



FIRST FRIDAY LETTER

The World Methodist Council June 2020

Greetings from the General Secretary

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

A South African colleague, Rev. Errol Narain, now based in Chicago, used George Floyd's last words and plea for help, "*I can't breathe*" as the theme of his Pentecost sermon and celebration of Africa Month.

He very skillfully reflects on James Weldon's poem Lift Every Voice and Sing, which was set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson and performed by 500 children for the first time on 12 February, 1900, in honor of Lincoln's birthday. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has adopted Lift Every Voice and Sing, as its anthem. The song voices the cry for liberation and affirmation.

In the sermon, Narain "traces the history of African-Americans beginning in Africa through the middle passage and their landing on the shores of America. The history of African-Americans is a history of slavery that continues evolving into many hybrid forms where racism is the norm. Slavery did not end in the USA but evolved. The road to freedom continues to be bleak and stony. The sermon is important for the day of Pentecost, the day of promise for God the Spirit, for a breath of life in a world where people die because they cannot breathe."

Africa Day is celebrated on 25 May each year, one day after Wesley's "heart-warming" experience at Aldersgate. In 1963 the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was formed that later became the African Union (AU). The OAU was established to build greater unity and solidarity between African countries and people of African descent in the diaspora. The theme for this year's commemoration was "Silencing the Guns - Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development and Intensifying the Fight against the COVID-19 Pandemic."

Africa boasts many inventions that changed the world. The world's first heart transplant was performed in 1967 by Dr. Chris Barnard in Cape Town. The Computed Axial Tomography Scan (CAT Scan), Retinal Cryoprobe, the Dolosse, and the Sasol – the world's first and largest oil-from-coal refinery are amongst the many contributions by Africa to global welfare. Many people forget that the African continent is our primordial home, the cradle of humanity and that the Christ child and his family were offered refuge in Egypt. Stephen Bantu Biko, one of the martyrs of the liberation of South Africans often claimed that the West had offered much to the world, but Africa's contribution is to "offer the world a human face." We share a common humanity.

This edition shares stories of COVID-19 and calls attention to the continuing struggle for all to be recognized as 'created in the image of God.' Included are links located on page 6 to a *Lament* by CME Bishop Lawrence Reddick, a *Psalm of Praise and Lament* by BMC's Rev. Ken Howcraft, and a *Response...* by WME's Rev. Dr. Kim Reisman.

Shalom

Ivan

Project Orange

Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary (left) of The World Methodist Council, is shown working with Ruben Richards in South Africa, to assist in providing much-needed fresh fruit through Project Orange to vulnerable populations.

Everyone around the planet is affected by COVID-19 and the Council is working diligently to provide positive effects to traumatized communities. The Council and its member churches are involved in many ways, including prayer and hands-on efforts. Click on the following link for more information:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDdtJtgx-7KI&feature=youtu.be>



North Carolina church continues veterans ministry amid COVID-19

Statesville Church of the Nazarene has ministered to local veterans in a variety of ways over the past 20 years, and Pastor Frank Turner has sought ways to continue that ministry amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

One of the church's main outreaches is a bi-weekly food pantry that is part of the Piedmont Veterans Assistance Council (PVAC), an organization Turner helped start. It facilitates four different food pantries across Iredell County. The food pantry is filled with donations from the local grocery stores and a local food bank. Recently, Turner said they picked up nearly 3,000 pounds of donated food.

Turner is a combat veteran himself, having served in the Vietnam War. His own experiences are one reason he sought to continue his ministry during this time.

"Veterans need consistency if they're going to turn their situation around," he said. "We don't hold the food pantry once a year or every three months. We do this every Tuesday and every Friday."

Turner has made sure to stay aligned with CDC, North Carolina, and federal protocols, mandating only two at a time in the food pantry and requiring social distancing while waiting in line to access the pantry.

The food pantry isn't Turner's only way of meeting with the veterans. He has frequented many other events and meetings for veterans, hoping to help them through their struggles to adapt to society after serving their country

and point them to God as a source of healing from their pain.

With 19,000 veterans in Iredell County, Turner comes across veterans in many different situations. He frequently sees veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), guilt regarding things that happened in combat, suicidal thoughts, and more. He has helped talk an individual down from suicide and has counseled others who have survived suicide attempts.

He believes being consistent in keeping up with conversations, the familiarity between one another, and helping provide for them are approaches that help make a breakthrough for these veterans.

"It's important that I put legs on what I say I'm doing," Turner said. "In other words, put words into action."

-- Read more stories at <https://nazarene.org/article/north-carolina-church-continues-veterans-ministry-amid-covid-19>



John Wesley's Sanctification

Healing and Wholeness for All in a Time of COVID-19

Many Methodists and Wesleyans know John Wesley's slogan "The World is my Parish." But few know that the pioneer of our religious beliefs and practices, penned these lines in response to the alienation from parish and pulpit by the Church of England colleagues and authorities.

In this context, Mr. Wesley's mission of spreading "scriptural holiness throughout the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith" illustrates a divine call for transformation of the Church as an appendage of the monarchy into an instrument of God's "sanctification" a sign of healing and wholeness for England and the world. A re-reading of John Wesley's Works reveals his concern for the healing of humanity in body, mind and spirit or what we may term, "holistic healing."

The late Theodore Jennings in his seminal work "**Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics,**" points out that Matthew 25: 31-46 (The Last Judgment) might well have played a seminal role in shaping Wesley's pastoral concern for the poor, indigent and infirm. In addition, Wesley's concern for the marginalised, illustrated in his visitations to mental health patients in Bedlam and his pastoral calls on his clergy to visit the poor, is tied up with the "outward behaviour" toward social transformation indicated in the "Discipline" and "Rules" of his followers. This significance of these 18th century guidelines to spiritual and pastoral cures for dealing with poverty and disease come from one who no longer perceived God as a dispassionate and transcendent being, ready to punish any human transgression.

In addition, the context of Mr. Wesley's ministry was set in an age of crisis and disruption similar to ours and

announced, almost to the day 24th May, his "strangely warmed heart" experience, expressing his faith conviction as an experience of the "head" and the "heart." The hymn translated from the Moravian Brethren, appropriately spells out the Wesley Brothers' inextricable link between grace, faith and healing. **"O! For a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise... He breaks the power of cancelled sin. He sets the prisoner free. His blood can make the foulest clean. His blood availed for me."** I am not aware that Mr. Wesley ever focused ministry into categories delineating "Faith Healing" or "Spiritual Healing." Personal salvation (healing), in the Wesleyan sense, is expected to become an integral witness for healing and wholeness in a broken world and especially in this time of COVID-19.

The Revd. Keith Vermeulen is a retired presbyter of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and is a part time researcher/writer for WMC.



Light of Peace Prayer Campaign for Korea

"We pray, Peace now, End the War!" This is the call to join the Prayer Campaign for peace on the Korean Peninsula (see: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/events/a-light-of-peace-prayer-campaign-for-peace-in-korea>). June 25, 1950 the Korean War began; 70 years later there is no peace treaty, only an armistice. The Korean nation is divided and militarization including nuclear weapons poisons the environment and the souls of people. It is time for peace – now. We are invited to join the Korean people in their prayers and their work for peace. Several of the WMC member churches plan activities in the next weeks until August 15. Here are two examples:

- Methodists in the USA are in support of a Virtual Action Week June 1-5, 2020 and urge their Members of Congress to work for a peace agreement to end the Korean War and the lifting of sanctions for life-saving humanitarian assistance (see: <https://>

koreapeacenow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/National-Action-to-End-the-Korean-War3.pdf).

- The United Church of Canada, together with partners in Korea, organizes an Online Prayer Vigil June 25, 2020 - 8:00pm ET to 8:45pm ET: <https://www.united-church.ca/events/light-peace-online-prayer-vigil-korea>

When Rev. James T. Laney received the WMC Peace Award 2019 for his lifelong engagement for peace on the Korean Peninsula he urged us: "Peace is the foundation of all human flourishing. Modern warfare is the Armageddon of life. Let us all promise each other that in our sphere of life, we will seek to be instruments of God's peace and justice."

Respectfully submitted by Rosemarie Wenner

Who will be the bridges?

Yesterday, into last night, hundreds of people demonstrated against the racism in our country, sparked but not confined by the recent police violence against black people. And it was good for them to be there.

But last night the scene turned toward violence. The route was my daily running route every morning—along Wacker Drive and into the loop.

So this morning my husband Ken and I went for a walk. I wanted to see my running route. But as soon as we got to the river, we saw that all the bridges along the Chicago River were up. There was no way to get across the river. We couldn't get into downtown or along the south side of Wacker.

When a bridge is up, there's a loud clanging sound with a flashing STOP sign. As we walked along, there was a continuous, out of sync clanging of the bridges. The clanging sound resounded down the canyon of the city—the canyon made by the tall skyscrapers. The clanging called out its warning: pay attention to what is going on!

We walked into the River North area for a while before circling back toward our neighborhood. All along we saw the effects of the night before, but it was the clanging that haunted me.

I've seen people write that the time we're in is an apocalypse; and this was before this week or weekend. We've done such a poor job teaching about the Book of Revelation that it's hard to go against the stream of how it has been interpreted popularly in our culture. But let me just say this: an apocalypse is an unveiling, a revealing for all to see. The Book of Revelation is a revealing of evil being overcome by good until there is

A new heaven and new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away. (Rev. 21:1)

We are in an apocalypse. But the apocalypse is not an economy that has plummeted to depths unknown since the Great Depression. The apocalypse is not the unemployment figure. The apocalypse is not that we can't come together and worship, singing our hearts out. The apocalypse is not the higher rates of illness and death of COVID-19 for people of color and those who are the most economically stressed in our society (often essential workers). The apocalypse is not police shootings. Hear me out!

The apocalypse is the unveiling, the revealing that all these things—as much suffering, death and loss that they have caused—the revealing of all the inequities and racism and poverty and poor health care that exists in our society. It has been starkly revealed just who we are as a society. That's the apocalypse: the revealing.



Some say that religion is really a way of seeing. If anyone has any religion right now, we cannot help but to see what has been revealed. And what has been revealed is now up to us to address.

While out walking this morning on the north side of the river, I saw a woman sitting at a bus stop. You have to understand: neither the buses nor the trains were running because they couldn't get across the river. But this woman was sitting at a bus stop that was about 50 feet from a bridge that was up. No bus was going that way! But there she sat.

Why was she sitting there? Maybe she was just tired. But to me, it seemed symbolic that we can sit down and pretend that everything is normal. We can refuse to see. The question is: What do we do with an apocalyptic time? Well, we can't just sit down and close our eyes and not see what we have seen in these last couple of months and now last couple of days.

The Book of Revelation ends in a vision of a new heaven and earth; nothing less. We must work for a new economy for all and not just for some, a better America that is judged by how it treats the most vulnerable among us, a new way of being church that values the realm of God's justice and mercy, a new way of loving that transcends—or bridges—our many divisions. On this Pentecost Sunday, with all our various experiences and perspectives and expressions of faith, let us join our voices with one heart to live and work and love into a new reality that is made possible by this time of revealing.

With the clanging and looking up at the gaps between the raised bridges, I kept wondering, who will be the bridges? Who will be the bridges? Who will be the bridges?

Will it be you?
Will it be me?
Will it be us?
May it be so.

-- Written by Bishop Sally Dyck, Northern Illinois UMC (USA)

To watch the full video follow the link <https://www.umcnic.org/news>

Cyclone Amphan devastates India, Bangladesh



Cyclone Amphan has cut a deadly path through Bangladesh and India, where at least 96 people have been killed between the two countries. The storm is the most powerful in more than a decade, with winds at 115 mph (185 kph) and storm surges that flooded low-lying coastal areas.

Communication lines are still closed off in both countries, making it difficult to get an accurate picture of the status on the ground and allow for coordination between those responding. Uprooted trees and fallen branches also caused extensive damage and some of the deaths.

Before the cyclone hit, more than 2 million people were moved into shelters out of the storm's projected path. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has made both the evacuations and the shelters even more dangerous, and many are concerned about the ability to maintain social distance within the shelters. The food shortages and med-

ical crises caused by the pandemic have been exacerbated by the storm in both countries, where flooding destroyed crops and fisheries and left thousands homeless.

Reports of damage to Nazarene homes and churches are still coming in, but one death – a child of members at a Nazarene church – has been reported. Several homes of Nazarenes collapsed or flooded.

So far, Bangladesh Nazarene Mission – the arm of Nazarene Compassionate Ministries serving in Bangladesh – helped evacuate people and provided food and hygiene materials at shelters in coordination with the government. They also opened several Nazarene facilities as shelters, currently hosting nearly 250 people. BNM and NCM plan to continue the distributions of food, water, and hygiene supplies to the shelters.

--Nazarene Compassionate Ministries

WesleyMen release study guide and resources for FastPrayGive.org

WesleyMen has released via their website a **five-part small group study** about ending hunger by Wesley's *means of grace*. The study guide, written by **FastPrayGive.org** director Andy Morris, is a direct response to the questions, "Why should we work to end hunger," and "How do we go about tackling a seemingly impossible task?"

The content is published on the **FastPrayGive.org** website. The site invites visitors to join the global movement of individuals who seek to end hunger by fasting one meal per week, praying during that time for hunger, and giving a micro-donation monthly to feed one other person. These specific actions are in response to the 2011 World Methodist Council Resolution calling for all members of the WMC to Fast, Pray, and Give in the name of Jesus Christ.

WesleyMen is currently seeking partners globally to translate these resources and begin the process of implementing regional variations of the FastPrayGive.org program to support hunger relief and sustainable development in the hardest-hit areas of the world.

Submitted by Rev. Steve Hickle, President, WesleyMen, An Affiliate Organization of the World Methodist Council



A TIME LIKE LAMENTATIONS: More than 101,000 Dead of Pandemic; and Only God Knows How Many Dead of Racism

One of the denominational leaders of another Black Methodist body called this week to ask me if I could sign onto a statement against “the assassinations against our sons and daughters.” This was my immediate and honest response: “I have no question with the statement; I can sign the statement, but what good will it do?” I am obviously tired of signing well worded but impotent statements.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, hardly an Annual Conference was held that I attended in which there was not a “State of the Country” statement that raised the issues of blatant and sometimes covert racism and called the Church to act in various ways in response. I don’t hear those statements in Annual Conferences much anymore. Could it be that we don’t hear it because of our laziness, or is it that we don’t have solutions, or have we become disparagingly cynical as if there be no hope in words?

Read more of this article at <https://thecmechurch.org/2020/05/a-time-like-lamentations/>

A Psalm of lament and praise in a time of coronavirus

How shall we praise you, Lord, our God?
When we are locked down,
how shall we praise you?
When the doors to your house are barred,
and your people cannot assemble?
When those desperately in need of money and work
cannot even wait in the market-place?
When we have to circle round people in the street,
and to queue for shops maintaining safe distance?
When we can only communicate
by hearing on the phone,
or seeing on the screen;
or digitally messaging,
or even just waving through a window?
When we cannot meet our parents and children,
grandparents and grandchildren,
or other family members and friends?
When we cannot touch them in their flesh and blood,
to know they are really alive?
How shall we praise you?
How, like Thomas, shall we not see yet believe
that your son is raised among us?
How shall we praise you...



Read more of this article at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/coronavirus/prayers-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/a-psalm-of-lament-and-praise-in-a-time-of-coronavirus/>

A Response to Recent Events in the United States

Events in the United States often impact the rest of the world. Though World Methodist Evangelism is a global organization working through a network of 80 million Methodist Wesleyans in over 130 countries; I feel it is important to speak out on the current unrest unfolding in the US.

I have been trying to mentally and emotionally process what has been happening recently in my country, the United States: to comprehend the storming of government buildings and escalating threats of violence. It demonstrates the universal human response when people feel their rights are being denied or their freedoms restricted. When I think about US history, it makes sense. We Americans have always protested injustice. From the American Revolution to the Civil War, when we believe our freedoms are being taken away, we protest. When we feel the government is “treading on us,” or limiting our rights, we protest. All of us can understand the anger and frustration that arises when we feel the government is exerting too much control over our lives.

Read more of this article at <https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/world-methodist-evangelism/>

UCC sharing 46 prayers in 24 hours during Interfaith Day of Prayer

On the National Day of Prayer, the United Church of Christ released 46 original prayers written by people of many faiths, in a multitude of voices. Religious scholars, deployed military, social activists, educators, authors, poets, a politician and a migrant living in sanctuary have authored appeals that touch on the need for the Divine in this time of the novel coronavirus pandemic. The church's interfaith "prayer warriors" range in age from a 95-year-old former UCC officer to a 7-year-old child.

They pray as one for moral and spiritual renewal — for a country grappling with greed, for politicians more concerned with economic stability than human life, for a world at war with a deadly virus. "A virus invisible to us, yet very present with us brings sickness. We cannot ignore or avoid its presence," writes the Rev. Geoffrey Black, a past UCC general minister and president (2009-2015). "Now we are awakened to the uncertainties of time and place." As retired Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson asks, "Do you mean for this virus to be a wake-up call about how we're treating the most vulnerable among us — even the earth itself — long before the virus?" These quotes, from two of 46 prayers are shared online at UCC.org and on the UCC Facebook page.

Rooted in firm belief in the power of their intercessions, the prayer warriors ask for strength, offer thanks, and look for grace and guidance in the days ahead. "Send fresh your anointing of grace and mercy upon those who believe, yet doubt your presence. Guide us, Father Mother God, always with your light so that men and women will see you and your glory through all that we do and all that we are," writes Dr. Pernessa Seele, an immunologist, CEO and Founder of Balm in Gilead, Inc., a religious based organization that provides support to families living with AIDS.

"SpiritGod, we stand in need of your healing spirit," writes human rights activist, Ruby Sales, founder and director of the Spirit House Project. "Touch our hearts, and in the place of greed that makes us gobble up everything

for ourselves, replace it with compassion and generosity."

"Sovereign God help us focus less on constraints and fear; but rather consider that we are all a part of a new vision for the hope of many nations and the healing of our world," Rev. Dionne Boissière, Chaplain of the Church Center for the United Nations.

Presiding Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry prays, "Help us to place our hands in your hands and in the hands of each other that we may walk together and work together until our nightmares are ended and your dream for us and all your creation is realized on earth as it is in heaven."

"Blessed are you, O God," prays Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. "Bring life even where there is death."

Rev. Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian Christian, sends his prayer from Bethlehem, calling for wisdom. "While states and countries are building walls of separation and promoting segregation in the name of security and self-protection, open our eyes in this time of a global pandemic, to recover our common humanity, dignity and equality."

The UCC is inviting members of all faiths to add their prayers to the stream of UCC posts on Facebook. "Although May 7 was the National Day of Prayer," UCC associate general minister, The Rev. Traci Blackmon said, "The voices gathered here are representative of the world's horrors and our hopes. I am deeply grateful and strengthened to know that this call to pray is reverberating around the world. In this space the number of people who've answered the call to contribute to this communal cry serves to remind us that God is indeed still speaking and we have the power to heal the world."

-- Read more stories and prayers at <https://www.ucc.org/news>

"As we shelter in place attacked by a virus so small we cannot see it, but so powerful that it slays us by the hundreds of thousands, do not allow us to forget that mightier are you, our Creator."

Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño

Bishop Harvey makes history as first Hispanic woman to be COB President



Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey addresses the virtual Council of Bishops meeting last Friday after she was installed as new President of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church.

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey of the Louisiana Area has made history by becoming the first Hispanic woman to be president of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church. She is also the first woman of color to lead the more than 128 active and retired bishops of one of the largest denominations in the world.

Bishop Harvey assumed the mantle of office last week as the active and retired bishops from around the globe gathered in a virtual meeting April 29 to May 1 to celebrate new leadership and to discuss plans for episcopal supervision brought on by the disruptions and postponements due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

“I pray that I might lead with the knowledge that we are intricately connected,” said Bishop Harvey in her message after taking office. “We are a web of interactive relationships. Our connection has never been more critical. I pray I will lead with integrity, accountability, compassion, love, and grace for all.”

She reflected on the shutdown brought by COVID-19. “The question of when we resume in-person worship is paramount for everyone. The recognition that the learning curve has been steep on every corner of the planet is undeniable. As bishops, we believe our churches are entrusted with the responsibility to care for our neighbor. We believe that the greatest expression of love for our neighbor has to be our priority,” she said.

Bishop Harvey follows Bishop Ken Carter of the Florida Area, who had led the Council of Bishops (COB) since 2018. Bishop Harvey, who has served as president-designate since 2018, was elected president at the November 2019 meeting of the bishops.

Other new COB officers:

- Bishop Tom Bickerton of the New York Area, president-designate;

- Bishop Tracy Smith Malone of the East Ohio Area, secretary;
- Bishop Bruce Ough of the Dakota and Minnesota Area, executive secretary;
- Bishop Sally Dyck of the Chicago Area, ecumenical officer; and
- Bishop Carter as the immediate past president

Bishop Ough and Bishop Dyck will follow Bishop Marcus Matthews and Bishop B. Michael Watson as COB Executive Secretary and COB Ecumenical Officer, respectively, on September 1.

The April/May meeting of the Council of Bishops also received leadership reports regarding immigration, ecumenical relations, racism, disaster relief, and other mission and ministry work around the global denomination.

Here are some of the highlights of the meeting:

- The bishops agreed that the General Conference that will be held in 2021 should be referred to as the postponed 2020 General Conference.
- The bishops approved a motion to support the young people’s call for the Commission on the General Conference to consider school/college schedules in setting the dates for the postponed 2020 General Conference.
- The bishops supported a global letter calling on the U.S. government to rescind its decision regarding funding of the World Health Organization.
- With the postponement of General Conference and the Jurisdictional/Central Conferences, the bishops see the Colleges of Bishops, in consultation with Jurisdictional/Central Committees on Episcopacy, as the appropriate bodies to provide coverage of vacancies in episcopal areas due to retirements, with final approval by the Council of Bishops (BOD, 407, 408).

-- Read more about this story at <https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/newsdetail/bishop-harvey-makes-history-13984089?fbclid=IwAR2xCx FCCFOpnJ2IRT7Bk5z-jcGjlc-50aYcBEfXuNIYS4FWu1e7nVUKf1GA>

A prayer for graduates: Go with God

Graduation marks a major milestone in life, a time when we celebrate accomplishments and transition to another phase. The video linked below combines images of graduates with the words of a benediction written by the Rev. Jay Moyers. We encourage you to share the link with individuals or as part of worship or small group time as you offer prayers for those who are completing their schoolwork and dreaming of the future. **Click here to watch the video.**

As your classes and grading are now complete, may you strive toward excellence in all you do.

As the speeches conclude, may your voices rise up to pronounce justice and peace in the world.

As the fanfares cease, may you sing of joy, even in the dark and lonely places.

As the applause quiets, may you celebrate and lift up those around you.

As you graduate, may your achievements grow and cause growth in your communities.

And may we all know of the overwhelming blessings of the One who created all things.

-- Read more stories at <https://www.resourceumc.org/>

Virtual missions event helps many confirm calling

The South America Region held its first virtual Explore event, helping 64 participants from 10 different countries take their first steps into the missions field.

The weekend event featured more than 15 speakers, including eight active missionaries who shared their experiences. “The entire event was extremely challenging, spiritually and in cognitive growth,” said Elizabeth Soto Venegas, a participant from Chile. “Now, I have the expectations of the stages that follow and at the same time am putting everything in the Lord’s hands so that He can decide what we should do. The most important thing is that I was able to affirm the voice of God for missionary service.”

Explore is designed to orient and equip those who are interested in missionary service with the Church of the Nazarene. Attendance is required for anyone interested in serving for 90 days or longer.

Originally intended to be an in-person event with active participation among smaller groups, the region had been discussing an online version of Explore prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

“Speaking with my team in the region, missionary Yoan Camacaro shared the idea of doing an Explore online,” said Junior Rodrigues, the regional Engaging and Equipping coordinator. “Now I was sure that God was leading us in this direction.”

The success of the event amid the coronavirus pandemic felt like a triumph for Rodrigues and many of the other organizers. “Our team and I are so thankful to the Lord for what He is doing in the region,” said Ashley Hoffner, one of the facilitators. “We don’t know what life will look like even in the near future, but we do know that God is still working and calling people to advance His kingdom.”

Explore is the first step for those interested in becoming missionaries. It is a tool to engage, educate, and prepare candidates for what their lives may look like.

One participant entered the event with many questions and feelings of uncertainty about a call to missions. “The Explore was a blessing for my life, mainly because I got answers to many unknowns,” said Rony Cabarcas Campo. “It has also motivated us in a great way to continue equipping ourselves and always be prepared for the use that God wants to give us. The Explore is especially important because it clarifies the fundamental steps to be able to fulfill our call effectively.”

The available spots for the event filled up quickly, and organizers were pleased with the participants’ feedback. “Many Nazarene brothers and sisters are thankful to the Lord and the team because the region was able to find a way to continue their process in discerning and eventually becoming missionaries through the Church of the Nazarene,” Hoffner said.

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



Faith in Corona times

Sars-CoV-2 (Covid 19) is perhaps not the most dangerous disease that has occurred recently. But it is extremely treacherous, and measures have been taken worldwide to contain it, which affect public and private life in a way that we have not seen since World War II. The outcome of the crisis is still uncertain and the consequences of the restrictions for individuals and society are not foreseeable. But many may be driven by the question of what that means for our faith. Quick answers to this are problematic. So far, I have hardly noticed any attempts to think about it publicly. I am also struggling for an answer and would therefore like to share my thoughts on this with others.

Love and selfishness

The first thing that strikes me is that it shows with impressive clarity what is in people's hearts. And that's good and bad. We are watching a wave of helpfulness. Groups of schoolchildren and students offer help for older people and organize it carefully. Others sense where emergencies could arise and search creatively for solutions. But there is also the opposite: People make nonsensical hamster purchases and leave nothing for everyday needs or steal toilet paper, soap and disinfectants in clinics where those who need them are lacking. What is the human being? Capable of love and threatened by sheer selfishness.

What is happening now also shows how vulnerable the system is on which our society is based. Global networking is not just an opportunity, it is also a danger. Much of what we take for granted is not as obvious as we thought. The question arises: What can we rely on and what do we build our lives on?

What does that mean for our faith?

This leads to the crucial question: What does this situation mean for our faith, what does it tell us about God? Some will ask: Why does God allow such a dangerous pathogen to spread? Others will see this as a sign of the end times for which the spread of epidemics is predicted. But there have been much more dangerous epidemics in human history. Still, the question remains: Did God create this virus to teach us a lesson?

Some time ago a pastor from Tübingen said a sentence regarding such questions that has accompanied me ever since. He said, "I don't think God let my daughter die to teach me a lesson. But I learned a lot from this experience, which is still important to me to this day." That deadly viruses arise is part of the interplay of life and death that God has put into his creation. Because we know that God is behind all of this, difficult experiences can become a message and a task for us.

Someone was just saying to me: "I have to think about the Tower of Babel again and again." The towers of a booming economy seem to be rising to the sky in our

time - but the question of how stable their foundations are is posed to everyone and each of us.

Praying for faith, hope and love

Whom do we trust? Is it that the stock market prices are constantly rising or that our lives are safe with God? According to the Bible, the faithfulness of God and his love is not shown in the fact that everything always goes smoothly, but in the fact that even in difficult situations we can trust that God is with us and gives us strength to stand the crisis.

But where our attempts to find answers fail, we can pray and ask God:

- for faith and trust that he will be with us when the illness hits us or shatters much that we have relied on so far. We are safe in him; he will give help.
- for hope and confidence that there will be ways out of this crisis. After that, some things will be different. But perhaps the crisis also offers opportunities for new ways of working together.
- for love that overcomes our selfishness and blossoms unexpectedly between people because God gives love, love that fulfills my life and that of others in giving and receiving.

[This article is taken from the bi-weekly magazine "Unterwegs" of the United Methodist Church in Germany - number 9/2020 of April 26, 2020.]

The author Dr. Walter Klaiber is Bishop emeritus of the United Methodist Church. After his retirement, he is living in Tübingen.

Dr. Klaiber was a member of the World Methodist Council Executive; he served on the Methodist/Roman Catholic International Commission for several quinquennia.



Photo credit: © EmK-Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, Volker Kiemle

Libertyville Sunday school holds Kindness Parade for residents

A Sunday school class from the United Methodist Church of Libertyville, Illinois (USA) held a Kindness Parade last week, covering a route that went all the way to Vernon Hills to help spread cheer and uplift residents.

In a congregation of cars with decorated signs on-hand, the students rode with their parents through the area to see senior citizens, said Debbie Williams, the director of children and family ministries within the church. Residents met the parade with smiles and support for the efforts.

With signs ranging from “We love you,” to decorated messaging with hearts, the aim of the parade, as stated in the namesake, was to spread kindness. But this concept of kindness came out from a larger lesson Williams has been teaching in her Sunday class.

Williams said in her classes, which have consisted of Zoom meetings during Sunday school, she has been teaching her students about kindness. The idea for a parade stemmed from various lessons about this topic, and how in the current pandemic climate someone can show kindness.

“How do you show kindness? Well, you hug somebody,” she said. “But obviously you can’t hug somebody or go to their house and visit them. You can’t do those things (right now).”

In coming up with ideas, the students expressed an interest in parades they had been a part of or seen in the past. It was with this Williams suggested the students visit se-

nior citizens who live in a five-mile radius of the church. This led to signs being made and cars being decorated. Meanwhile, Williams got on the phone to tell the local seniors about the plan.

Williams said while the kids had to stay in their respective cars, they were able to see each other and wave at the residents, which Williams said made things feel a little more normal than things are currently.

“It really put our kindness into action,” she said. “One thing I’m trying to instruct the kids on is, you have to put those thoughts into action all the time. Our theme is, ‘It’s cool to be kind all the time.’”

But this parade is one thing in a long list of ideas and actions taken by the students to promote the concept of kindness. Other things pursued include different assignments and creative projects, such as bookmarks, which have been sent out to senior citizens.

Looking to the future, Williams said these kindness lessons will be ongoing. She said in learning how to be kind, they’ve come up with an acronym, “THINK before you speak.” The word THINK stands for be truthful, be helpful, be inspiring, be necessary and be kind.

“I teach the kids, kindness creates more kindness,” Williams said. “It’s like a chain reaction when you’re kind to someone. Not only does it make them feel good, but it makes you feel good too.”

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Nine-year-old, Grace Ciaglo standing up through the sun roof of her mother’s car, making bubbles at the United Methodist Church Friday before parishioners paraded around town in Libertyville, May 15, 2020. (Brian O’Mahoney/Pioneer Press)(Brian O’Mahoney / Pioneer Press)



Parishioners from the United Methodist Church parade around Libertyville Friday, May 15, 2020. (Brian O’Mahoney/Pioneer Press)(Brian O’Mahoney / Pioneer Press)



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