



FIRST FRIDAY LETTER

The World Methodist Council September 2020

Greetings from the General Secretary

Dear sisters and brothers,

From September 1 to October 4, Christians around the world celebrate the “Season of Creation.” After all, we have been through this year, and as many countries move out of the infectious phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, this year’s celebration theme is very appropriate; “**Jubilee for the Earth; New Rhythms, New Hope.**” I encourage you to download the resources to join the celebration: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/2020-season-of-creation-celebration-guide>

In last month’s First Friday Letter, I drew attention to the fact that COVID-19 has exposed the inequalities in our world and the need for more just and sustainable ways of living. I further posed a question if our generation will be remembered as those who rediscovered the link with the creation and the people who worked towards justice and peace for all, or will we have missed the opportunity to address social and economic inequality?

We live in what some have described as a “cut flower” consumer society, a world without windows, often tone-deaf to the groans of creation and human need. Reading **Earth Bible**, edited by Norman C. Habel, forced me to recognize my anthropocentric orientation in theology and how it influenced my interpretation of scripture. I found the Wesleyan scholar, Howard A. Snyder’s **Earth Currents: The Struggle for the World’s Soul** and “**Salvation Means Creation Healed: Creation, Cross, Kingdom, and Mission,**” The Asbury Journal Vol. 62 p. 9-47 most helpful in my search for a Wesleyan environmental ethic for our day and age. In a recent article entitled, **Wesley the Environmentalist?** (<https://www.catalystresources.org/wesley-the-environmentalist/>), Snyder offers four “ecological” principles that Wesleyans can own as they contribute to the discussions about environmental stewardship. Firstly, *love for God and neighbor extends to all creation.* Secondly, *linked with love is the call to stewardship.* Thirdly, *Wesley’s emphasis on “social Christianity” and “social holiness” carries creation-care implications.* Lastly, *Wesley’s economic sensitivity has creation-care implications.* I encourage you to explore these principles.

We need to challenge the way commodity markets and agribusiness places profits before people. To paraphrase, former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, caring for creation is not an optional extra but a matter of justice. It is central to what it means to be a Christian. Methodists all over the world should respond to the issues of climate justice, saying loudly and clearly; “This far and no further; let’s act now and act fast.”

Keep safe and healthy.

Ivan

Clanwilliam, South Africa.

This West Coast area is renowned for its wild flowers. That have never been touched/planted by human hands. Blooms appear each August and it reverts to dry barren land until winter rains come again.

Photo by Neal Bruton



A prayer for Beirut

On Tuesday 4th of August 2020 an explosion shook Beirut and all of Lebanon. The tremor of the explosion was felt in Cyprus, some 240Km away. Everything within a 10 Km radius was damaged, houses, buildings, shops, cars, etc. The explosion was a chemical one and what followed was a toxic pollution of the air.

Churches, mosques, schools, hospitals in addition to homes and shops in the area were all destroyed. The affected area is home almost 1 million people, in one of the denser population areas in Lebanon. Over 135 people have been killed and over 5,000 people injured. This is not counting the people who have not yet been found.

I was born, grew up and lived most of my life about 1.5 Km away from the location of the explosion, seeing the pictures of the destruction brought memories, and much loved places that broke my heart. My church, my school, the street I used to play on and the hospitals I went to when needed, all destroyed. I have not yet seen any pictures of my house. My family and my friends are all in that area. The picture is one corner of my school and church.

Below is a prayer for the situation in Beirut and the people who are in need of our prayers. There is a long and a shorter version of the prayer. I prefer the longer version be used, but you are welcome to use the shorter version. UnitingWorld has launched an appeal to help with the rebuilding of the city infrastructure. The Middle East National Conference is running a parallel appeal to assist with the immediate needs of the people of Beirut. I ask that you be generous in showing your love and care for the people of Beirut. God of creation,

You create the Cedars of Lebanon and give them their majesty to withstand all tribulations for your own pleasure. You exalt them to represent eternity, strength, and endurance. Yet we have cut them down and destroyed them for our own personal pleasures. As we remember the Cedars of Lebanon, we also remember the people of Lebanon in their diversity of cultures and faith.

Prayer

God of explosions and pollution,

Out of the depths we call to you; in the face of incomprehensible anguish and sorrow, we lift the cries of our distress and implore you to show mercy upon those who are suffering from the destruction of the explosion in Beirut and the ensuing chemical pollution. Give protection and wisdom to emergency service personnel, doctors, nurses, hospitals, and all those who assist in elevating the pain and suffering of those affected. Encourage our generosity to those who suffer loss. In your mercy restore your creation and heal our land.

We pray for those who have been injured in body, mind or spirit and ask you to heal them;

Grant us all firm resolve to stand with our neighbours who are in need, to love them and to offer our generous support of them in this their time of trouble.

Amen.

To read more on this story follow the link: <https://theobloggy.org.au/prayer-for-beirut/>

Aerial view of the streets of Beirut



Condolences to the United Methodist Church of Sierra Leone

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The World Methodist Council has learnt with great sadness and shock of the tragic death of your spiritual leader, The Right Reverend John K. Yambasu on 17th August. We understand that Bishop John sadly succumbed to an accident on his way to attend the funeral of a colleague, The late Revd. Edmund Kamara, in Northern Sierra Leone.

On behalf of the World Methodist Council, representing some 80 million people called Methodists across the globe, I convey my heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathies to the United Methodist family at large. I pray that the Almighty bind up your broken hearts and souls as you prepare to come to terms at your devastating loss.

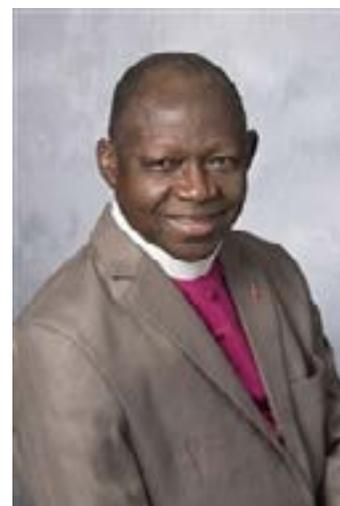
And yet, we give thanks to the Creator for the gift that was Bishop Yambasu, for his Ministries in Christian Education and Youth, for founding the Child Rescue Center in Sierra Leone and for his leadership as Bishop of the United Methodist Church since 2008.

We pray too, during this time of grief, when brokenness of heart and spirit forcefully remind us that death is woven into the very fabric of our human existence, that Bishop Yambasu's wife, Millicent and children, Rebecca, Adima, John, Emmanuel and Elizabeth will know God's love and comfort in a very special way.

The Lord is near to those who mourn; he lifts up those whose spirit is crushed. Psalm 34:18;
The Lord binds up the brokenhearted, Isaiah 61:1-3

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Ivan M. Abrahams
General Secretary



Right Reverend John K. Yambasu

Bishop Nhiwatiwa elected president of Africa College of Bishops

Bishop Eben K. Nhiwatiwa, Resident Bishop of the Zimbabwe Area of The United Methodist Church, was elected as interim president of the Africa College of Bishops. He follows Bishop John K. Yambasu, the Resident Bishop of the Sierra Leone Area who died in a road accident on Sunday.

In electronic balloting, the active bishops in Africa selected Bishop Nhiwatiwa as their new leader. He serves the Zimbabwe East and Zimbabwe West conferences in the Africa Central Conference. There are 66 active bishops in The United Methodist Church throughout the world.

Bishop Nhiwatiwa has served the church in various capacities from local, district and conference levels. He was elected a bishop of the church in August 2004. He currently serves as the Board member and Chair of the Finance Committee of the Africa University Board of Directors.

Bishop Yambasu, who was also the newly elected Chancellor of Africa University, died in an accident while he was on his way to attend a funeral service for one of his pastors.

Bishop Nhiwatiwa and other bishops in Africa will make a recommendation to the Council of Bishops on which bishop would serve ad interim as resident bishop of Sierra Leone Area.

“While remaining extraordinarily sensitive to the grief we all share there was a need to fill this role as they will soon begin their work to identify persons to fill the vacancy left by Bishop Yambasu's death,” noted Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, President of the Council of Bishops. “Bishop Yambasu played a critical leadership role in the church, the ecumenical outreach, the government and of course the broader global church. His death leaves a void of leadership particularly in Sierra Leone. The College is well aware of this and will recommend to the Council of Bishops coverage for this interim assignment.”

Africa University Board of Directors will select a new chancellor.

Read more of this story at <https://www.unitedmethodist-bishops.org/newsdetail>

Water project lightens load for new mothers

The United Methodist Church has installed rainwater-collection systems at three of its health facilities in the East Congo Episcopal Area, a move that is being hailed by pregnant women and new mothers who often had to walk miles to fetch water after giving birth.

The project, which benefits hospitals in Bukavu, Goma and Osio village, was funded by a \$7,800 grant from the United Methodist Committee on Relief. The rainwater systems were installed in June. Having an adequate, dependable supply of water enables United Methodist medical structures to operate safely and more efficiently, said Dr. Marie Claire Diandja Manafundo, coordinator for the church's Maternal and Child Health program. "The goal is to fight infectious diseases in hospitals," she said, adding that a lack of water complicates efforts. The new systems will save lives every day in East Congo, she said.

According to the Congolese Ministry in charge of sustainable development, only 38% of the population has access to clean drinking water in urban areas, and that number falls to 17% in rural areas. The shortage affects United Methodist facilities and is especially difficult on maternity patients. "(Some United Methodist clinics) are in places where water is scarce," said Dr. Damas Lushima, general coordinator of health for the episcopal area. "The woman who has just given birth is called upon to travel miles to fetch water while she is still in the maternity hospital. The installation of rainwater-collection systems alleviates the difficulty of water in our health structures."

The UMCOR grant provided tanks and tools to gather rainwater at the three health centers during the rainy season. Kits were installed on the roof of each hospital to collect the water and channel it to the new reservoir tanks. Manafundo, the wife of East Congo Bishop Gabriel Yemba Unda, said the impact of the project is far-reaching. "Without water, it is difficult to minimize the risk of contamination from various diseases in our hospitals. There are diarrheal diseases, cholera, Ebola, which recurs from time to time. Now, we are fighting COVID-19. We need to have water to wash our hands for good use in our health facilities. Despite the advantages of the system, its success relies on the rainy season," she said.

Dr. Chilove Okenge, who works for the new United Methodist Medical Center in Osio, a rural village about 15 miles from Kisangani, said the hospital is in an area that is not served by Regideso, the Congolese government's water-supply system. "The permanence of water in the hospital depends on the rainy season. During the dry season, with the absence of rains, it is difficult for the reservoirs to be supplied with water, which puts us in a difficult situation," he said.

Before the rainwater-collection system was installed at the facility, patients often had to fetch their own wa-

ter. "After childbirth, we do not have enough energy or strength to perform certain tasks such as (fetching our) water supply," Safi Pauni said. "I am happy that those in charge of this structure have listened to our cries because during the prenatal consultations, all the women were shouting about the water difficulty here in Osio.

"We say thank you to The United Methodist Church for bringing us this center, and today we have water on site, while those who had given birth before us were forced to walk for miles to the river to stock up on water," she said.

Manafundo said that while the rainwater project is a good starting point, the ideal situation would be to install water wells at all United Methodist health structures. "For lack of sufficient resources, we preferred to start with the rainwater-supply system. But with the borehole, which does not depend on rain, we will have water all the time, and even members of the local community can use it," she said.

Dr. Djimmy Kasongo, medical director at United Methodist Irambo Hospital in Bukavu, said the facility has long faced water problems "The lack of water in this hospital led us each time to buy water elsewhere. We have Regideso water facilities in our health center, but we lacked water due to the low pressure. Now Irambo has a new, larger water tank and the rainwater-collection system. (The tanks) sometimes allow us to conserve water, especially during this dry season when water has become a scarce commodity in the city of Bukavu," Kasongo said.

Pacifique Kababili, attending nurse at Irambo, thanked UMCOR for the implementation of the project, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the nursing staff and patients must wash hands frequently to stop the spread of the virus. "It was sometimes difficult for us to wash our hands every time, but now we have water reserves that will allow us to observe the rules of hygiene," she said.

Anny Karine, who gave birth July 8 at the hospital, said she was pleased to benefit from the new water project. "This has just given a new image (to the hospital's maternity ward) and allows pregnant women to have water for the cleanliness of their children and also for motherhood in general," she said. "I (first) gave birth in 2017 in this hospital, when there was a lack of water, but today we have water all the time."

Photo courtesy of United Methodist Irambo Hospital



Hurricane Laura makes landfall in Louisiana



Results of Hurricane Laura in Louisiana

On 27 August, Hurricane Laura made landfall on the Louisiana coast as a Category 4 storm with sustained winds up to 150 mph. As of Friday morning, six people were killed.

The hurricane had already swept over Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Puerto Rico, killing at least 24 people and damaging thousands of homes. The storm followed closely behind tropical depression Marco, which brought heavy rain to the region just a few days prior. While flooding caused by storm surges and damage from the storm has not been as severe as anticipated, many coastal towns and cities sustained damage.

In the days leading up to the hurricane, Nazarene districts and local churches in Texas and Louisiana were preparing a response. In Lake Charles, Louisiana, the city that was hit the hardest, Lake Charles First Church of the Nazarene sustained damage to the roof. At least two church members have also lost their homes, although because most people have not returned to their homes, the full extent of the damage is still unknown.

Nazarene Disaster Response teams, who travel to disaster affected zones to assist churches, were on standby Wednesday as the storm drew closer and are ready to support pastors as they assess damage in their churches and communities. The South Texas District has also been mobilizing crisis care kits and other relief supplies in preparation, enabling churches to be ready to respond before the storm hit.

How You Can Help

Pray

Pray for those who have lost loved ones, and pray for those facing loss of homes and livelihoods. Pray for the months of recovery ahead, when developing resilience will be key. Pray for those who are most vulnerable during and after the storm, especially senior adults, individuals with disabilities, and people living in poverty. Pray for church leaders and churches responding to the needs around them.

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

Restorative Justice: Biblical and Healing Justice

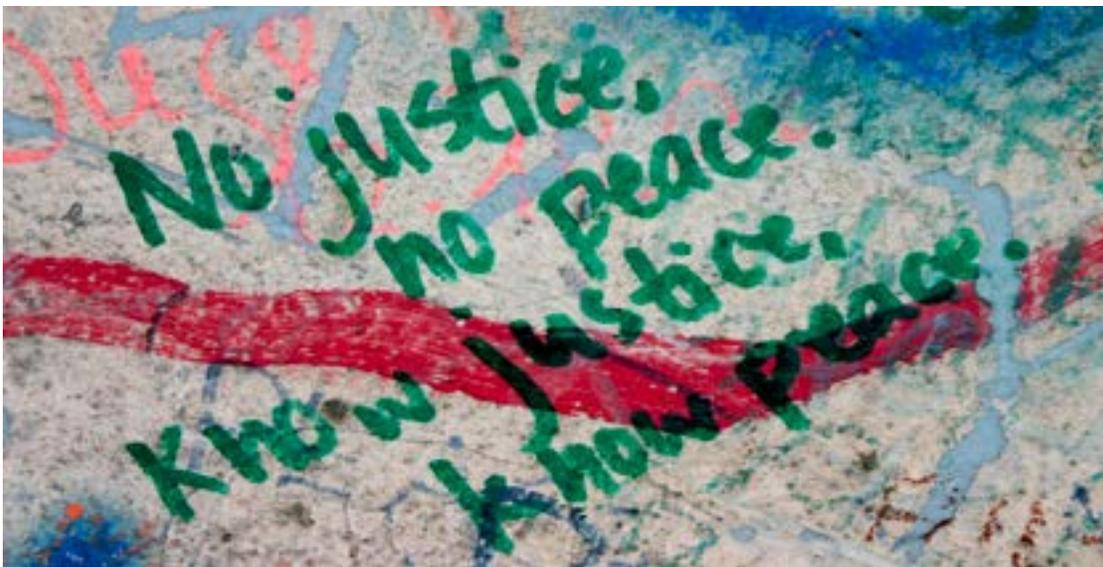
The WMC General Secretary, in a recent virtual discussion led by UMC Director of Missions, Dr. David Scott, spoke of his qualified support for UNSC Resolution 2532 which called for a total cessation of hostilities under COVID 19. UNSC Resolution 2532 was passed so that medical assistance, food supplies and humanitarian aid could be delivered to war ravaged zones during the pandemic. Bishop Ivan, however, qualified his support, objecting to the UNSC's exclusion of war against ISIL, ISIS, Al Qaeda and similar referenced groups pointing out that nations such as Yemen and Palestine would suffer a double blow fighting against both COVID 19 and Western armed forces.

The WMC archives are filled with decades of resolutions that indicate true peace is not just an absence of war but also the presence of a justice tempered with God's mercy and care for all God's people everywhere. In South Africa, however, after five months of COVID 19 lockdown, the SA Police Services has claimed the lives of at least fourteen civilians, the latest being a 16 year old, "autistic, coloured" boy who is alleged to have broken the "State of Disaster" lockdown rules. In the United States, police officers are said to have dealt with protests against a racialised police officer who held his knee on George Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes until the latter died with all manner of brutal crowd control. Police-use-of-force against an unarmed Jacob Blake, grandson of Reverend Jacob Blake Sr., a lead pastor at Evanston's Ebenezer AME Church during the 1960 and 70s, who was shot 7 times in the back is left paralysed and fighting for his life. These beg the question whether government training of police officers can be considered anything but retributive and undermining of "people's security."

In the New Testament, Jesus speaks to a forward looking, not retributive justice. Revenge, retaliation and the "*Lex Talionis*" have no roles in his notion of justice. Instead, Jesus absolves a prostitute, a man who hears voices in his head, an adulteress, a thieving tax collector and a highway robber! The notion of "just deserts" and "three strikes and you're out!" are firmly rejected in his stories of the vineyard workers (*Matthew 20: 1-6*) and in the story of God, the Loving Parent (*Luke 15: 11-32*). The story about Lazarus and the unnamed wealthy man (*Luke 16: 19-31*) is especially appropriate for our world of unprecedented poverty, inequality and joblessness. We are told that the wealthy man is obligated - through God's justice - to share what he has at his table with the poor and not regard his giving as a charitable and optional extra (*see Leviticus 25: 35*). In whatever manner the wealthy man comes by his wealth, he is obligated to share with Lazarus, a poor man who has nothing. Since he fails to do this, he is condemned. For Jesus, wealth and poverty can only be reconciled through a sharing of wealth with the poor, the vulnerable and marginalised. In another story of hired daily labour in the vineyard (*Matthew 20*), God's right to give to those who do not deserve "equal pay for equal work" is not a contradiction to God's goodness and justice. Instead, God's generosity may be seen as a justice that serves life in all its fullness and abundance (*John 10: 10*).

Howard Zehr, widely regarded as the "Father of Restorative Justice in USA," says: "The God who saves, freeing from oppression regardless of merit, is limited in wrath but unlimited in love. It is God's unlimited love, not God's wrath, which we are told to imitate." In this same manner, the people called Methodists are challenged to spread this "scriptural holiness" by proclamation of the "evangelical faith." In the October edition of FFL, we shall explore and compare contemporary forms of justice with Biblical Justice.

Keith Vermeulen is a retired presbyter of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and writes as a WMC researcher



Methodists crucial in fight for women's vote



Women march in the 1913 Women Suffrage Procession in Washington

Crowds jammed into the Tennessee state capitol on a hot August morning in 1920 for what all expected to be a momentous day. The question on everyone's mind: How would the Tennessee legislators vote on U.S. women's right to vote?

Ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution required 36 states' approval, and 35 states were already in hand. However, ratification was far from assured.

Most of Tennessee's southern neighbors had rejected the measure. The state's legislature faced pressure to do the same and begin sounding the amendment's death knell.

Suffragists in the gallery had little hope that eastern Tennessee Rep. Harry T. Burn, the state's youngest legislator at age 24, would join their ranks.

They could see that Burn's lapel bore a red rose, a symbol of opposition to the women's vote. What they could not see was the letter in his pocket — carrying advice from his Methodist mother.

"Dear Son: Hurrah, and vote for suffrage!" Phoebe "Febb" Burn wrote from the town of Niota, Tennessee, where she attended what is now Niota United Methodist Church. "Don't keep them in doubt."

Her son's sudden "aye" tied the vote and emboldened fellow legislator Banks Turner to give the decisive 49th assent. Thus, Tennessee secured women citizens a voice in their nation's democracy, including in that year's presidential election.

People across the United States last month marked the centennial of that historic vote on Aug. 18, 1920. However, achieving this victory took more than one mother's letter, and the fight for ballot access continues even now.

The 19th Amendment followed more than 70 years of persistence through setbacks and sacrifice. The people called Methodist were part of the struggle from almost the beginning.

"Methodists have a long history of strong, leading women," writes the Rev. Susan Lyn Moudry, a historian, in an article for the United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

John Wesley accepted women lay preachers and class leaders from his movement's earliest days.

Advocates for women's rights and the abolition of slavery worked closely together. Sojourner Truth, a former slave who began her public ministry as an itinerant Methodist preacher, was an activist for both causes.

But after the U.S. Civil War, opponents to change successfully drove a wedge between the activists. The 15th Amendment assured only African American men had the right to vote, and even that assurance soon proved weak in the face of states' Jim Crow laws.

Meanwhile, many white suffragists turned their backs on the struggle for racial equality to focus on fighting for their own access to the ballot box. While women could vote in a handful of western states, starting with Wyoming in 1869, their success at the national level remained stubbornly elusive and multiple state referendums on the women's vote went down to defeat.

The word suffrage comes from the Latin word *suffragium*, meaning voting tablet. Still, opponents were happy to play on its similarity to another English word. With women's suffrage, critics argued, men and families would suffer.

Rev. Anna Howard Shaw, one of the first women ordained in the Methodist Protestant Church, was president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association for 11 years.

However, Shaw and her fellow suffragists were often deeply divided on the best tactics to pursue and perhaps most profoundly on matters of race.

Continued..

Methodists crucial in fight for women's vote continued...

Ida B. Wells-Barnett, baptized a Methodist while a student at Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, was a pioneering Black journalist, anti-lynching activist and suffragist. However, fellow suffragists asked Wells-Barnett — one of the most seasoned veterans in the fight — not to walk alongside them during the landmark 1913 national suffrage parade in Washington. The women's suffrage association feared alienating white support. But when a mob overtook the parade route and began beating women marchers, Wells-Barnett rejoined her fellow suffragists in the chaos.

“One had better die fighting against injustice than die like a dog or a rat in a trap,” was Wells-Barnett's motto. That was not the only violence suffragists would endure on the road to ratification. They continued to face mob attacks and when arrested for civil disobedience, they endured brutality in prison — including force-feedings when they went on hunger strike.

Annette Dorris and other United Methodist Women in the district are using the 19th Amendment's centennial as an opportunity to encourage U.S. citizens to vote, especially in Tennessee. In 2016, Tennessee ranked 48th in the nation for voter turnout among all states and the District of Columbia.

“Let's honor their sacrifice by getting out and voting,” Dorris said.

Metanoia ~ Transformation Despite Disruption

When it comes to disruption, 2020 has been filled to the brim. It is mindboggling how much has occurred in just a few short months — a global pandemic, a global reckoning with the sin of systemic racism, typhoons, hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados. There have been so many “unprecedented” events, it is hard to keep track and I am sure I have overlooked a few. My apologies.

In the midst of all of this challenge and disruption, young adults continue to follow Jesus with passion and perseverance and World Methodist Evangelism is honored to be able to walk with them on their continued journey of *metanoia* — transformation.

This month would have been the beginning of the registration process for Metanoia 2021, WME's **international gathering for young adults aged 18-35**. Unfortunately, 2020 upended those plans. So, following the lead of the World Methodist Council, we have postponed Metanoia until 2022. You will want to **mark your calendars for August 1-7, 2022**. We will gather in Sweden for a time of spiritual transformation — within us, between us, and beyond us. Our theme is A Covenant of Belonging: Living as Faithful Stewards of our World and its People. You will not want to miss this opportunity to engage a global body of young adults and grapple with significant issues that are impacting our world, like climate change, migration, and systemic racism.

Dorris also sees in Febb Burn's timely letter the difference one mother can make. Burn's vote, important as it was, did not accomplish full suffrage. Many Black, Native American, Hispanic and Asian American women who had struggled for the 19th Amendment's passage still were denied access to the ballot box. Methodist women such as Mary McLeod Bethune, Jessie Daniel Ames and Dorothy Height would continue the fight for voting rights and racial justice long after that August day in 1920.

Moudry, the United Methodist historian, said the Methodist involvement in the women's suffrage movement shows that change is long and hard.

“The work for justice does not happen overnight; we cannot get discouraged or give into moments of defeat,” said Moudry, who is also the coordinator of clergy and lay leadership excellence in the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

“Leaders are needed who build bridges and help the church understand the issues involved in justice work,” she added. “This takes great courage and unwavering commitment, even in the midst of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.”

Read more of this story at <https://www.umnews.org/>

If you are a young adult between 18-35 we pray you will start now to make preparations to attend. Need based scholarships will be available. If you are a church leader, we pray you will begin identifying young adults who might benefit from this unique and transformative experience.

In the meantime, to gather momentum for 2022, the Metanoia Design Team is planning several web-based events and conversations to take place during 2021. This team is made up of folks from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, the Pacific, and South America and we are excited about the experiences they will create. Watch for additional information in the First Friday newsletter, on the WME website (www.worldmethodist.org), and on Social Media. We covet your prayers for this process and for the young adults whom God will be lifting up.

Respectfully submitted by Kimberly D. Reisman



world
methodist
evangelism

Colleges, seminaries reopen amid COVID-19



Students at University of Indianapolis

As president of United Methodist-related McMurry University in Abilene, Texas, Sandra Harper is used to worrying about big stuff, such as finances, enrollment, personnel and buildings. Last month, she was also having to make sure students were wearing masks and getting their temperatures taken before checking into dorm rooms. Harper's concerns include the looming West Texas Fair & Rodeo, an opportunity for the coronavirus to spread through Abilene and surrounding Taylor County. "That's a big event, and it hasn't been canceled," Harper said, noting that her school has no known COVID-19 cases and has a contact-tracing team ready.

Across United Methodist-related higher education — including 13 seminaries and 112 colleges and universities in the U.S. alone — there's a scramble on to reopen safely for fall semester amid the ongoing pandemic. . Protecting faculty, staff and students is paramount, but private schools also must try to maintain enrollment and offer a rich enough campus experience to justify tuition rates higher than at public schools. That's a big task with COVID-19-related restrictions in place.

Scott Miller is in his 30th year as a college president, a period that includes 9/11 and the Great Recession. He doesn't think those events compare to the challenges currently facing private higher education. "You add those together and multiple by 10 and that's what the pandemic has created for us," said Miller, president of Virginia Wesleyan University and the North American Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities.

When COVID-19 forced much of the U.S. into lockdown in March, United Methodist colleges and seminaries joined their counterparts in moving to online classes only for the balance of spring term. Federal funds through the CARES Act and Paycheck Protection Program helped schools avoid layoffs and cover rebates for student housing and meal costs. "That was a godsend," Harper said.

But the pandemic has persisted, complicated by widely varying infection rates across the country.

Some United Methodist seminaries, such as Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, in Evanston, Illinois, made an early call to stick with online classes through term. "We're being very cautious. We have not made a decision about the spring, and we probably won't until early October," said Lallene Rector, Garrett-Evangelical's president. "We want to see what's happening with the other schools that are opening." For now, Rector said,

online enrollment looks strong and the early decision allowed the school to hire a new technology specialist and upgrade generally its online presence.

Methodist Theological School in Ohio is, like Garrett-Evangelical, a stand-alone institution — not embedded in a university. MTSO's surveying found new students, especially, wanted to be on campus, so the seminary is offering some in-person classes this term. The roomy, 80-acre campus in Delaware, Ohio, helped with that decision. "We can social distance with the best of them," said the Rev. Jay Rundell, president.

Duke Divinity School, in Durham, NC, has followed Duke University's requirements. That will mean some in-person classes, but lots of online classes, and students who want to take all their classes online can do so. "Some of our students have chosen a completely online option and not even moved back to North Carolina," said G. Sujin Pak, vice dean of academic affairs. Duke is just 11 miles from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which recently pulled back on offering in-person classes after a spike of COVID-19 cases among students. At Duke, Pak said, mask-wearing is strictly enforced and there's a Duke Compact that students sign, wherein they agree to observe health protocols. "We've also decided to start a week early so we could finish all our classes prior to Thanksgiving."

Dillard University, one of 11 historically black colleges and universities supported by the United Methodist Black College Fund, is using that hybrid approach. The New Orleans University has posted on its website a 20-page guide for reopening. President Walter Kimbrough said Dillard did surveys, and he personally sat in on focus groups to gauge what turned out to be strong sentiment, including from faculty, for having resuming campus life. But lots will be different. "We're on the conservative side with residence halls. Everybody's in a single," Kimbrough said.

Read more of this story at <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/>
Photo by Luke Cooley

Methodist Liaison Office Report

Throughout the month of August, there have been continued daily protests in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv against PM Netanyahu due to his handling of the Corona Virus and the economic situation. Israelis and non-Israelis are allowed to enter Israel without being quarantined for 2 weeks only if they arrive from the green list of countries. The Israeli airport authority last Sunday announced that foreigners coming from countries that are not on the green list will not be able to enter Israel until at least October 1st.

Gaza has been firing daily explosive balloons into Israel. Israel has retaliated daily since 6th August. However there appears to have been a deal made at the end of the month after talks with Qatari, for Gaza to stop sending balloons with explosives and Israel to return back to pre-escalation, presumably easing fishing restrictions and goods going into Gaza, and restoration of fuel supplies to Gaza's one power station. This is yet to be confirmed.

Israel, West bank and Gaza continue to be affected economically by COVID 19 causing high unemployment and hardship. COVID 19 continues to affect Israel and the West Bank, there has been higher cases reported in Gaza.

A new deal between Israel and UAE has been reached to normalise diplomatic ties between them. Criticism was made that Israel was making peace in UAE with one hand and making war with Gaza with the other. Palestinian resistance factions condemned the Israel Emirates agreement as a stab in the back of the Palestinian people. PM Netanyahu plans to annex parts of the West bank was put on hold after the UAE agreement.

During the middle of the month thousands of Palestinian families were able to cross through breaches in the fence and assisted by Israeli soldiers to visit the sea. It was reported that they were informed to wear masks, bring food. Vehicles were waiting to take them at a cost of 150.00NIS per family. Reports indicated soldiers put their jeep lights on to assist finding the openings for those returning at night. This was the first time many were able to visit the sea and return.

Angleena has spent more time in Tiberias to give pastoral support to Rev. Kate and the Scott's Hotel staff as the result of the death of her partner Peter. With regret but understandable, Rev. Kate has resigned and is preparing to leave her ministry here and return to the USA on the 23rd of September.

The Church of Scotland has agreed that Rev. John McCulloch can return on 10th of September as the UK is one of the countries on the green list to enter Israel without Quarantine. His family will not be returning with him.

Angleena attended the funeral of Rita who was a long-standing member of St. Andrews. Her family were not able to enter the county until she died.

Angleena visited the Staff at WI'AM who continue to support people in crisis and continue conflict resolution. We thank God that after more than 50 days in hospital, Zoughbi's brother Michael is starting to respond and recover slowly.

Angleena attended and led the Christian Prayers at the monthly praying together which was held in Tantur.

Davoud from TON has expressed the difficulties they are facing due to being told to register their land by Israel again, and with local Palestinians who have started to cultivate on TON land. They are in discussions with local leaders.

We intend to start revisiting the Advanced Projects from September. Angleena has not returned to services for the UMC Filipino Church in Tel Aviv, due to the services being held in a bunker, small space and no ventilation. Services they have held and seen on FB include singing. She has been asked to lead the Anniversary Service in October, and the leaders of the congregation are seeking permission with Israeli Officials to hold the service in the open air, with social distancing.

Samar attended a very informative tour with Zochrot (memories) in the Talibiye area of Jerusalem, learning the history before the Nakba and the effect it has had on Palestinians lives, their land and homes afterwards. Angleena was unable to attend due to an ankle injury. Afterwards they were able to pick up many items from Rita's daughter who is having to return her rented apartment. Zoughbi and the WIAM Centre will distribute to those in need. More items will be collected in due course.

We wish Thomas well as he returns to Germany, thanking him for his support over the years as General Secretary and his continued interest in the MLO. We congratulate and welcome Roland as he takes on the role of General Secretary, looking forward in time to meet in the future.

We hold all facing difficulties and uncertain times in our prayers. Stay safe.

Blessings.

Angleena & Samar

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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 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 September 28 for the October edition.

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