Americans rallied in support providing donations and specialist fire-fighting personnel, some who lost their lives in the significant effort," says British Methodist Minister, The Rev Keith Garner who is serving as Superintendent of Wesley Mission. "Our prayer is, amongst all of the challenges we continue to face, that 2020 may be the year that more people will be receptive to the message of hope we find in Easter."



Rev. Keith Garner, Superintendent of Wesley Mission in Sydney, Australia

"The location changes, but the message doesn't. We thank God that in a time where gatherings are not permitted this clear Christian message will reach people isolated in their homes through TV broadcast, simulcast on radio and streaming via our website and social media," says Keith Garner.

The Isolation of the Cross

Each day during Holy Week commencing on Palm Sunday, Keith Garner will invite you into his home via stream for a conversational style devotion entitled 'The Isolation of the Cross'. This candid series will explore the seven final words of Jesus spoken from the Cross. As we practice social distancing and experience isolation ourselves, the words of Christ speak powerfully into our present context.

Easter Sunrise Service

The dawn breaks and hope is alive as Australia welcomes Easter Day ahead of much of the world. Join the Sydney sunrise at global times listed below as Wesley Mission streams a special celebration with uplifting music from international YouTube sensation, Jayesslee and quiet devotional thoughts. Many people say that it doesn't feel like Easter Sunday until Keith Garner has greeted them with the acclamation, 'Christ is Risen!' to which there is an enthusiastic response, 'He is Risen Indeed!'

Keith Garner has been the Superintendent of Wesley Mission for fifteen years and is about to leave at the end of this year. He shares, "I have mixed feelings about this final Easter Sunrise Service. Part of me is disappointed because, although I will have gifted musicians and so many aspects that will make the service meaningful, I shall certainly miss being at the Sydney Opera House and the Wesley Theatre which are both closed because of the current crisis. However, we know from the massive range of services that we continue to provide with compassionate care for some of the most marginalised in Australia that our work is more needed than ever. With that in mind, we may have an even greater audience with whom we shall share the good news of Easter hope."

You can stream the devotional series and sunrise broadcast at wesleymission.org.au or watch and join in the conversation on Wesley Mission's YouTube channel and Facebook pages.

Some of the key broadcast times to watch the stream at wesleymission.org.au

Sydney, Australia	6am, Easter Sunday, 12 April
US East Coast	4pm, Saturday, 11 April
US West Coast	1pm, Saturday, 11 April
United Kingdom	9pm, Saturday, 11 April
Cape Town, SA	10pm, Saturday, 11 April
Apia, Samoa	9am, Easter Sunday, 12 April
New Zealand	8am, Easter Sunday, 12 April

Respectfully submitted by Amanda Bailey at <https://www.wesleymission.org.au/>

Bishop Onuoha to NCDC- Provide Testing Laboratory for COVID-19 in all States of the Federation



Following the failure of the Nigeria Center for Disease Control to provide testing Laboratories in the South-East, North-West, North-East for suspected cases of Coronavirus, the President Vision Africa International, Bishop Dr. Sunday Onuoha has called on the Center to get rid of all bureaucratic bottle necks and set up testing centers in all parts of the country.

necks should not pose challenge in setting up testing centers in all the states of the federation.

He noted that the government has every resource at its disposal to set up testing laboratory in all the zones, stressing that the testing centers should be in all states of the federation while each state should account for it.

Bishop Dr. Onuoha urged South-East states to form joint efforts in this trying moment especially in checking their borders against influx of people from other States, adding that there are no such clear boundaries in many parts and villages broken by two states.

The Global Peace Award Winner, 2013 in a statement released in Umuahia and issued to newsmen while reacting to the NCDC's release of Molecular Laboratory Network that has flooded the social media space, said Coronavirus pandemic concerns all, and wondered why NCDC would deprive the South-East of a testing Laboratory where suspected cases can be handled, describing it as unacceptable.

The Methodist Bishop who reminded the NCDC that all the zones are connected, also urged them to immediately set up Testing Laboratory in the South-East as people of the zone are crying and yearning for help, saying that bureaucratic bottle

He also used the medium to enjoin South-Easterners and indeed Nigerians, to take precautionary, safety measures as stipulated by the World Health Organization (WHO), which include: regular washing of hands, use of hand sanitizer's, social distancing, nose masks, disposable hand gloves among others, while also reminding Nigerians to pray fervently for God to heal the land by taking away the Coronavirus scourge ravaging the world.

Read more at <https://www.news Buka.com/bishop-onuoha-to-ncdc-provide-testing-laboratory-for-covid-19-in-all-states-of-the-federation/>

AME Church adapts to minister during the pandemic

Across the Connectional Church, individual congregations have thought of innovative ways to share their ministry virtually. Special worship resources have been created by the Christian Education Department and the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church Publishing House. The Bishops of the Church have started a Facebook page to share devotionals and in many Episcopal Districts, they are hosting prayer calls and hosting weekly worship services to maintain a sense of community beyond the local congregation as well as provide access for persons whose local churches may not have resources. Before being called to the ordained ministry, Bishop Vashti McKenzie, Presiding Prelate of the 10th Episcopal District (Texas), was a Gospel DJ at a radio station. She is sharing her talents virtually by hosting live praise parties with her daughter Rev. Vashti Jasmine Saint-Jean.

Many churches have engaged in special local ministries beyond their walls. For example, Payne Chapel AME Church in Birmingham, AL pastored by the Rev. L. Nicole Slater, has started a food delivery program for elderly members and persons in the community near the church who are at high risk for falling ill to the coronavirus. Matt Seawright, one of the church's ministerial staff stated, "We are an older congregation and we found that there are people in the Birmingham area that live alone or have in-home health care. One of caterers used by the church is out of work, so we connected them with wholesale food distributors who still have supplies but because there aren't events, they can't be sold." Distributors have also donated excess cleaning supplies and other goods. On average, 15 people are helped every two days and the program is expanding with additional churches and nonprofit agencies getting involved.



Wholesale foods are being distributed by AME to those in need.

Respectfully submitted by John Thomas III

Prayer from Rev. Mirella Manocchio, President of OPCEMI

God of grace,
we turn to you in prayer in this difficult time
in which the spread of a pandemic infection has forced our governments
restrictive measures that limit the normal course of life,
they block our sociality and risk making us shut up in our increasingly small sphere,
but they are necessary.

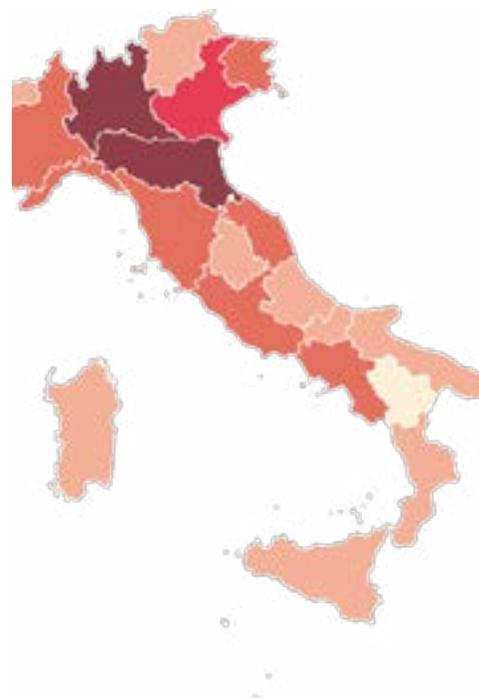
God of love,
help us to maintain community bonds and solidarity with our sisters and brothers,
especially with those who are in sickness and need,
and help us to be a family for those who are without a family.

God of healing,
we pray for those who have been infected and for their family members,
give them the courage to face this moment of illness;
we pray for all healthcare workers who are spending so much
to manage this epidemic competently and generously,
for scientists who are working hard on a cure in a short time;
give them all strength and vision to face and try to stop this epidemic.

God of mercy,
allow us to live this time as a profitable opportunity to reflect on our experience of faith
and on our being part of an easy society prey to fear and discouragement in the face of adversity;
help us, despite the difficulties of this situation, to keep us united and open to others,
help us not forget all the other great tragedies that undermine peace and disrupt the world.

God of salvation,
we pray you support us in fighting the chains of exploitation and injustice
and help us to maintain chains of solidarity throughout Europe;
please don't abandon us to the fear of contagion,
but even more to the contagion of fear
for Christ Jesus our brother and savior.

Amen



COVID-19 Outbreak Cases in Italy
(darker shades have more cases)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:COVID-19_Outbreak_Cases_in_Italy_\(Region-level_Density\).svg#filelinks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:COVID-19_Outbreak_Cases_in_Italy_(Region-level_Density).svg#filelinks)

Eight Million euros go to Coronavirus Emergency in Italy

The Methodist and Waldensian churches, (in collaboration with their social, educational and cultural organisations) declared their commitment and solidarity with those affected by the Coronavirus in Italy.

Given the extraordinary circumstances in which we find ourselves, the Tavola Valdes will give eight million euros from the fund of the "Otto per mille" allocated annually to the Methodist and Waldensian Churches. It will assist those affected by the COVID-19 and a special fund has also been created.

The Tavola Valdese will carefully evaluate both immediate and urgent as well as long term needs. Immediate and urgent

needs, especially in the health sector, on which many resources are generously made available by individuals, foundations and other charitable organizations and for which therefore, we must give special attention to the evolution of the situation (especially in those areas of the country that appear more fragile and less equipped to cope with the emergency). The second line concerns the long term needs which will last beyond the emergency. This element will consider the unforeseen aspects, including: exclusion and impoverishment in which those most exposed to the consequences of the prolonged blockade of productive activities and social support networks will plummet and the choices of redistribution of human and financial resources imposed in recent months by the measures taken to stop the contagion.

World Federation women encourage one another in prayer

Just as Europe was identified as the new epicentre of the COVID-19 outbreak, an email was sent out by the Europe: Continental Area Vice-President, Lilla Lakatos, from Hungary. It was directed to 34 women leaders of the Units in that Area, a letter of encouragement in a time of crisis.

Lilla gave us news of two Federation sisters known to us all and invited us to share specific requests ‘so it will help us to think and pray for each other, and express that we care.’

‘Don’t forget,’ she urged us, ‘that God is in control, as He is the mighty God, God of the universe. I believe God has a future for us, a plan that is full of hope. Don’t forget that you are all part of the Federation, and as courageous Federation women you can lift up each other in prayer, and God is with us.’

As responses came back from women across Europe (from Portugal, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Latvia, Sweden, Italy and the UK among them) I felt moved by the unity in prayer we were sharing in the midst of our concern for one another.

Lilla continued to encourage us:

‘I wanted to encourage all of you once again, that we are allowed to express our fears and say what we feel. It is normal, it is OK. Jesus is the Son of God, and even He had fear in His soul before dying on the cross. This is the greatest encouragement for me that a prayer can be formulated with a weary or anxious heart. You might think we, as Christians, have to show that we do not fear. I think as the disciples we also start to be anxious as we lose control. That is fully normal. Let’s connect to our feelings and in the same time connect to Jesus and tell him we are in trouble and surely He will say: “it’s okay, I know what you mean, and I have everything in my hands, I know how many hairs you have on your head, so do not worry!” Do whatever you can, even if it is a small thing, do it, if it helps you to overcome fears! (For me the medicine for my soul during these days is: humor, worship and prayer.)’

She shared with us a prayer from the Methodist Church in Britain guidance and resources on COVID-19

God of all hope we call on you today.
We pray for those who are living in fear:
Fear of illness, fear for loved ones, fear of other’s reactions to them.
May your Spirit give us a sense of calmness and peace.

We pray for your church in this time of uncertainty.
For those people who are worried about attending worship,
For those needing to make decisions in order to care for others,
For those who will feel more isolated by not being able to attend,
Grant us your wisdom.

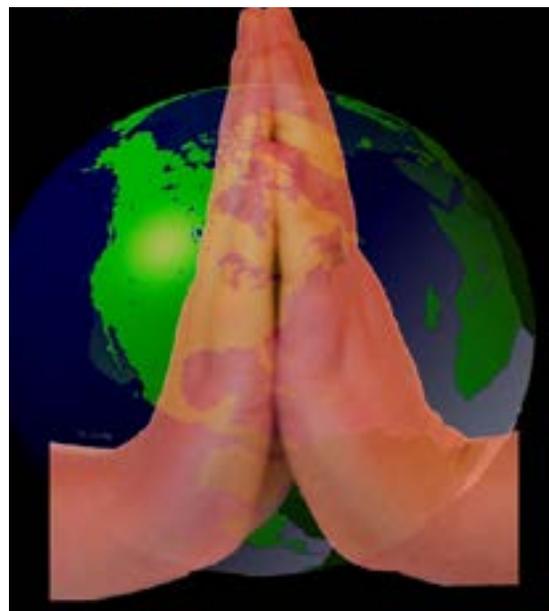
Holy God, we remember that you have promised that
Nothing will separate us from your love – demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ.
Help us turn our eyes, hearts and minds to you.

Amen

Meanwhile, the women of Zimbabwe encouraged us to join with them 9am – 2pm on 26th March when they had hoped to gather in their thousands in the City Sports Centre to celebrate the World Day of Prayer service 2020 written by them and used globally earlier that month. Unfortunately, their national gathering had to be cancelled, but still women of the World Federation ‘joined them’ in spirit on that day to focus on ‘Love, Peace and Reconciliation’.

Submitted by Rev. Alison Judd, World President, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women

Read more at <http://wfmucw.org/>



How the COVID-19 affects Church of South India

The rapid spread of the novel corona virus globally has sparked a wave of tension worldwide. As the outbreak continues, Church of South India (CSI) is concerned about its impact on the most vulnerable communities of India.

Challenges that we are facing:

The Challenge of coming together as a faith community is very evident due to corona virus pandemic. As the church worldwide is observing the season of lent and the faithful preparing themselves to celebrate Easter, the worship services are called off in keeping the safety of the community at large and also in abiding to the call given by the government. Church worship services are streamed online through the use of social media, however for many who live in rural India an exposure to use social media in itself is a challenge.

In this lock down of 21 days for now, social distancing has become the rule. Gatherings and public spaces are curbed and people are instructed to stay indoors without much contact with anybody due to the spread of COVID 19 infection. However for many in India Social distancing is not an option at all. Most of the urban poor reside in close contact with their neighbours and in knitted communities called slums. People living in such cramped living spaces are more prone and are at greater risk of transmitting infections to others.

To combat COVID 19 the entire nation has come to a halt, all sectors of work have called off their work routines except for the essential government services. This has impacted the lives of thousands who are a part of the unorganized work sectors in India. Most of them do not have jobs and were daily wage earners, the construction labourers, farmers, and so on... this will push them to more poverty stricken situation and malnutrition and low immunity can make them prone to ill health and sickness.

Another challenge is the plight of migrants who are unable to travel back to their own home towns and villages at the wake of this lock down. Not enough travel facilities at this time has caused more plight on them as they have to commute on foot for hundreds of kilometers to reach their own home towns in search of safe spaces. Many are still stranded on streets with elders and children and are waiting for help and support at this time.

The worst hit due to this pandemic are the disabled, the aged, women and children who are economically poor without enough necessary resources to survive.

There is a huge lack of awareness of the pandemic among people from marginalized communities. Maintaining hygiene and sanitation is way out of reach as there is a sudden price hike in hand sanitizers and other essential commodities like groceries. These communities are already vulnerable as they don't have adequate income or sufficient resources. They are on the brink of starvation and many of them have exhausted their monthly ration supplies and do not have access to avail rations due to lack of awareness.

Most of the students who study at government run schools rely on midday meals which have also stopped since many schools have shut down. The street vendors struggle to sell what they have. Women employed in household activities are instructed not to come. While the government has been making efforts to provide ration and food supplies to the marginalized communities, India's current economic situation, population, poor health care system and distribution of resources make it a struggle.

Response of the CSI in terms of immediate relief:

Most Rev. Dharmaraj Rasalam, the Moderator of the Church of South India (CSI) sent out a communique of assurance and prayers against the backdrop of COVID 19 Global Pandemic. Representing the leadership of the CSI Synod, the Moderator exhorted the clergy and the believers of the Church to be responsible citizens at this crucial time. The main point in the communique is the concern for the poor and the marginalized people who will be seriously affected by the added financial crisis this pandemic will create.

Many Dioceses all over CSI are coming up with meaningful initiatives; here we just give a glimpse of how CSI is serving people amidst this pandemic:

* CSI schools as space of living and shelter for Homeless people

* Hospitals run by CSI sets apart isolation ward for those who are under surveillance for the prevention of the spread of Coronavirus. A dedicated team of Doctors, nurses and health care workers are working in association with the respective district government authorities in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

* Community kitchens and Distributing food packets and essentials to the Daily wage workers and the needy across CSI. (as shown below)



* CSI Youth actively engaged in preparing hand sanitizers and masks, distributing them and spreading awareness among public on safety and sanitization. They are helping the respective district authorities as volunteers.

Respectfully submitted by the Church of South India, read more at <http://www.csisynod.com/>

Bayanihan

Over two months has passed since the first reported case of COVID-19 in the Philippines. The global pandemic has already claimed too many lives in this span of time. And with the country's dense population, insufficient facilities and equipment, and evident lack of preparedness, it is feared and projected for the death count to only increase in the coming weeks. The people are in state of panic, as in many other countries. Nevertheless, this ongoing tragedy has awakened the *bayanihan* spirit in a lot of Filipinos. Many see the lack of urgency and creativity and the misplaced priorities in the national response to the current situation, urging them to take action in their own ways.



“People are voicing out the needs and concerns of the poor who are the most vulnerable”

Social media is primarily utilized since almost everyone is locked at home. Aside from personal updates and entries for entertainment, citizens share situations in their localities during the strict implementation of the enhanced community quarantine or lockdowns in different parts of the country. There are people practicing their democratic rights to express observations, to tell stories, and to offer suggestions for action, which have been proven to be useful in pushing some important changes in the national decisions. There are also many who circulate helpful information about the virus and about the national situation, while being vigilant in the spread of fake information. Some people are voicing out the needs and concerns of the poor who are the most vulnerable to the infection, to hunger, and to safety. They watch closely how the persons of authority implement the plans and how they treat the common people.

The dire need of personal protective equipment, especially for those in the frontlines, has driven many groups to organize cash and in-kind donation drives to provide for such need. Some of them are the Small Hands Philippines, a number of young people from the United Methodist Church, and other unnamed groups and individuals. There are also several ways to send donations to different social welfare organizations and

health institutions. And due to the limitations in mobility, money transfers are being done by some. Such is the case for the National Council of Churches in the Philippines while planning and preparing for relief operations.

Many church organizations and members take part in the said initiatives and more. Prayers, health tips, words of encouragement, messages of solidarity or sympathy, and social updates are vastly visible across social media platforms. Family altars are encouraged and helpful materials are being made available online. Worship service is also done online: some preach, some sing songs of praise, and some do semi-full liturgy. Households in some of the poor communities receive relief goods from the church. Church workers are also cared for by ensuring that they receive honoraria or love gifts despite the absence of weekly gatherings. As for the Iglesia Evangelica Metodista En Las Islas Filipinas (IEMELIF), they make these initiatives happen by making good use of their connectional relationship by coordinating with the national leadership, the district superintendents, and some lay leaders of the Church. They do so by communicating online and by meeting constantly via teleconferencing. Some local church members voluntarily have cooked food or food supplies sent to the homes of pastors and deaconesses.

Indeed this is a trying time for everyone. Along with the medical problems are other concerns: limited food, at-risk livelihood, domestic safety, and threatened rights and security. This is when the Filipino people can really count on the true essence of *bayanihan*, that which is deeper than, and is beyond merely fulfilling obligations or following rules. This is the time for solidarity among all.

Respectfully submitted by Lissa Ramos Brown, Youth and Young Adults Committee Chair

May 15th deadline for Peace Award

Nominate someone who exemplifies Courage, Creativity, and Consistency for the World Methodist Peace Award.

Applications submitted by **May 15** will be considered for this year.

The nominee should show courage in regard to physical danger or putting personal interest at risk. Creativity should include opening new initiatives and attracting others in working for the cause of peace. Consistency is judged by effort over a period of time and intensity, despite setbacks. Here is the link to read the full criteria:

<https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/world-methodist-peace-award/>

Please send all nomination forms to Bishop Ivan Abrahams at info@worldmethodistcouncil.org.

Report on the work of the Geneva Secretary

Greetings and blessings to all of you, wherever you are – some busy, although not doing business as usual, some forced to slow down and isolate themselves. Today I would like to share some information and reflections with all of you:

And what about my work on your behalf?

March 26-28 I was supposed to take part in the WMC officers meeting in London. March 27 we would have celebrated the life and ministry of Rev. Dr. Boghal, the WMC Peace Prize recipient for 2018. But I am in South West Germany, grateful for a comfortable home in a well-developed country and mindful of billions of people who are facing the current challenges caused by the Corona virus under much more difficult circumstances. How do we as World Methodist Council respond? Is there anything we can do besides sharing stories of best practices from our more than 80 member churches?

Here are three suggestions:

1) **Praying, thinking and acting in the Wesleyan spirit**

Almost anywhere in the world people cannot meet for worship and Holy Communion. Churches and congregations develop means to connect and to gather virtually, by phone or by praying in different places at the same time and often with the same liturgies. Online worship enables us to connect with sisters and brothers in Christ who live on another continent and in other time zones. Via social media the worldwide Methodist family can become visible, although not touchable. As we practice the means of grace let us keep in mind what Terry Wall from the Methodist Church New Zealand said: “There is wholeness to Wesleyan spirituality... Heart and soul and mind are held together... Each is caught up in the dynamic of the spirit’s action. Inner devotion stimulates moral action.” (<http://www.methodist.org.nz/files/docs/faith%20and%20order/wesleyan%20spirituality.pdf>)

The Corona crisis will cause historic changes. We are called to engage spiritually, morally, intellectually and by our actions so that by God’s grace things will change for good and not for bad. Wesleyan and Methodist practitioners and scholars are needed to offer pastoral care and to theologially engage in discourses how to understand the current realities in the light of the Gospel and how to envision a future with hope for all God’s children and for planet earth.

2) **Strengthening the global connections to combat poverty**

The radius where to go and with whom to interact directly is limited for most of us in the moment. In Europe f.e. local congregations are not allowed to continue their food banks or programs for children in need. This causes pain and danger for many people. In the public news we rarely hear anything else than the impact of the Corona crisis. But wars in Syria or Yemen did not stop, people in Venezuela are still starving, refugees are on their way or in huge camps all over the globe. And agencies of our churches together with NGO’s take efforts and huge risks to reach out to the most vulnerable. I belong to the privileged people who receive their salaries as if there was no crisis. I do not spend as much money as normal

because I am forced to stay at home. I commit myself to give an extra portion for programs engaging in ministries with the poor.

3) **Joining hands with Ecumenical and Interfaith partners**

Methodists and Wesleyans often praise themselves for their Ecumenical spirit. I encourage us to intentionally cooperate with our Ecumenical partners in these days. We can engage in prayer initiatives initiated by Pope Francis, the World Evangelical Alliance and many others. For practical support the World Council of Churches has put a team in place named “faces of help”. Amongst them is Joy Eva Bohol, a United Methodist from the Philippines and program executive for youth engagement at the World Council of Churches. She can advise on accompaniment of young people in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, on self-care and mental health in dealing with isolation, especially for young people living alone, and facilitate safe space conversations among young people to address issues of isolation, anxiety for the future, or being away from family.

Other “faces of help” are Rev. Dr. Nyambura J. Njoroge, Dr. Manoj Kurian and Dr. Mwai Makoka, all three offer expertise in health care, especially keeping in mind the faith component; Rev Nicole Ashwood serves as counsel as far as sexual and gender based violence is concerned; Rev. Benjamin Simon works on “Churches and COVID 19” and pastoral care; Dr. Mikie Roberts connects people in ecumenical prayer and spirituality and Frederique Seidel offers advice on challenges faced by children, youth, educators and teachers. Most of these people work in close contact with the United Nations. More information and contact details can be found on: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/faces-of-help-wcc-offers-resource-people-to-accompany-during-covid-19-pandemic>

I continue to connect with people working for the WCC and other partners via Internet and email and I will keep you informed on possibilities to pray and work together. Please let me know if you have questions and suggestions what to do.

Finally I would like to greet you with the Moravian Daily Texts for today, Sunday March 29: When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way. Psalm 142:3 (NIV)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

May God grant you hope, strength and peace.

Grace and peace,



Becoming a Virtual Evangelist

How timely is our quadrennial theme, “Getting Back to Basics as We Envision Our Way Forward Taking Care of God’s Business?” During this season of Lent the World has found itself in a Crisis, but we must remember Christ-is.

The title, Virtual Evangelist, may be different and the methods may be a little unorthodox or uncomfortable, but the message is still the same. Some will hear you and some won’t. But, what an auspicious opportunity to pray and share the Gospel of Jesus the Christ!

So, let us consider a few ways you may become a Virtual Evangelist.

*Text family and friends, inviting them to join you in a Creative worship experience.

*Send a link to YouTube, Twitter and/or Zoom, asking others to join in a service or just to connect.

*Invite someone to join the CME teleconference Sunday School, worship service or Bible Study.

*Invite others to join the CME Prayer Ministry each morning at 6:30 AM in their time zone.

*Invite others to join you in a call to pray The Lord’s Prayer on a designated day and time.

*Lead a video worship experience with coworkers who may be home.

*Invite others to join your church in Worship.

*Search your contact lists and reconnect with someone you haven’t spoken with in a while.

*Connect on a two- or three-way call to check with family and friends.



Rev. Leon C. Moore, Jr., General Secretary of Evangelism and Missions, Pleasant Hill CME Church, Pastor-Conyers, GA

*Develop a group from your contacts and send daily scriptures or prayers.

*Face Time family and friends to pray with them, especially the sick and shut-in.

*Develop a children’s led Prayer Call via-teleconference.

*Develop a thought-provoking question about Faith and send to grandchildren.

*Offer your assistance to help a child with schoolwork by phone.

*Lead an open and honest discussion about current events through Free Conference Call.

These are just a few ways you can become a Virtual Evangelist. Keep an open mind and “Just do it!” May the Lord be with you!

For additional information, visit Virtual Ministries Resources page: <https://thecmechurch.org/2020/03/online-technology-ministry-resources/>

Nomination Forms available for committee chairs and officers

The World Methodist Council is open for 2021-2026 delegates to be nominated as Committee chairpersons or Officers. You must be a delegate in order to be nominated to be on a committee or elected as an officer.

Click on the following link to access these forms:

<https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WMC-Chairperson-Nomination-Form-2021-2026.pdf>

<https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WMC-Officer-Nomination-Form-2021-2026.pdf>

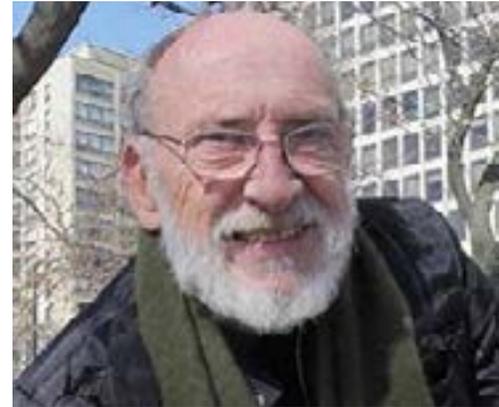
In Memoriam

The Rev. Dr. Theodore “Ted” Jennings

WMC President the Rev. Dr. J.C. Park said he cherishes the memory of Ted Jennings. “Ted has lived his solidarity with theologians from the global South and East. I have owed him so much whenever I needed moral support from members of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies. I would like to express my heartfelt condolences for his beloved wife and his faithful friends in many parts of the world.”

Jennings was born on October 24, 1942. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Duke University in 1964 and his Bachelor of Divinity and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Emory University in 1967 and 1971 respectively. He taught for three years at *Seminario Metodista* (Methodist Seminary) in Mexico City and is an ordained Methodist minister. His scholarly work and publications have focused on a broad array of topics, such as Methodism, ritual studies, biblical hermeneutics, liberation theology, LGBT rights and queer theology, the politics of Pauline Messianism, and the work of Jacques Derrida.

Following a serious stroke on March 5th, 2020, at his second home near Acapulco, Mexico, Jennings was transported by ambulance to Hospital Angeles Roma in Mexico City where he passed away almost three weeks later on March 25, 2020.



Rev. Dr. Theodore Wesley Jennings Jr.

The Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright

Dr. Wainwright, 80, who was a current resident of Chapel Hill, is mourned by his many friends and colleagues of the World Methodist Council. Well loved for his leadership and work in many areas, Wainwright served as chair of the Council’s Ecumenical Relationships Committee.

The Council joins many around the world in mourning the death and celebrating the incredible life and witness. A significant contributor to theology and ecumenism, he taught at Duke Divinity School, contributed greatly to the drafting of the “Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry” (BEM) convergence text as he served as a member of the World Council of Churches Faith & Order Commission, and co-chaired the International Commission between the World Methodist Conference and the Roman Catholic Church. A preeminent scholar, he authored and edited multiple volumes, including *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life*.

Dr. Wainwright died on March 17, 2020 and his arrangements: Cremation Society of the Carolinas of Raleigh.

Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family and friends.

The Lord is near to those who mourn; he lifts up those whose spirit is crushed. Ps 34:18

Click on the link to read more:

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/newsobserver/obituary.aspx?pid=195758063>



Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright



Please send press releases, articles and resources! Submissions should be a page or less, edited and ready to publish. Contact us by **the last Monday of the month** at communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org if you would like your story to be included in the next edition of the First Friday Letter. Please note that articles should be received by April 27 for the May edition.

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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