



# FIRST FRIDAY LETTER

The World Methodist Council July 2020

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## Greetings from the General Secretary

There is no doubt that 2020 will go down in history as one of the most tumultuous years of our generation because of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and the global response to systemic racism.

According to data collected by John Hopkins University, this week saw two coronavirus milestones - ten million infections and half a million deaths worldwide. We have responded and adapted to the pandemic through lockdowns, social distancing, sanitizing, and new patterns of behavior, but is it enough?

One of the legendary jazz musicians, Siphon Gumede's rather upbeat tracks, is entitled, *When Days are Dark, Friends are Few*, but many of us are witnessing quite the contrary in response to the health crisis and racism. There has been a revival of community spirit from big business to faith communities, sporting personalities, and individuals.

The World Methodist Council, together with its ecumenical partners through the World Council of Churches in 1968, created the Program to Combat Racism that played a significant role within the international anti-apartheid movement. People of faith are challenged as never before to continue and strengthen their commitment to fighting the scourge of racism. New activism is needed to deal with this gross scandal to the Christian faith.

The response of faith communities, who gather regularly in mosque, synagogues, temples, ashrams, and churches, with minor exceptions, has been exemplary. Many of us hear, know, understand, and share in the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the people we serve. From our commitment to poverty eradication, ending racism, care of creation, and acts of service, we have shown that upholding the sanctity of life and livelihood is valued in all faith traditions.

All our actions count, and everyone has to play their part to beat the coronavirus pandemic and ending racism.

### **A Prayer as we pass through the eye of the COVID-19 storm**

Gracious God, you walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death.

We pray that those who suffer and are overwhelmed by the Covid-19 virus, by hunger or poverty, by fear or grief, be surrounded by the incarnate presence of the crucified and risen, ascended one.

May every human being be reminded of the precious gift of life you entered to share with us.

*Continued on next page*

## Greetings from the General Secretary continued...

May our hearts be pierced with compassion for those who suffer, for those who live daily on the frontlines of the pandemic, for your love is the only healing balm we know.

May the dying and the dead be received into your enfolding arms, and may your friends show the grieving who must walk alone, that they are not alone as they walk this vale of tears.

All this we pray in the name of the one who walked the road to Calvary. Amen.

*(Adapted from a prayer by Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori)*

Blessings from our God of Eternal love and grace,

Ivan

## Wesley's Sanctification A first step toward restorative justice

Methodist founder John Wesley never used modern terminology such as “restorative” or “healing” justice.

In terms of poverty and ill health of the “lower classes,” Wesley could accept neither modern terms such as “blaming the victim” or “criminalising the poor”. Rather, he records the significance of “visiting the sick” - those who today we refer to as the vulnerable and marginalised - as a necessity for his followers who are supposedly saved by grace in “the attainment of eternal salvation” (‘On Visiting the Sick’, VII: 117).

Today’s Methodists and Wesleyans need to understand this notion of “justification by grace through faith” as a comprehension and practise of God’s healing love, visible in justice that heals relationships broken by acts of crime, violence and all fragmentation of human relations. Such progenitor of the restoration of human and social relationships, or today called Restorative Justice, is far superior to any political and legal practices of “conflict resolution” available in Britain during his lifetime and later.

The criminal justice context in which Wesley ministered would have been defined by the legal centring of “The King’s Peace” in which crimes of violence, murder, robbery, false coinage and arson were tried as a violation of the King’s person. This criminal justice system, therefore, rather than being concerned with violations against the offended, placed the “King” as the primary victim. The person harmed by the offense became a “third party” and lost out in legal a process that removed any restitution for the victim. Compensation that might have been due to the victim was now replaced with a “fine” payable to the state.

Several retributive, punitive and cruel measures were put in place for dealing with “crimes against the King.” One such means of punishment was “correction” by “tread-milling” 10 000 steps a day, the offender going nowhere. A first such centre of imprisonment, euphemis-

tically called a “House of Corrections”, was built in 1686 in a small Yorkshire town of Ripon. Wesley would have been familiar with Ripon, which was a debtor’s prison where the poor, for whom he cared much, paid their dues - simply for being poor!

The criminal justice histories of most other cultures outside Britain have entirely different focal points. For many, the search for the restoration of community peace and order, holding the offender accountable to the victim is central. We shall explore differences between Retributive and Restorative Justice in the subsequent issues of FFL.

*Keith Vermeulen is a retired presbyter of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and writes as a researcher for the World Methodist Council*



*Featured at the World Methodist Museum, Wesley meeting with prisoners at debtor's prison.*

## COVID-19 and The Response of Methodist Conferences in Africa

The AMC Webinar was held on 9th June 2020 with participants joining from the various parts of Africa and beyond.

Our speakers were

- Bishop Dr. Hilliard Dogbe, Presiding Bishop Western West Africa Episcopal Zion Church- Online Communication, the new normal in Church Information dissemination.
- Bishop Purity Malinga, Presiding Bishop, Methodist Church of Southern Africa - Implication of the lock down on the means of grace.
- His Eminence, Dr. Samuel Kanu Uche, Prelate Methodist Church Nigeria - The nexus between Welfare and Discipleship in the COVID-19 situation.
- Bishop Joseph Ntombura, AMC President and Presiding Bishop of Methodist Church in Kenya - COVID-19 and The Re -Awakening of Africa.
- Bishop Samuel Kanyinamura AMC Vice President East Africa and Presiding Bishop, Free Methodist Church Rwanda- The Cooperation of Church and Government to win COVID-19.

From the discussions, it was seen that we need to be intentional in the use of our online platforms by investing in training and upgrading of equipment for effective communication and discipleship, while minimising cost of travelling and reducing the spread of diseases. It was noted that communal worship, one of the major aspects of means of grace, has been severely affected; however, the lockdown also strengthened family devotion.

We discovered that Welfare and Methodist Social Action is all about taking care of the body, soul and spirit; therefore, provision of palliatives, especially in form of food relief to vulnerable members and others in the society, was encouraged.

## Vanuatu District begins work in unreached islands

The Vanuatu District of Oceania recently sent its first team to the northern island of Espiritu Santo to begin establishing the Church of the Nazarene's presence. The team participated in a commissioning service in mid-May. Where a pastor testified that she had been praying for many years that God would help bring the message of holiness to her family on Santo. "God has answered my prayers," she said.

When the team arrived at the first village, they began earning the residents' trust by distributing fish, clothes, plates, cups, and spoons. They also passed out Bibles and books for the children. The village chief accepted their gifts, giving his blessing for the team to evangelize.

Each night, the team held a worship service. On 23 May, 21 people accepted Christ. The next night, the team held

COVID-19 has revealed the level of decay in Africa especially in the health sector and this should make us reassess our local health systems.

Methodist Conferences were called upon to support Government with medical supplies and other equipment as the cooperation of Church and Government to win COVID-19 is essential.

Matters Arising

1. Rural evangelism to those who do not have Internet access and improved Relief assistance to the vulnerable members.
2. Paradigm shift in the training of ministers in InfoTech for effective post COVID-19 ministry.
3. Celebration of the Holy Communion, especially during lockdown.
4. Engage the African Union and other Regional bodies to focus more on local solutions.

In conclusion, the pandemic can work as the catalyst for the true emancipation of Africa as we can use this opportunity to chart new socio-economic policies where we can be seen as development partners with the West, solving our problems in creative ways.

*Very Rev. Opeyemi Awe*

General Secretary, Africa Methodist Council



a large worship service where 15 more people committed their lives to Christ. "This has been our prayers for a long time, to bring the Church of the Nazarene to the northern islands, and God is answering our prayer," one person said.

A new believer offered his property as a location for a church shelter but a second man asked that the shelter be built in the center of the village. The team was happy to change locations and built the structure with the help of several local men. Two other teams were also commissioned as part of the district's project to reach new areas. The second team will travel to two other northern islands, Malekula and Ambrym, and the third team will follow.

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

## Early Responder Reports in Gladwin

It has been three weeks since heavy rains fell, and dams burst in the Great Lakes Bay Region. Michigan United Methodists, led by Conference Coordinator for Disaster Recovery Ministries, Nancy Money, have been on the scene since Day One. Leaders have networked with other relief agencies to assess the damage and begin long-term strategies for support of the nearly 6,000 households affected by the flooding. Volunteers arrived from around the state to pitch in with mucking out and caring for teams at the sites.

This eye-witness, hands-on report comes to us from Madeline Hutchison, leader of an Early Response Team (ERT), who had boots on the ground helping with flood clean-up last weekend.

“When we first arrived in the Gladwin area, the amount of devastation was staggering. Wixom Lake, which once held an estimated 26 billion gallons of water emptied in 45 minutes after the Edenville Dam breached. Piles of debris were found up and down the impacted streets, with homeowners scrambling to beat the growth of mold and other damaging consequences. Before the dam emptied, all of the homes surrounding the lake and channels had between 18 to 36 inches of water inside with noticeable interior waterlines from 48 hours of constant rain.”

Once the Edenville dam breached, the lake water emptied from the homes and went rushing towards Midland. A homeowner commented that the terrible irony of the disaster is that the dam breaching is what saved his home. If the dam hadn't breached, his home, along with others on Grouse Street, would have been a total loss.

“We were tasked with visiting homes on two specific streets around Lake Wixom. We worked in conjunction with four other volunteer teams from various churches assessing the damage, providing a plan of action, and doing what we could to secure the homes from further damage. Many of the other volunteer groups were from the community or various church organizations in the area. Due to our team's experience and Early Response training, we were prepared and assigned the task of demolition and mold treatment.



“Other teams, unfortunately, did not come equipped with the required PPE for the demolition of walls, sheetrock, and insulation, so we directed the other teams to work on moving furniture and items out of the home so that we could properly demolish the walls and remove the moldy insulation. It was also apparent that we were the only team that had any formalized training in disaster response work. Our training prepared us to collaborate with the larger groups, create a sufficient plan, and work together to help the homeowners quickly.

“We were about to complete the proper demolition of four homes during our day and half of work. Once the room was cleared of furniture, we cut and removed sheetrock and insulation to 48" above the floor. This can be dangerous work because the walls and insulation had significant mold growth by this point in time. Through the teamwork of all volunteers involved, we were able to prevent these homes from continuing to incur mold damages and shine a little bit of light in a very chaotic time for these homeowners. For that, I will always be grateful for the opportunity to help this beautiful community.”

That's a day in the life of an ERT member.



*Early Response Teams are made up of volunteers who have received training in UMCOR protocols. ERTs know how to prepare a structure for recovery teams and to provide assurance to survivors that God's people care about their lives and homes. ~ photo courtesy Madeline Hutchison*

*A member of a Michigan-trained Early Response Team works on a wall in Gladwin. The home was damaged in flooding that occurred following heavy rains on May 19, 2020. ~ photo courtesy Madeline Hutchison*

# Ministry in the Newly Distanced Church

Part 1 of 2

*Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:4-5*

The profound effects of COVID-19 have forced thousands of churches into new forms of worship. The proliferation of online offerings including worship, Bible studies, devotional teaching times, prayers services, and the like has been staggering. Research suggests that more people are engaging with churches in the new online environment than before the pandemic. This is cause for celebration! This also means that church leaders have an unprecedented challenge before them: how to effectively teach those that they have reached how to stay connected to the true vine of which Jesus speaks. This presents exceptional challenges in a distanced church.

These challenges can present themselves in a variety of ways. While the advent of online worship may mean that more people can connect with a particular church, it might also mean that those who were regular attenders of that same church before the pandemic can now attend any number of other churches from their home. The strong influence of the “attractional church” model in recent decades has resulted in people moving to different churches wherever they feel they are not “being fed.” Ask people why they join a church community and they will frequently cite factors like the preaching style, the music in worship, the programming offered for their kids, or something similar. While all these can have merit, this also means that people are likely to move along to something else when a more attractive opportunity presents itself. In the newly distanced church environment, this can mean that church leaders might feel pressured into something of an “arms race” to provide the slickest online worship offering or more and flashier digital resources than the church down the “virtual street.”

To use another imagery common in the scriptures, these digital resources have provided new ways to welcome lost sheep into the flock, but it has also provided easy ways for sheep to move from one pasture, and shepherd, to another. As these shepherds begin to see their flocks in person again, they are going to find new sheep that have found their way from a far-off place. They are also going to find that some of their sheep have left for what they considered a greener pasture. With the new opportunities presented by online offerings comes new challenges of how to disciple new members of these congregations.

In the passage above, Jesus is reminding the disciples that being connected to one another means being connected to him and vice versa. There is a richness in the term “abide” that should not be overlooked. The Greek word is “meno”

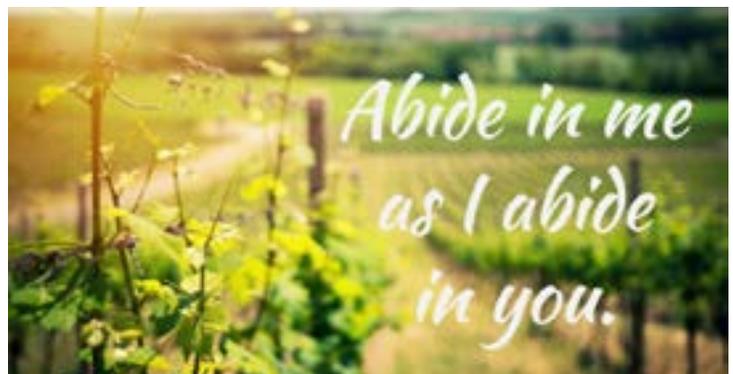
and is the same term used when:

- Jesus tells the disciples to remain in a town sharing and showing the love of Jesus. Matthew 10:11
- John the Baptist describes the dove descending and remaining on Jesus at his baptism. John 1:32
- Jesus tells Zacchaeus that he is going to stay at his house that day. Luke 19:5
- In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asks the disciples to stay awake and pray with him while they remained with him as he was grieved, “even to death.” Matthew 26:38

This is not the first time we have seen an increase in participation in religious activities after a crisis. Churches frequently see an increase in attendance following a natural disaster or a tragedy. The key to ministry in these situations is providing biblical leadership on abiding after the shock of the tragedy fades. However, the COVID-19 crisis presents a unique situation in terms of the length of the impact and the precautions that must be taken to mitigate further harm as the initial impact passes. As churches begin reopening, church leaders and their congregations are finding new and challenging situations in terms of discipling newcomers to their congregation, caring for those who have remained, and reconnecting with those who have disconnected from the vine because the online environment meant they made their way to a new virtual, and distant, church.

Each of these situations will present opportunities and challenges which many leaders have not yet experienced. Fulfilling the mandate to teach people to “abide” will require new and innovative leadership. There is a particular power in being present with one another, in abiding. While physical distancing requires us to think about that in new ways, church leaders should remember the power of presence—real and virtual. Part 2, offers practical ideas about ministering to the newly distanced church. You can find it: <https://www.worldmethodist.org/wme-blog/distanced-church-2/>

*Rev. Dr. Rob Haynes is the Director of Education and Leadership for World Methodist Evangelism.*



## When We Pray

The Worship & Liturgy committee has formed a series of conversations in June and plan to have the next set in August. The discussion material is linked below:

[https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/akb\\_Burns-Becoming-We-Published-2020.pdf](https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/akb_Burns-Becoming-We-Published-2020.pdf)

### Introduction to this Reading

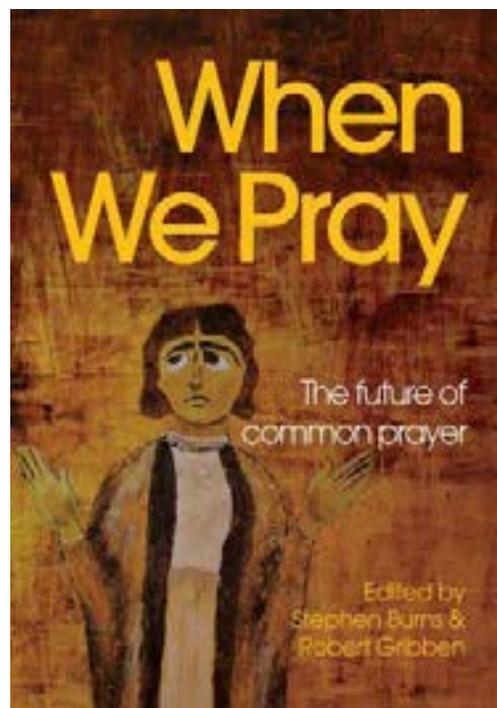
I have been learning about Worship through my engagement with the World Methodist Council. Part of my learning has been the opportunity to gather with other people formed and nurtured by the Wesleyan tradition. It has been a steep learning curve and full of challenges and delights. This essay was an opportunity to reflect on some of the emerging issues. The original version of this essay has been published in a collection from the Pacific/Oceania:

#### **When We Pray - *The Future of Common Prayer***

Edited By Stephen Burns and Robert Gribben, May 2020

The essays in this volume from liturgists in mainstream Christian churches in Australia and New Zealand gladly acknowledge that when we pray, we join with others.

We share a history, a way of worshipping, often a common language and established forms, with authorised prayer books designed to retain the theological and liturgical emphases of the various churches. Yet it is a subject that can divide as well as unite; with a variety of experiences, attitudes and aspirations, especially in a world where forms of worship are readily accessible from internet sources. If worship and prayer express what we believe, who authorises forms of worship; who determines the authenticity of liturgy; what principles underlie and surround how people of faith worship in formal gatherings? These are some of the issues that inform the essays in this practical and ecumenical resource.



## WMC receives major donation

The World Methodist Council gratefully acknowledges the generosity of longtime staff member, the late Edna A. Alsdurf, who left \$199,569.57 to the Council.

“It is a blessing to receive such a substantial contribution. Not only will the almost \$200,000 make a difference in the mission and ministry, but the affirmation that is shown when a key staff member has this much belief in the Council’s work is very affirming,” General Secretary Ivan Abrahams said. “I knew Mrs. Alsdurf and her husband, Ken, and enjoyed fellowship with them. She was a very special person.”

The legacy of Mrs. Alsdurf and her family will continue as her contribution touches the lives of people around the world. Some of these funds will be used to empower youth and young adults to be more engaged in the work of the Council in order to assure the Council’s future.

Edna Beatrice Atkinson Alsdurf died Aug. 18, 2018 and her husband Kenneth Gordon Alsdurf passed away June 24, 2017.

## Join in the work of the Council!

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I support the work of the World Methodist Council. Marked by an X my donation is to be used in the area below:

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YYA Increase the number of Youth and Young Adults (YYA) in the Council's ministry and mission.

PLC Honor or memorialize a President or Chair by donating to the Presidents Legacy Circle (PLC)

Conference The Council meets every five years. Efforts are made to include under-served countries and populations so that everyone has a voice and a seat at the table.

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# Churches say peace treaty is essential next step for Korean Peninsula

**Churches throughout the world are calling for a peace treaty to formally end the Korean War that started 70 years ago.**

They are also calling for the normalization of relations between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the United States, in the quest for a peaceful future for the Korean Peninsula.

Seventy years ago, the war began in northeast Asia and left the Korean Peninsula devastated. Fighting was suspended by a ceasefire – the Armistice Agreement of 1953 – but the war has never been formally declared over or a peace treaty concluded. Special prayers and efforts are needed for a shared peaceful future on the Korean Peninsula future on this anniversary occasion, say the churches.

A renewed escalation of tensions in the region has recently put the world on edge again. A Joint Ecumenical Peace Message for the 70th anniversary of the start of the Korean War was publicly delivered on 22 June during a live-streamed event which acknowledged these tensions but described them as evidence of the urgent need for new initiatives for peace.

Co-sponsored by churches and councils of churches around the world, especially from countries that participated in the Korean War, the message describes the war as an “appallingly destructive conflict”.

They are calling for healing wounds for a shared future for the long-divided Korean people.

## Sombre anniversary

“On this sombre 70th-anniversary occasion, we, as churches and councils of churches from countries that played a role in the division and conflict on the Korean Peninsula, join in calling for: An immediate formal dec-

laration of the end of the Korean War.”

They are also calling for swift steps towards the adoption of a peace treaty to replace the 1953 Armistice Agreement, as a starting point for further progress towards the realization of a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

They note that “Seven decades after this war began, it is time to acknowledge that it ended long ago. New challenges to peace and stability in the region have arisen in the meantime, but we do not believe that the resolution of those challenges will be facilitated by keeping that 70-year-old conflict open.”

“On the contrary, we believe that the conditions for pragmatic dialogue and negotiation on current realities on the Peninsula could be greatly enhanced by recognizing the end of the war.”

They urge resumption of dialogue between the Republic of Korea and the DPRK, and between the USA and the DPRK, with the encouragement and support of other states who were involved in the Korean War.

They call for the normalization of diplomatic relations between the DPRK and the USA. The churches are also calling for the suspension and cancellation of any further military exercises in the region.

“We appeal for the fulfilment of the letter and spirit of all the agreements that had given so much hope of progress towards peace on the Korean Peninsula – in particular the Panmunjom Declaration of April 2018, the Pyongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018, and the Singapore Joint Statement of June 2018.”

*Read more at <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news>*



## A just recovery – post-COVID-19

The Uniting Church in Australia has outlined a set of principles and key actions that will guide the way to a better future as Australia recovers from the coronavirus pandemic. UCA President Dr. Deidre Palmer said the COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the stark inequality and disparity in our Australian society and exacerbated the disadvantage faced by our most vulnerable people.

“In recent days, we have seen thousands of people around our country stand against inequality, specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the pressing need to address deaths in custody and the calls for Voice, Truth and Treaty. It is a reminder that as a nation we must do better.

As Australia looks to a post-COVID-19 world, we have a unique opportunity to renew our vision, to reimagine policy and to find creative ways to rebuild a nation that is just for everyone,” said Dr Palmer.

“One of the key learnings in this time of crisis is how deeply we are connected to one another, how deeply we depend on each other. What we have seen clearly is that we are only as strong and healthy as the most vulnerable members of our society.” Dr. Palmer commended the Federal and State Governments for their collaborative leadership in ensuring Australians were kept healthy and those impacted economically could access support.

“It has shown us that when we make sacrifices for the well-being of the whole society, everyone benefits.” The document, Build Back Better: A Just Recovery, Post-Covid-19, draws upon the Uniting Church vision for a just Australia based on our belief that each person is created in the image of God and deeply loved by God.

As Christians, we see in the life and mission of Jesus, God’s call for abundant life for all people and the renewal of the whole creation.

The Assembly has drawn the document together with input from across the Church, including from our agencies delivering community services on the ground, our Uniting Aboriginal Islander and Christian Congress (UAICC) and others working in the area of justice.



The principles we believe will guide a better future are:

- Build Resilient Individuals, Families and Communities
- Build a more equal society
- Build a nation where everyone is respected and has a voice
- Creative, collaborative and constructive leadership to rebuild Australia.
- Build for a sustainable future

The Uniting Church has further described 12 key actions to achieve these principles.

- Stimulation of the economy with a focus on job creation by investing in projects that are good for all Australians and for our planet.
- Fix gaps in the social security safety net and ensure a permanent increase to Jobseeker Allowance, providing a livable safety net for those out-of-work.
- Ensure community services are properly resourced to support vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, families and communities, and to respond to areas of growing need, including domestic and family violence and mental health.
- First Peoples and rural and remote communities have adequate access to food and health services.
- Initiatives that improve access to affordable housing for all people.
- Ensuring our tax system is fair and transparent, with individuals and corporations contributing fairly to the costs of post-COVID recovery.
- Doing our share for the global recovery from COVID-19 and building a more equitable, safe and sustainable world for the future.
- Reducing fossil fuel usage, and excessive consumption of resources to build for a sustainable future.
- Adequate support for people living with disability and older Australians.
- Prioritising work towards Voice, Truth and Treaty for First Peoples, meaningful action on incarceration rates for Indigenous Australians and calling out racism and building inclusion across all Australian society.
- A focus on creating pathways to permanent migration.
- Collaboration between Governments and civil society with political leadership focused on common good.

Read more of this article at <https://assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/3197-a-just-recovery-post-covid-19>



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 July 27 for the August 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).

### About the First Friday Letter

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