



# FIRST FRIDAY LETTER

The World Methodist Council May 2020

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## Greetings from the General Secretary

The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic is as unprecedented as the lockdown forced on many countries to counter the spread of the virus. Just a few months ago, many of us could not have imagined the changes and disruptions to the regular routines that we now collectively face. COVID-19 has forcefully reminded us that we are one world, one humanity, and more interdependent than we imagined.

I have been awestruck by the selfless acts of service of the Methodist Family (see articles in this edition of the First Friday Letter). We owe a particular debt of gratitude for those on the frontlines for their service to humanity – health care workers, store clerks, long haul truckers, farmers, and so many more who assist us in holding life and limb together.

It is my prayer that when we emerge from the mandatory lockdown in many countries around the world, we will be more aware of our shared humanity, the gaps in social security and, deficiencies in economic policies. COVID-19 offers us an opportunity to stand together and push the reset button. My heartfelt condolences go to those who have lost loved ones and my prayers continue for the many affected economically.

It is heartwarming to see many leaders rising to the challenge of rejuvenating co-operation, co-ordination, and information sharing to mitigate the spread of the virus. We need to do everything possible to work towards a world that is more like God's plan for it.

Thank you for the ways you support each other, including the stranger in your midst. As this crisis continues to unfold and we together navigate uncharted waters, we must remember, we are all in this together, whoever we are and wherever we are. Let us not forget the three simple rules that the founder of the Wesleyan movement, John Wesley, lived by, “doing no harm, doing good, and staying in love with God.”

During this period that demands social distancing and other austerity measures, you might feel powerless, frustrated, and anxious regarding the future, but I encourage you; Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9)

Grace and Peace,

Ivan



## Postponement of The World Methodist Council and Conference

After a series of meetings with the Conference Host and Program Committees to evaluate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on General Conference schedules of member churches, the Steering Committee decided to postpone the Gothenburg 2021 Conference to **August 10-14, 2022**.

The Council, since its inception in 1881, has learned that we always need to be prepared for the unexpected. Whether it is the forces of nature, changes in the global economy, pandemics or other factors, we know that we will get through these challenges as we have before.

We are living through an unprecedented time in history. It is not the first time that a World Methodist Conference has been postponed. During World War II, the 1941 Conference was shifted to 1947.

We want you to know that the WMC values you. The coronavirus may not have infected you and your loved ones, but no matter where in the world we find ourselves, we are all affected. Our most important task is to work together to overcome the pandemic. The best way, according to the authorities, is to stay at home.

We continue to pray for your health and well-being, may God bless and keep you safe.

Yours in Christian love and service,



Ivan M Abrahams, General Secretary



JC Park, President



Gothenburg, Sweden

### Nominate Speakers for Conference, note June deadline

Your help is needed! The Planning Team seeks to identify speakers and workshop leaders for the 2022 'On the Move' Conference, particularly in relation to the three main themes: 'Migration,' 'Pilgrimage,' and 'Illumination – lights that guide our way.'

Workshop Leaders and speakers should bring challenging and inspiring input to the Conference. Please share the names of people who can do this with us! The Conference should reflect and celebrate the World Methodist Council's commitment to racial, age, gender, geographic and denominational diversity.

**The deadline for potential speakers and leaders is 30 June 2020.**

Please send any names to Dr. Martyn Atkins at the following email address: [belvoirlodge1955@gmail.com](mailto:belvoirlodge1955@gmail.com)

## New Director Announced for MEOR

The Rev. Matthew Laferty will begin as Director of the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome (MEOR) on September 1. Laferty says he is excited for this new opportunity.

“I have a keen interest in Christian unity and have made ministry with Christians of different denominations and theological understandings a central feature of my ministry. My new role in Rome will allow me to engage more deeply in ecumenical relations and assist our global Methodist family to live Christ’s command for Christians to be one so the world may believe,” he explained.

He goes on to say he is sad to leave his United Methodist post in Vienna, Austria where the people have been faithful in the shared ministry, adding he has been deeply touched by the friendships there over the past five years.

The mission of the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome is to foster relations between the global Methodist family and the Roman Catholic Church, seek new ecumenical relationships on behalf of the World Methodist Council, provide opportunities for formation and education, and offer hospitality to Methodists visiting Rome. Laferty will direct and oversee the work of the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome, a shared ministry of the World Methodist Council, The United Methodist Church, the Methodist Church in Britain, the European Methodist Council, and the Methodist Church in Italy

and represents 80 million Methodists around the world.

Laferty is an ordained pastor and commissioned missionary of The United Methodist Church. Prior to his appointment in Vienna, he served as the pastor of the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy—an international, interdenominational church in Moscow, Russia—from 2011-2015.



*The Rev. Matthew A. Laferty*

He concurrently served as executive director of MPC Social Services, directing an immigrant outreach center working in areas of hunger, medical assistance, integration, anti-racism, and counter-human trafficking. Laferty has also pastored in Connecticut.

From Crestline, Ohio, Laferty holds a Master of Divinity degree from Yale University and a BA from Ohio Wesleyan University, where he graduated cum laude. He was awarded the Downes Prize for worship leadership by Yale University in 2011.

## Conference and Meeting Postponements



Many member churches of the WMC are rescheduling conferences. The ones listed below are links to notifications we have received. If you do not see your churches’ update you may want to check your churches’ website.

Postponements:

- African Methodist Episcopal Conference Delay: <https://www.ame-church.com/news/cancelled-annual-conferences-and-meetings/>
- Christian Methodist Episcopal - CYYAC20: <https://thecmechurch.org/cyyac20/>
- UMC General Conference Delay: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/tentative-general-conference-dates-publicized>
- Wesleyan General Conference Delay: <https://www.wesleyan.org/gc20-and-church-assessment-announcement>

## Council celebrates International Workers' Day

International Workers' Day celebrated its 134th anniversary. In the May 2016 edition of the FFL, General Secretary Bishop Ivan Abrahams applauded the fact that 66 countries acknowledged the struggle of workers to celebrate their hard won rights to dignity and, the right to withhold their labour in the event of employer-employee disputes. The General Secretary expressed surprise that in the USA, where thousands of workers led a "workers' revolution" at Haymarket in Chicago, the May 1 strike celebrating International Workers' Day global recognition, is not commemorated.

Why should the Church worry about the world of work and the worker? Jesus brought into sharp relief a refusal to separate the material realm from the spiritual when he proclaimed, "I have come in order that you may have life – life in all its fullness" (John10:10, TEV). Work is related to acquiring food, clothes, shelter and – above all – finding meaning in relation to one's own and others' in the world. Jesus tells a story of God's judgment and justice which reminds us that, when we provide food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, welcoming care to the stranger, we do so to God.

Economic globalization is built on the market ideology of neo-liberalism, where the laws of market become the moral yardstick, reducing moral value of humanity, the nation-state, community and individuals to the beck and call of market morality. Labour, too, has been reduced to the exploits of "rampant, unbridled, footloose capital," a term coined by the late Margaret Legum, a well-respected South African economist. Legum lamented the failure of the democratically elected government to implement Nelson Mandela's *Reconstruction and Development Plan* in the 'late '90's. Such failure led to an inability to recognise the power that organised labour could contribute toward eradicating poverty, building a more equal nation and creating sustainable livelihoods.

Social, political and economic context played important roles in the search for understanding Wesley's ethics on "getting and spending." In 18th century England, EJ Hobsbawm paints a devastating portrait of life in Britain when he writes: ***"In all these industrialised areas life was, for the working class, miserable, poor, nasty, brutish, short and, above all insecure, and the religions they chose for themselves mirrored their situation."***

The working classes and poor of Britain are believed to have taken to the Wesley's formation of "chapels" as opposed to the staid worship and prayers of the Anglican Church. The collection of "a ticky" (two and a half cents) a week in these chapel meetings led to the development and building of Methodist churches which were not to be ostentatious. Gatherings in these "chapels" were the formative factors of Britain's labour organisations, leading to the use of the collective noun "chapel" for a group of trade unions. Aligned to this, we may understand Wesley's ethic on the use of money – "gain all you

can; save all you can; give all you can" as more than an ethic for "personal salvation" and less the advance of capitalist wealth. Wesley portrays a link between "personal salvation" and the call to social, political and economic transformation of life, especially that of the marginalised, working poor. Hugh McCleod, however, notes that within the milieu of religious and working classes in 19th century Britain, the Methodist position was complex. He contends that Wesley insisted on the ***"mutuality in society between classes of brotherhood and the need to work for the rights of all with an equal opportunity for all irrespective of temptation or need ... It may be said that poverty...heightened the conflict between Christian morality and political economy in which the concern for social justice came to prevail against the discourse for personal salvation."***

The most significant Methodist exponent of faith and the labour movement in the 19th century was perhaps the Methodist "street preacher, flamboyant platform speaker, a prolific writer of books, an indefatigable organizer, beloved professor and social theorist" – Harry Ward. Ward, born in Britain, immigrated to America in 1891, was a Methodist local preacher. A worker in his father's butcher shop, he became immersed in workers' struggles and developed an aversion to capitalism. Ward's high regard for organised labour appears in his statement that ***"... the labour movement (as) the most advanced point at which the divine energy was operating in the highest evolution of man."*** He would produce the *magna carta* of Methodist Church-Labour relations, a Social Creed for the Methodist Church's Federation of Social Services. His sentiments on preaching were simple: ***"one gospel to both the social and the individual ... making the fruits of repentance ... manifest in appropriate social action, in educating the community in fundamental principles of social justice, in proclaiming God as the God of the poor, and in the removal of inequality in society."***

I put the question to Bishop Abrahams: why should Methodists celebrate International Workers' Day? His reply was straightforward: ***"Where wealth and power are uncritically celebrated as God's gifts, the presence of poverty, suffering and powerlessness are too often seen as God's punishment. But when such belief is turned around, as in Matthew 25:40, the way is open for seeing the presence of God in the poor, marginalised and suffering."*** Wesley's sentiments on slavery reminds us that Friday's have, for Methodists, a powerful resurrection and liberation meaning. Wesley records in his Journal: ***"We set Friday apart as a day of fasting and prayer that God would remember the poor, outcast men (and women) considering the wealth and power of their oppressors make a way for them to escape and break their chains asunder."*** WMC celebrates May Day / International Workers Day, praying that the chains of the 21st century slavery of poverty amidst abundance, inequality of resource sharing, indebtedness by poor nations to a globalised economy may be shattered.

*Excerpts of Interview by Keith Vermeulen*

## Nazarene couple in Mexico make masks for local healthcare workers

Jesús Alberto López Chevez and Brenda Ovando Torres, a couple from First Church of the Nazarene in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Mexico, are using their skills to create protective masks for medical personnel, free of charge.

The couple was inspired by the parable of the talents in Mark 25 to serve others through their profession. Jesús is a mechanical engineer and Brenda is an industrial engineer. “They are very compassionate young people, and it has always been clear to them that their vocation is a godsend,” said Edi Montejo of Mexico Nazarene Compassionate Ministries.

After seeing stories on social media and the news that there was a shortage of basic protective equipment in the hospitals, they knew they could help ensure that medical personnel received urgently requested facemasks. Each 3D-printed facemask has a production time of 1.4 hours. The materials required are an elastic band, an acetate sheet, and PLA filament (biodegradable plastic material).

A few days ago, Silvia Santiago, Southern Mexico District NCM coordinator, put the couple in contact with the Ministry of Health for the municipality of Independencia, Chiapas. Silvia, with the help of other women in the church, obtained the material for the assembly of 15

protective facemasks, which are already in the hands of health professionals.

“Without a doubt, in these moments of health crises, it will always be a pleasure to hear testimonies from young people who help society and share the love of Jesus Christ through his vocation, that is, to live compassion as a way of life,” Montejo said.



“Let us continue to pray for this situation that is affecting many nations; let us pray for health professionals and their families. In the midst of this pandemic, our good God is in control; let’s make the hope of Jesus Christ contagious, not fear.”

*Read more stories at <https://nazarene.org/>*

## Asian church generously responds to needs during pandemic

Do you remember what you were doing January 17, just three months ago? Were you planning for what would happen if a global pandemic swept across the world, infecting millions and impacting the livelihood of billions? It is amazing how much life has changed in such a short period of time. The countries of Asia-Pacific Area — with a combined population of over 4 billion people — are no exception. Millions of people’s lives have been changed by COVID-19.

On April 1, a group of national leaders of The Wesleyan Church in Asia met on Zoom to discuss COVID-19. Leaders on the call from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and others reported the devastating coronavirus impact. Many of the church family in these areas are day laborers who work hard, but they do not have the consistent employment to which many people are accustomed. They cannot work remotely from home, and they do not have savings accounts.

As the leaders shared, the pattern became clear: countries were implementing strict but necessary lockdowns to stop the spread, and as a result, many church members were left without any money. Their families could not get food. Starvation was becoming a real threat. And churches could not take care of their pastors, as members’ income was drastically affected.

Our Asian leaders expressed a desire not only to care for their church families, but also to meet the needs of their communities. What better opportunity to be the hands and feet of Jesus? But if only they had the resources.

One of the people on the call was from a creative-access country. (This is a country where the individual cannot be open about their faith in Jesus.) It was her first time being part of an area meeting. She didn’t say much throughout the call. But after the call ended, she went back to her network of house churches and shared about the need. They decided they wanted to help their Christian brothers and sisters in other countries, and they officially began collecting funds for this purpose on April 6. You can imagine the surprise, when, one week later, word was received that members of this house church network had given more than \$42,000 (in U.S. dollars) to support those in need in the surrounding Asian countries!

They had given as the Macedonian Church gave nearly 2,000 years ago in response to a critical food need of their Judean sisters and brothers. Paul describes their gift in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

*Written by Rev. Ben Ward, Asia-Pacific Area director and director of Development and Communication for Global Partners.*

## Two churches in same district destroyed by tornadoes

Following a string of devastating tornadoes across the Kentucky-Tennessee District, Salem Ridge Wesleyan Church (Brooksville, Kentucky) and Faith Community Wesleyan Church (Chattanooga, Tennessee) experienced near-total losses of their church buildings and belongings.

On April 8, 100-year-old Salem Ridge Wesleyan was hit with 80 mph winds, rain and golf ball-sized hail that tore the church roof off and caused severe water damage.

“The Salem Ridge Wesleyan Church family have poured hours of labor and thousands of dollars into fixing up their 100-year-old building that was destroyed last week,” Rev. Aaron Sherman, district superintendent of the Kentucky-Tennessee District, said. “They’re not discouraged, however; they’re energized by the fresh opportunities they are finding to minister to their neighbors and the new connections that are being formed in the community as a result of their material loss.”

Salem Ridge Wesleyan Pastor Jonathan Rogers believes this storm and the subsequent destruction of the church building are in fact an answer to a long-awaited prayer. “I can tell people have a preconceived idea of how you’re going to be: you’re going to be sad, you’re going to be disappointed, you’re going to be whatever,” Rogers said. “And people think I’m nuts, but I’ve prayed for this for years.”

Rogers and many other members of the Salem Ridge congregation had committed countless hours and significant finances toward renovating and updating the church, recently installing the church’s first bathroom, septic system, concrete sidewalk and parking area, and were on their way to saving for and installing an updated heating system. But Rogers’ end goal was to rebuild a church building even before the storm had hit.

“God gave me the vision to build a new church, and people would come. So, I ended up designing a new church, even though, here I was with a rinky-dink church building with no money, but the vision was put on the backburner because we weren’t ready for it,” he said. “But this past weekend, the Lord showed me that when I started pastoring here, I couldn’t have handled a new church building. I wasn’t ready — none of us were. So, God had to take us in steps: putting in a new septic system, modern bathroom, and sidewalk. “God has led us step by step to build our faith and to show us what he can do. And now it seems he feels like we’re at the point that we’re ready for the new church.”

Once COVID-19 mandates subside, Salem Ridge Wesleyan will convene in the parsonage, which will require minor renovations but withstood much of the storm. Rogers is using this opportunity to minister as he can but added that he is the one being ministered to as families neigh-

boring the church, who do not attend Salem Ridge, have been sacrificing time, energy and money to help salvage and clean the church.

On Easter Sunday, April 12, four days following the devastation to Brooksville and surrounding areas in Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio, another storm rolled through Chattanooga, Tennessee, demolishing Faith Community Wesleyan Church (FCWC) and much of the local community.

Suffering 145 mph winds and nine-mile-wide tornadoes, FCWC experienced total loss of the building and the fellowship building on campus. Dr. M. C. Tolbert, pastor of FCWC, described the scene as a “war zone,” noting the destruction not only of the church but the total loss of hundreds of homes and businesses in the community as well.

“Even in the midst of surveying the absolute destruction of their own Church and Family Life Center, Pastor M. C. and Anna Tolbert and the Faith Community Church Family are gathering supplies and needed items for the dozens of nursing home patients that were displaced when the tornadoes damaged their facility, located next to FCWC,” Sherman said. “They are finding ways to look beyond their own loss and needs and minister to the hurting and vulnerable around them.”

“The blow of losing two church facilities in five days has been difficult, but once again these churches are choosing to move forward instead of backing down. Our district has been blessed lately with a strong spirit of unity and renewed purpose — reaching our communities for Christ, however, whatever and wherever!” Sherman said. “These hard times have only strengthened our resolve and are galvanizing our team to move forward with greater focus and determination. Our district motto is ‘Onward and Upward’ and nothing we are facing is deterring us from moving that direction — following God’s lead to the best days still ahead!”



*Two Wesleyan churches in the Kentucky-Tennessee district experienced devastating loss the week of Easter as storms tore through the region. Read more stories at <https://www.wesleyan.org/two-churches-in-same-district-destroyed-by-tornadoes>*

## Olivet opens dorm rooms to local healthcare workers, first responders



*Olivet Nazarene University is offering its on-campus housing to first responders and essential health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

Recently, two hospitals and several groups of first responders reached out to Olivet to request temporary housing for those that are working on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to assist the community, Olivet has agreed to make a number of their empty dorm rooms available for first responders and medical personnel who feel unsafe returning to their homes due to virus exposure. "ONU has had a great relationship with our community for over 100 years," said David Pickering, Olivet executive vice president.

"We live in this community and serve together in this community. The community opens itself up to the campus, and we wanted to do the same for them. We were just returning what they do for us every day."

The university instituted a distance learning model in the middle of March, sending its students home for the rest of the school year at spring break. A minimal number of students and staff still remain at the campus. According to Pickering, Olivet is a part of Region VII in the Illinois disaster relief program and serves as a surge location for emergencies.

"We meet with local emergency organizations every month in partnership with them," Pickering said. "We were able to also go to other organizations and offer our space or whatever they needed. This included fire, police, and county personnel."

Olivet's new partnership with hospital employees and first responders started in April. The new residents are housed in three "inner campus" dormitories that have been cleaned, cleared, and prepared for them. The three buildings together could house about 150 people with one person residing in each room, according to Pickering.

"We are blessed to live in a community where we serve together and we have the opportunity to demonstrate the compassion that the Lord could have on those in need," Pickering said.

*Read more stories at <https://nazarene.org/>*

## CME Church Destroyed for Second Time by Tornado

As the storm blew through Carbon Hill, a small town in the northern part of Alabama, on Easter Sunday night, April 12, 2020, the Grants Chapel CME Church sat right in its path. For church members this was *deja vu*. In 2002, the church's former building was destroyed by a tornado.

The worst damage was to the fellowship hall. The furniture was ripped apart and the walls blown away. A piano and foundation remained among the debris. The main sanctuary, while intact, lost a portion of its roof and everything inside was tossed about and damaged by the rain.

The congregation had not met in the building since early March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, so they are heartbroken. The church's pastor, Rev. David Toney, said the members are already planning to rebuild. "Although we can't see each other face-to-face, we are trusting God to bring us out of this" said Minister Rosemary Irvin, who was a member when the church was first destroyed.

The Grants Chapel CME Church is a part of the Huntsville District of the North Central Alabama Region where Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton is the Presiding Bishop.

*Submitted by Teresa Jefferson-Snorton*



## Mission hospital sends pregnant women home to wait

A United Methodist mission hospital is sending pregnant women home to protect them from the coronavirus while they wait for labor to start, even as the number seeking shelter has surged.

Mutambara Mission Hospital has reduced the number of pregnant women staying at its waiting mothers' shelter due to the COVID-19 crisis. The hospital has been housing about 70 women since Cyclone Idai devastated the region a little over a year ago. Now, the hospital is trying to limit that number to about 40, admitting only women with high-risk pregnancies and those who are close to delivering.

The pandemic, however, has brought more women to the shelter to await the arrival of their babies. Some come early because they live far from the shelter and don't want to face an issue with transportation, while others fear being exposed to the coronavirus, said Florence Ogugua Mefor, a midwife at the hospital. Those who have had C-sections in the past also often come to the shelter ahead of time to avoid possible complications, she said.

"The 21-day lockdown in the country is a contributory factor to the surge in number of waiting mothers this time, with ages ranging from 15 to 35 years," Mefor said. "Some refuse and cry not to go back to their homes. (They want to) stay at the hospital."

Mefor and her husband, Dr. Emmanuel Mefor, are from Nigeria and serve as missionaries with the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. He is one of three resident doctors at Mutambara Mission Hospital, the referral hospital for the district of Manicaland, which has 24 clinics and two rural hospitals.

"I thank God that this hospital did not totally close down because of this COVID-19," said 19-year-old Idah Gozo, a pregnant mother admitted to the waiting mothers' shelter.

Grace Kuretu, 32, from Bvumbura community, said she feels safer at the hospital. "This is my second time to be admitted at this shelter. The staff are so caring and I am safe from this coronavirus fears out in the community," she said.

There have been 23 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in

Zimbabwe and three deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

Ethel Mapanda, Mutambara Mission Hospital administrator, said the number of waiting mothers increased after the lockdown announcement by the president on March 30. "We are trying to decongest the mothers to reduce the spread of the virus," she said. However, she noted, there are still around 45-60 women staying per day, on average. "The number has decreased a bit because the hospital is not accepting those who are not referred."

Dr. Emmanuel Mefor said hospital deliveries are gaining popularity in Zimbabwe, where home births are common, especially in rural areas. "This is very good," he said. "Those who are really at risk are referred to Mutambara Hospital from the clinics. But there also those who come ... on their own volition as a matter of choice."

In terms of readiness for COVID-19, the hospital is only providing services to emergency cases. The health ministry has directed hospitals to reduce the number of patients to limit contact. "So far, we have not had any suspicious cases. Presently, we don't have (the) items needed if eventually any case comes up," Mefor said. "We have very minimal personal protective equipment, which is running out."

Nhamo Mirato, head nurse of admitting at Mutambara, said the facility has taken steps to protect patients from the coronavirus, including forming an eight-member virus taskforce and discharging patients who are well enough to go home. "Only critical patients are admitted. Two isolation rooms were identified for male and female patients. Resources were mobilized and distributed in wards and departments," Mirato said.

"All staff were taught on COVID-19 by the infection control nurse. Outpatients and pregnant waiting mothers are seen in small numbers of five for social distancing." She agreed that the hospital does not have enough protective clothing for health care workers. "The few boxes of surgical masks that we had are now out of stock. ... There are no aprons, gumshoes, bin liners, disposable gowns, hand sanitizer or sharps (disposal) tins," Mirato said.

Read more stories at <https://www.umnews.org/en>



*From left, Rumbidzai Chiremba, Grace Kuretu and Idah Gozo are admitted to the waiting mothers' shelter at Mutambara Mission Hospital in Manicaland, Zimbabwe. Photo by Chenayi Kumerera, UM News.*

# How North Alabama is coping with the COVID-19

## Homeless conduct ministry

In a recent update from the Church of the Reconciler, a ministry with, by and for the homeless in downtown Birmingham, Alabama, the ministry stated that though in person, onsite worship services and services in general have been canceled, they are offering their building to collaborate with several organizations dedicated to meeting the daily needs of people living on the street. From their fellowship hall, Church of the Reconciler is working with Community on the Rise, Be A Blessing Birmingham and Food for our Journey to coordinate daily food donations distributed on three routes throughout the city. They are creatively using their space along with the blessings of donations from area churches, restaurants and individuals to continue serving the homeless by providing food and hope.



## Drive-In Church

Several United Methodist Churches in North Alabama are conducting drive-in church, with attendees parking in a designated area and tuning in to the church service on their cars' radios. Odenville United Methodist Church holds their services in a small amphitheater across the street from their sanctuary. Rev. James Haskins leads the service from a stage in the amphitheater. Members of the church, members of the community and a few pets attend. Those in attendance remain in their cars, practicing good social distancing, and when suitable, open their sunroofs to enjoy the great spring weather. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Odenville-United-Methodist-Church/871867086205200>

*Rev. James Haskins leads drive-in church*

## Food provided during COVID-19

The Jacksonville Christian Outreach Center (JCOC) provides assistance to no/low-income individuals living in their zip code in northeast Alabama. A 501(c)(3) organization, supported by 24 local churches of all denominations, their building sits adjacent to Jacksonville First United Methodist Church, one of their largest supporters in both funding and leadership. Managed completely by a volunteer staff and board, JCOC receives donations of food, household goods and funds, distributing them to those in need. JCOC also shares fresh produce, grown in the nearby "Garden of Eatin,'" a partnership with Jacksonville First United Methodist Church. Though the demand for assistance has increased with the spread of the coronavirus, the volunteers boast the generosity of the area has risen to the occasion. As volunteers work with JCOC's guests, they give them "food for the body and for the soul," often including a Bible with the groceries and sharing a prayer and a smile as guests leave.

*Submitted by Debra Wallace-Padgett and Linda Holland*



## World Methodist Evangelism launches new initiatives

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID19 crisis, World Methodist Evangelism (WME) continues to bring the Methodist Wesleyan family together around the task of showing and sharing the love of Jesus in a complex and hurting world. Though the planning began in 2019, we were able to launch ***Real Faith ~ Real World, our new podcast ministry*** in April. It was clear that God's hand was in the timing as one of our first episodes was an outstanding conversation with Dr. Ben Witherington on the question, "Where is Jesus in the Midst of Suffering?"

Hosted by Rob Haynes, WME's Director of Education and Leadership, the *Real Faith – Real World* podcast seeks to *connect the faith within us with the world around us*. Every other Monday, tune in on podcast platforms such as iTunes, Spotify, Google Play, Stitcher, or the WME website – [www.worldmethodist.org/podcast/](http://www.worldmethodist.org/podcast/) to hear conversations around issues of faith and life.

We would love to hear about the ways God is moving in your life, community, and ministry! Our Ministry Moments will be a great way for the global Methodist Wesleyan family to celebrate God's activity in our world. Simply record a 2-3 minute audio file on your phone, tablet, computer, or other device and use [www.WeTransfer.com](http://www.WeTransfer.com) to send it to us at [podcast@worldmethodist.org](mailto:podcast@worldmethodist.org).

In 1991, WME created a Prayer and Fasting Community.

## Worshipping in new ways

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, AME members have found new ways to worship and minister to the communities we serve as well as advocate for justice and fairness. In the USA, several states have called for openings but the Council of Bishops as well as the Connectional Health Commission have urged churches to stay closed for the foreseeable future. Mortality rates for African Americans who contract COVID-19 are disproportionately high.

Pastors and church organizations have been encouraged to use social media and technology to create forms of community and discipleship. One unique prayer call has been held by Bryan Gray and Jason Ferguson, lay

Presidents of the Chicago and Atlanta Annual Conferences respectively. During Lent, they took an initiative to bring persons together weekly for prayer to create an environment not tied to a specific region. The calls still go on weekly averaging over 100 people and drawing in different persons from around the church. Laity, youth, clergy. The Council of Bishops has hosted two prayer calls, reaching thousands of AME members.

Making the church's presence felt during social distancing requires innovation and creativity, but can be achieved. In the Baltimore and Metropolitan DC area, professional photographer Rev. Bill Lee of Communi-

ty of Hope AME Church has started a photography ministry chronicling the work of essential workers and hospitals to spread awareness and show appreciation. **In Georgetown County, S.C., choir members from Greater St. Stephen AME Church have gathered at the hospital to sing and minister to healthcare workers.** Throughout Zambia, the 17th Episcopal District Lay Organization food and necessities for persons who cannot leave home.

Since that time, people in over 130 countries have joined together to pray and fast in the pattern of John Wesley, going without solid food from after the evening meal on Thursday until late afternoon on Friday. During their fast, they commit themselves to prayer that our world might know Jesus Christ. Each week we send them an email of encouragement and prayers for their time of fasting.

In mid-April, as part of our Prayer and Fasting ministry, Kim Riseman began leading evening prayer on **Thursdays at 8pm (eastern time, US)** via Facebook Live. In this time of pandemic, we are adding a specific focus on prayers for the end of the COVID19 crisis, for comfort and care for all those affected, and for strength and perseverance for all those working on the front lines of this battle. Prayer is powerful and effective! We invite you to join our Prayer and Fasting Community as well as to engage with us. To join go to [www.worldmethodist.org/connect/](http://www.worldmethodist.org/connect/). To participate, in evening prayer, visit the WME Facebook page – [www.facebook.com/worldmethodistevangelism/](http://www.facebook.com/worldmethodistevangelism/). If you are not able to join us live, Facebook records all Live events so you can view them at any convenient time.

These are difficult days, but God is with us! At WME we continue to reach out to our world as it navigates the challenging spiritual questions raised by the current crisis, to offer the love and hope of Jesus Christ, and to come alongside all who are struggling.

While safety means its members cannot physically gather, the ministry of the AME Church is as strong and vibrant as ever.

*Submitted by John Thomas III*

*Submitted by John Thomas III*



## Thursdays in Black ambassadors: “We must enable and promote safe spaces for all”

**World Council of Churches (WCC) ambassadors of the Thursdays in Black campaign are standing behind a joint statement that urges both awareness and protection from the “dual pandemics” of COVID-19 and gender-based violence.**

“As countries respond to COVID-19 with necessary restrictions on movements and activities, more people are calling violence hotlines and crying for help in other ways,” the statement reads. “The effects of lockdown, job losses, and the sheer vulnerability of people who were already on the margins of society are all serious concerns.”

The ambassadors for Thursdays in Black, a global campaign for a world free from rape and violence, are also featured in an accompanying video, speaking from the heart on the higher incidences of violence that have been reported during global quarantines.

“Conflicts and crises nearly always carry gender-based burdens – which can be compounded by other factors such as race and ethnicity, ability, and economics,” reads the statement. “We urge everyone to care for the persons in their homes, personal relationships, and in all workplaces still serving the public good.”

Among the 13 ambassadors is WCC moderator Dr. Agnes Abuom, who signed the statement urging change at both the grassroots and leadership levels.

“We encourage churches to be involved in creating physical and virtual safe spaces for those who are not safe in their homes,” the statement reads. “This can include support to local professionals and caregivers in the field of sexual and gender-based violence through prayer, space, materials, and money.”

While we need to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we must not victimize or stigmatize people in the process, the statement concludes. “We also must look beyond the current crisis and renew our resolve to address the root causes of sexual and gender-based violence that are only exacerbated during conflicts and crises,” the text reads. “As Thursdays in Black ambassadors, we pray that people of faith join us in creating a world of justice and peace in these challenging times.”

*Read more stories at <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/thursdays-in-black-ambassadors-we-must-enable-and-promote-safe-spaces-for-all>*



**World Council of Churches (WCC) ambassadors**

## Webinar draws lively global audience seeking “how to be the church” when buildings are closed



Hundreds of people from across the world participated in a livestreamed webinar organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) on 29 April with a lineup of speakers who shared insights in how churches across the world have quickly transformed their services because of COVID-19. *Read more of the story here <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/webinar-draws-lively-global-audience-seeking-how-to-be-the-church-when-buildings-are-closed>*

*Photo: Albin Hillert/WCC*



Please send press releases, articles and resources! Submissions should be a page or less (500-700 words), edited and ready to publish. Contact us by **the last Monday of the month** at [communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org](mailto: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 May 25 for the June edition.

### On the Web

This and past First Friday Letters can be found online at [FirstFridayLetter.worldmethodistcouncil.org](http://FirstFridayLetter.worldmethodistcouncil.org).

The World Methodist Council's website may be found at [worldmethodistcouncil.org](http://worldmethodistcouncil.org).

The World Methodist Museum's website is at [methodistmuseum.org](http://methodistmuseum.org).

To subscribe to this newsletter, please email [communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org](mailto:communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org).

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