



# FIRST FRIDAY LETTER

The World Methodist Council November 2020

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## Greetings from the Vice President

Dear friends,

Greetings from Ireland! We are approaching the date when clocks go back one hour so as to maximise on daylight. A wry post on Facebook suggested that this shouldn't happen – 'We don't need another hour of 2020!'

It has been an extraordinary year: there have been abnormal weather events, forest infernos, devastating floods, resulting in more and more people becoming migrants and refugees. And there has been, and continues to be, Covid 19.

In the midst of this, Pope Francis has published his encyclical, Fratelli Tutti<sup>1</sup>, calling us to friendship and mutual support. This document seems a sequel to Laudato Si<sup>2</sup> which reminded Christians and others that the earth is our common home and what we do in that home affects it and all who live in it. Fratelli Tutti urges a culture of loving encounter with others; it argues that to profess faith in God as the creator of all human beings, to recognise that all people possess an inherent dignity, has concrete consequences for how we treat each other and make decisions in politics, economics and social life.

The thrust of Fratelli Tutti resonates strongly with the Methodist and Wesleyan ethos - we believe ourselves to be *'the friends of all and the enemies of none'*. John Wesley declared that *'the world is my parish;'* he preached on that challenging verse from 2 Kings 10.15 - *'If your heart is as my heart, then give me your hand'*, noting, in his opening sentence, that *'love is due to all mankind, the royal law, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,'*<sup>3</sup>

I am constantly inspired by recipients of the World Methodist Peace Award. The Tent of Nations, outside Bethlehem, was co-recipient of the 2017 Award. The Nassar family has lived on this family farm for four generations, since the final days of the Ottoman Empire. Under increasing pressure and harassment from Israeli authorities and people from the surrounding illegal settlements, they live out the motto engraved in three languages on a large stone at the entrance to their land: *'We refuse to be enemies.'* In welcoming all peoples to the farm, they witness to their Christian faith which empowers and strengthens them in the face of what appear to be unsurmountable difficulties. Theirs is truly a culture of encounter and 'shalom' - the well-being of all created in God's image, all God's children.

St John puts it this way - *'We love because he first loved us'* (1 John 4:19).

Stay safe - and may God bless you,

Gillian

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<sup>1</sup> *'Brothers all...'* this is a quotation from St Francis and should be read in that light.

<sup>2</sup> *'Praise be...'* also a quotation from St Francis

<sup>3</sup> *The Catholic Spirit Sermon 34*

## Water is Life

“WATER IS LIFE,” THE WOMEN SING.

At 4:30 a.m., it is pitch black in the village of Mzira in Malawi.

In the early morning sky, the Southern Cross and the Big Dipper look bright enough to walk on. Dogs howl and scurrying animals rustle through the maize fields.

Most men and children are asleep but the women are stirring.

African women gather under the shadows of trees, buckets swinging, ready to embark on the first of many journeys they will make during the day to fetch water for their families.

As they gather, they chat, laugh and count heads. Making their way through maize fields, creek and riverbeds, over slick rocks and through other rough terrain, the women sing to encourage each other and to scare away anything or anyone that might be lurking in the dark — including “bad men who may be rapists.”

“Water is life, let us go and draw water, water is life, our children should go to school,” the women sing.

The colorful plastic buckets most of them carry hold 5 gallons of water. The weight of water is 8.3 pounds per

gallon. Light as air at the beginning of the journey, the filled buckets become heavy burdens balanced on their heads for the trip home. The singing and dancing never stops.

The precious water will be used to make porridge, wash dishes and clothes and bathe children before they go off to school. Not a single drop is wasted. The used dishwater and bathwater is collected; some goes to the chickens and other animals. Some goes to the small kitchen garden.

The water they scoop up comes from an “unprotected” well, explains Mercy Chikhosi. It looks like a big muddy hole. The women let the water settle in their containers so it looks clear when they dip a cup into it, but it is still dirty, unsafe water.

Chikhosi, a graduate of United Methodist Africa University in Zimbabwe with a degree in nursing, first came to this district in 2011 as a community health coordinator with Malawi United Methodist Church. She now works full time with Wandikweza, an organization she founded to support best practices in health care, developing sustainable communities and empowering girls and women.

Read more of this story at <https://spark.adobe.com/page/9JXwdq3ZKUekX/>

*Photos by Mike DuBose, story by Kathy L. Gilbert*



*Women carry water for their families as the sun rises behind them at Njenjete village near Madisi, Malawi.*

# A Call to Joint Action from the Africa Methodist Council Secretariat

Peace be unto you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Africa Methodist Council as a people of faith who uphold the teachings of scriptural and social holiness, in solidarity with all those who are lovers of peace, justice and equity especially those within the Wesleyan movement present the following statements to all on behalf of the President and Executives of Africa Methodist Council.

1. In solidarity with the Democratic Republic of Congo Kairos, the Southern Africa Kairos, Nehemiah Hope Project, and The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, we present the case of Nobel Laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege. He is a Congolese gynecologist and pastor who founded and works in Panzi Hospital in Bukavu. Mukwege has treated thousands of women who were victims of rape since the Second Congo War, some of them more than once. He condemned a massacre in Kipupu, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and has been calling for the release of the UN Mapping Report that documents crimes against humanity committed in eastern Congo. Because of this, he, his family and patients have received numerous death threats via SMS, voicemail, and social media posts. These threats against Dr. Mukwege, his family, and the healthcare workers at Panzi Hospital is a direct attack upon free speech and the pursuit of a just and fair Africa. We must all stand against those who have chosen to inflict damage on the voices of those who stand up against Gender Based Violence. Nobel peace laureate Denis Mukwege is presently placed under the guard of United Nations security forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

2. The Africa Methodist Council stands with one voice against Religious and Civil violence. Despite the United Nations (UN) calls for ceasefires across the world to halt the spread of COVID-19, fighting and terror attacks have not stopped in many parts of the continent, with heavy civilian and military casualties. West Africa in particular has been hard- hit by the operations of extremist groups. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), said that despite intense efforts by concerned countries, violent extremists continue to attack security forces and civilians, forcibly recruiting children into fighting in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. Presenting the Secretary-General's latest report (document S/2020/585), he described security conditions as "extremely volatile". In Burkina Faso alone, as of June, 921,000 people have been forced to flee, representing a 92 per cent rise over 2019 figures. In Mali, nearly 240,000 people are internally displaced — 54 per cent of them women — while in Niger, 489,000 people were forced to flee, including Nigerian and Malian refugees. In Nigeria, 7.7 million people will need emergency assistance in 2020.

3. AMC aligns itself with the call from The Methodist Church of Southern Africa for the church to speak and act against Gender Based Violence. As a church called by Wesley to social holiness we commit to work together to destroy gendered social hierarchies and create a

world where all of humanity, in its diversity, is embraced. We will focus on promoting multi-level, multi-pronged strategies because policy and institutional change as well as transformation in individual attitudes and behaviour are needed to end Gender Based Violence. We call on all churches, organizations, Regional and International bodies to take the issue of Gender based Violence seriously and we should be accountable in dealing with the menace wherever it rears its ugly head. We should all be committed to playing our part to ensure that our Church premises and institutions are safe spaces, where the affected can find healing. Perpetrators who have truly repented should be counselled and reintegrated so that we may all encounter the merciful, compassionate and Risen Christ.

## Conclusion

We call on all Methodist people in the continent of Africa to reflect deeply on these issues and on our behalf and in the name of Christ to use your good offices in the Church and society to speak against these and many other ills which have been allowed to take root in our communities. Mass mobilization of grass root churches especially through our lay movements and religious bodies is still an effective means of building awareness and engaging these issues. We appeal to all Conferences to build awareness of these issues through all platforms at their disposal. We also call for deep intercession, for with God nothing shall be impossible!

John 17:21 "That they may be one"... As Methodists in Africa we need to reposition ourselves in Jesus Christ as stewards, peacemakers' healers and justice-seekers. We appeal to all conferences to move beyond a localised view of ministry and see the World as our Parish so that we can join forces against deviant forces that are currently tearing the body of Christ apart from within and without.

As we call for prayers and affirmative action let us remember the words of our Hymn MHB 811

Thy kingdom come, O God, Thy rule, O Christ, begin;  
Break with thy iron rod, The tyrannies of sin.

Where is thy reign of peace, and purity and love? When shall all hatred cease, as in the realms above?

When comes the promised time, That war shall be no more,  
And lust, oppression, crime, Shall flee thy face before?

We pray thee Lord, arise, And come in thy great might;  
Revive our longing eyes, Which languish for thy sight.

O'er lands both near and far, Thick darkness broodeth yet:  
Arise, O morning Star, Arise, and never set.

Yours respectfully,

*Very Rev Opeyemi Awe*  
General Secretary

## Conference sessions go virtual, with mixed results



*A view of GNTV Media Ministry's video control room during the Baltimore-Washington Conference annual gathering shows multiple computer screens, audio equipment and busy technicians. Photo courtesy of GNTV Media Ministry.*

Just as churches had to scramble to go online or enhance their online presence because of meeting restrictions caused by COVID-19, nearly all U.S. annual conferences have had to resort to virtual meetings for passing budgets and handling other essential business. Approaches have varied. Experiences have too, with mixed feelings accompanying even successful sessions.

Bishop Bruce Ough has presided over 28 annual conferences, and he feels the two virtual conferences he led this year, in the Dakotas and Minnesota conferences, went quite well. Participant surveys have told him as much. "However, the downside, which has also surfaced in the evaluations, is that folks clearly miss the physical connection and the community building that happens around the edges," he said.

Annual conferences are the basic bodies of The United Methodist Church, as described in its constitution. But the term "annual conference" also refers to those groups' yearly meetings, which include business sessions, clergy and laity sessions, ordination and commissioning services, memorial services and more.

In the U.S., annual conference sessions typically occur between May and July, but the pandemic forced church closings beginning in March, and postponements of annual conferences quickly followed. So did announcements that they would go virtual. This year, such meetings have sprawled across the calendar, with the Great Plains Conference meeting on May 30, and the Kentucky Conference not scheduled to meet until Dec. 6-8. Most conferences have limited their agendas and shortened their meetings. They've relied more on pre-recorded reports and music.

"A lot of the feedback we've had was about how seamlessly we were able to move from pre-recorded to live items," Ough said. Conferences have used a range of

communication platforms, with Zoom Video Webinar a popular choice. Voting technologies have varied at least as much.

One common presence was GNTV Media Ministry, led by the Rev. David Wood, a United Methodist elder. That nonprofit typically provides technical support to 16 U.S. annual conference gatherings. This year, with technology more crucial, that number went to 24. "The challenges are making sure that you allow space for the participation of the members so that everybody can ask their questions and have their voice heard," Wood said.

While most online conferences have had a focal point, where the bishop is presiding and a livestream originates, the West Virginia Conference conducted its business session at 12 sites. Small groups of clergy and laity came to each, observing social distancing and watching a big screen.

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, wearing a face shield, was at the one where the live feed originated, and she could be seen on screen at the others; but in addition to her virtual leadership, each site had its own presider for local discussion and voting. For clergy and laity to participate from their homes wouldn't have worked universally in mountainous, largely rural West Virginia.

"We have vast areas in the conference that have challenges with internet access," said the Rev. Deborah Coble, communications director. So far, the Virginia Conference has had the most conspicuous technological problems and has posted letters of apology from Lewis and the vendor responsible for the voting malfunctions. But Virginia has not been alone.

The Great Plains Conference in its May 30 meeting had a mass conference call where connection problems were initially bad enough to consider postponing, said Scott Brewer, treasurer and director of administrative services.

The Rio Texas Conference chose ElectionBuddy as its technology for secure online voting, and the system worked. But some participants did not get their voting credentials due to a not-fully-updated conference database of email addresses. So to include everyone the conference moved during the Oct. 3 meeting to Zoom polling, which Bishop Robert Schnase acknowledged was, under the circumstances, essentially an honor system.

Jozlin Parker, Rio Texas' director of technical ministries, noted that all of the few votes taken had passing margins of at least 97 percent, and that the conference was able to compare registration and voting numbers to know "the honor system was working for this annual conference vote."

*Continued..*

## Conference sessions go virtual, with mixed results *continued...*

The Upper New York Conference has outspoken critics of how it handled debate at its Oct. 3 virtual session. “If I wanted to speak to anything I would have to call a phone number, input an access code, press a button to be transferred to the operator, talk to the operator to say I would like to speak in favor or against this measure or have a point of order, then the operator would put us in a queue for the bishop to call on us,” said Ian Urriola, a lay delegate.

Urriola noted that delays resulted in not everyone getting called on and that there were audio and closed-captioning issues. He has asked the denomination’s Judicial Council to rule on whether the meeting violated the Book of Discipline, which requires accessibility for people with disabilities — in this case, people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Meanwhile, Kevin Nelson, a home missionary who participated in the meeting, remains unhappy that the conference’s organizational motion did not allow legislation to be amended. “If we can’t change the business that’s

brought to us, we’ve sacrificed a core power of a deliberative body,” he said.

Upper New York Conference Bishop Mark J. Webb declined an interview request. Stephen J. Hustedt, director of communications, noted the bishop “asked for grace” as the meeting began. “Certainly it was a learning experience both for users and for people running the technology,” Hustedt said. “Overall, there were very few hiccups. That said, for the people experiencing hiccups I know it was frustrating.”

Plenty of participants around the connection reported positive experiences with virtual annual conferences. “Everybody felt really good about it,” said the Rev. Bill Lawson, audio visual and technical consultant for the Memphis Conference, which had about 600 clergy and laity participating through Zoom and another 2,500 who streamed proceedings via Facebook or YouTube.

Read more of this story at <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/conference-sessions-go-virtual-with-mixed-results?>

## Haven of Hope helps women escape abuse in Eswatini

Bethany First Church of the Nazarene in Bethany, Oklahoma, is sponsoring a project in Eswatini to help aid women who are victims of sexual abuse and sex trafficking. Haven of Hope will be a center to help shelter and rehabilitate those who need it.

Bethany First has long had a heart for Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland. The church has put on 5k races, dinners, and benefits and helped build churches and parsonages in the country since 2008.

At the end of 2017, Bethany First leaders felt God asking them to pray about the problem of abused women, including trafficking and prostitution. The AIDS epidemic in Eswatini has contributed to this issue significantly, creating over 200,000 AIDS orphans in a country of 1 million people. This has led to many youth-led households and situations where abuse was overlooked and ignored.

Doug and Margaret Eaton, who lead Bethany First’s missions projects in Eswatini, traveled there with a team and funding to search for a way to apply it to this situation.

“We believed that our staff at that time had been given this vision by God,” Doug said. “We were the ones to figure out a way to apply it in this country. So, conversation after conversation, we finally ran into one rescue house, an independent one.”

They got to know the girls there and the founders, who were supported by an independent ministry. Ultimately, the ministry’s founders and Nazarene leaders agreed that the best way to assist was to help keep the women who reported abuse safe while the legal process ran its course.

They came across an old building that had been built in the 60s. Doug was pleased to find an already existing structure.

“Having something you can restore, rebuild, and remodel is much easier to get approval for than starting fresh and building a new structure,” Doug said. “We got all the permissions from the Church of the Nazarene; we found who owned it. We went through all the processes with the [necessary] committees and social services in the country, and then we declared that we were going to create Haven of Hope.”

The physical building is currently being renovated, and you can follow along at Eaton Swazi Journey on Facebook. Despite the fact that the building is not finished, they are already helping shelter women from their abusers.

Recently, the Eatons held an invitational benefit exhibit at the Oklahoma History Center. They asked 20 artists to create artwork out of some old seats from Bethany First. Doug said 50 percent of the proceeds came from the artwork auction and another 50 percent came from cash donations from people who simply wanted to help. This event raised enough money to cover the remainder of the building costs for the facility in Eswatini.

“We believe that these women and girls, because they know Jesus, they might have hope, but they don’t have a haven,” Doug said. “They have no way to escape. And that’s what we’re building.”

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

## Southern Africa Methodist laud Mogoba

The Rev. Dr. Stanley Mogoba was honored with an Inaugural Lecture on 31 Oct. by The Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The Synod passed a resolution in 2019 to honor and celebrate Dr. Mogoba with the annual lecture's aim to preserve the legacy of this elder, celebrate Pam-Africanism and Africa Day, mobilize against xenophobia and other forms of discrimination and promote the healing and transformation of Africa. Held in Johannesburg, the keynote speaker was Bishop Ivan Abrahams (*right*), General Secretary of the World Methodist Council who paid tribute to and thanked Mogoba for his lifelong work. Mogoba was the 1996 Council Peace Award recipient.

To watch the lecture follow the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/iWij7J5OjLY>



## World Methodist Museum artifact on exhibit in Geneva



A set of saddlebags usually housed in the World Methodist Museum is on display at the International Museum of Reformation in Geneva, Switzerland for its exhibition, *Calvin in America*. The saddlebags will be on display from 2020 until 2021. More than 50 works, to underline the specificity of religion and Protestantism in America, will be included. The Reformation Museum will highlight the vision of Protestantism that developed in the United States over four centuries and lies at the heart of the cultural and political project of the USA, the International Museum's statement explains. More than 25,000 annual visitors see exhibits there. The Museum says the saddlebags will assist in being able to explain the extraordinary organization of this Church whose pastors were able to travel across an immense country in the 19th century to reach its inhabitants far from the cities.



## Côte d'Ivoire church to help build schools in central Africa



*Bishop Benjamin Boni and Lydie Flore Magba, Central African Republic ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire, initial the framework agreement for technical and economic cooperation in education between The United Methodist Church in Côte d'Ivoire and the Central African Republic. The agreement aims to revitalize the Central African education system, which has been disorganized by years of successive socio-political and economic crises. Photo by Isaac Broune, UM News.*

The Côte d'Ivoire United Methodist Church is planning to help build schools in the Central African Republic.

Côte d'Ivoire Bishop Benjamin Boni and Central African Republic Ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire Lydie Flore Magba signed an agreement for technical and economic cooperation in education on Oct. 8 at the Jubilee Temple of Cocody in Abidjan.

“When the church invests in education, it sends the message that the life that Jesus gives is not only about the kingdom to come but also about the present,” Boni said.

He praised the Central African government’s efforts to improve the lives of its people.

This collaboration aims to replicate the United Methodist schools model of Côte d'Ivoire by building, among other things, 12 school complexes in 12 cities ranging from preschool to secondary school, each with a health center, a canteen and a place of worship.

“We want to care for each child at all levels,” said Lazare Kouassi, director-general of the United Methodist Schools in Côte d'Ivoire.

The project is expected to take five years and is estimated to cost nearly \$165 million U.S. The government already has made 124 hectares (about 306 acres) of land available. The government will take care of the schooling of 60% of the children, and support one-third of the total cost. The rest will come from outside partners.

The Côte d'Ivoire church will help design curriculum, share best practices and assist with the management of the schools, according to the memorandum of understanding.

The education system of the United Methodist Church in Côte d'Ivoire is organized around a structure called the General Directorate of the United Methodist Schools. It has 97 schools, including 36 preschools, 53 elementary schools and eight secondary schools.

For the 2019-2020 school year, 23,257 students were enrolled, with more than half of those girls (51.11%). Its schools are among the institutions of excellence in Côte d'Ivoire. The General Directorate has existed since 1926.

It was during a mission to Côte d'Ivoire that Biro Rameaux, economic affairs advisor to Central African Republic President Faustin-Archange Touadéra, suggested that the General Directorate of the Methodist Schools could be a model for “his country in reconstruction,” Kouassi said.

“Following his report, the president of the Republic made it a priority by entrusting its follow-up and implementation to his ambassador,” said Hippolyte Tramo, a Central African citizen and professor of mathematics at the General Directorate of the United Methodist Schools for about 10 years.

The successive socio-political and economic crises in this former French colony have disrupted the Central African education system, leading to an insufficient number of qualified teachers, low school attendance and

the destruction of school equipment and infrastructure, according to data provided in the memorandum of understanding. The document noted that surveys in 2010 showed that 30% of children between the ages of 6 and 11 have never had access to school.

“If the church has decided to accompany me in my mission, I give glory to God,” said Magba. “The signing of this agreement is a divine plus in my mission.” She said it was the first agreement in the international relations framework that she signed since coming to Côte d'Ivoire in November 2019.

The United Methodist Church in the Central African Republic is a mission initiative under the East Congo Episcopal Area. It is supported by the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. The presence of the denomination in the country dates back to 2006. There are 20 United Methodist communities (local churches) in the country, according to the Rev. Marcel Sachou, a Global Ministries missionary in the Central African Republic and a member of the Côte d'Ivoire United Methodist Church.

Boni expressed the wish to see the education project become a reality.

“We will make ourselves the instrument of God to help the brotherly people of the Central African Republic who, for some years now, have been passing through the valley of trial,” Boni said. “For us, it is an infinite joy to share with others what God is doing with us.”

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

## MEOR Webinar on Catholic-Methodist Dialogue

The Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome is hosting a special 1-hour webinar on Thursday, 10 December on the international Methodist-Catholic bilateral dialogue. The webinar will begin at 17:30 Rome time (+1 UTC).

In this webinar entitled “God in Christ Reconciling: Methodist and Catholic Understandings of Reconciliation,” the webinar will explore the recent work of the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission. The commission has been engaged in intentional study and dialogue since 2017 on the theme of reconciliation and the unity of the church. The commission is projected to publish a comprehensive report on reconciliation in summer 2021. The 10 December webinar will focus on the commission’s dialogue process, how reconciliation relates to the trajectory of international Methodist-Catholic dialogue, Methodist and Catholic understandings of reconciliation, and discoveries made during the dialogue process.

The main speakers are Bishop John Sherrington and the Reverend David Chapman, respectively the Catholic and Methodist co-chairs of the commission. Bishop John Sherrington is the auxiliary bishop of Westminster in the Roman Catholic Church. The Rev. David Chapman is the chair of the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District in the Methodist Church of Great Britain. The Reverend Matthew A. Laferty, director of the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome, will moderate the webinar.

To learn more about the webinar, visit the MEOR website at [www.meorome.org](http://www.meorome.org). Email the MEOR administrator at [office@meorome.org](mailto:office@meorome.org) to receive the Zoom link for the webinar.

## Our Place in the Cloud (or Six Degrees of Separation)

In many churches around the world, we marked All Saints Day this past Sunday, taking the time to honor the clouds of witnesses that have gone before us – all those people who have shaped, challenged, and carried us forward on our spiritual journey.

As I contemplate the saints in my own life, I’m reminded of two interrelated and intriguing ideas. The first is called *six degrees of separation*; the second, *three degrees of influence*. Six degrees of separation is the theory that everyone is six or fewer steps away, via introduction, from any other person in the world. Essentially, through a chain of a “friend of a friend” statements, any two people in the world can be connected in a maximum of six steps.

In our current age of social media “influencers” the theory of three degrees of influence shouldn’t be a big surprise. It asserts that social networks have great influence on us, but that influence doesn’t end with the people to whom we are directly tied. We influence our friends who in turn influence their friends, which means that our actions can influence people we have never met.

You may be wondering what this has to do with the great cloud of witnesses we just celebrated on All Saints Day. For me, the connection is in the metaphorical power of this kind of thinking. These ideas help us visualize the importance of understanding our own place in that “cloud.”

My own story may help with that understanding, but first, a small bit of history.

Nelson Mandela was a Methodist, educated in a Methodist boarding school where the chaplain was Rev. Seth Mokitimi. In 1964 Mokitimi became the first black person elected as President of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). He was a powerful influence on Mandela.

To read more follow the link below:  
<https://worldmethodist.org/wme-blog/all-saints/>

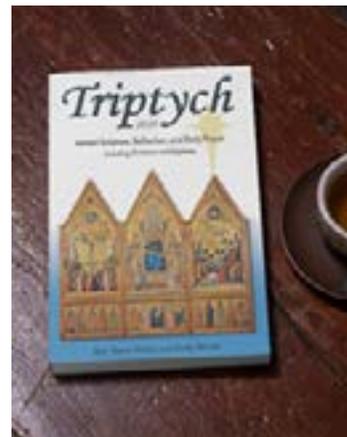


## WesleyMen and FastPrayGive.org offer an Advent through Epiphany devotion resource

As an extension of the weekly scripture and devotion offering through the FastPrayGive.org program, WesleyMen is offering an Advent through Epiphany devotional guide.

In this project, they have used selections from the daily readings of the Revised Common Lectionary (year B), offering a lay (Andy Morris) and clergy (Steve Hickle) perspective. While there are many such Advent resources, WesleyMen offers this one viewed through the “lens” of three foundational scriptures: Isaiah 58:1-14, Luke 1:46-55, and Luke 4:16-21. Borrowing the name of an art piece with three hinged panels, called a Triptych, each day offers a Triptych of scripture, reflection, and prayer as well.

As we remember and rehearse the birth of Jesus, WesleyMen hopes that this will lead you on a spiritual journey and help you to deepen your spirit in an enjoyable way. Available in Paperback, e-book, and PDF formats at FastPrayGive.org in early November.



<https://FastPrayGive.org/store>

## COVID-19, Debt Cancellation, Reparations and Just Economics for Life

In October 2020, I took part in an interfaith e-consultation on Debt Cancellation, Reparations and Just Finance. Speakers came from the Bahá’í, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish and Rastafarian tradition. The participants issued a statement entitled: “Just Economics for Liberation and Life”: “This joint message captures faith reflections on just finance and reparations, identifies common ground and calls for urgent action to tackle the debt crisis and to build more just, reparative, and restorative financial and economic structures,” reads the message. “The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the issue of sovereign debt in the spotlight for obvious reasons: mounting a response to the intertwined health and economic crises and ensuring a just and sustainable recovery require tremendous resources.” The statement observes that debt is about power. “Throughout history, debt has been used by the political and economic elite to control, generate and distribute resources, as well as to discipline communities,” reads the text. “Ultimately, debt is a moral and spiritual issue. Mindful of the deep inequalities and injustices facing our world and the highest values in our religious and spiritual traditions, we call for a reimagining of finance and economics from the perspective of those oppressed by these systems, so that economies can deliver deep freedoms for all our communities and not outrageous profits for the very few,” reads the text. “Our gathering highlights the urgent need for system change if our financial structures are to be just and resource economies that nurture life and deliver prosperity for the most vulnerable.” The Statement can be found under <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/just-economics-for-liberation-and-life>

In the same light, WMC General Secretary Ivan Abrahams signed a letter to the President of the World Bank and

Director of the International Monetary Fund asking them “to show courageous leadership at this critical moment and cancel debts owed by developing countries to your institutions for the duration of this crisis. Debt cancellation is the most immediate way to release the finance required to prevent millions of our sisters and brothers being needlessly pushed into poverty by the pandemic.” (see: <https://mediacentre.christianaid.org.uk/christian-leaders-world-wide-urge-imf-and-world-bank-to-cancel-debts/>).

Methodists claim to respond to John Wesley’s call to do no harm, do good and make use of all the means of grace. We are called to acknowledge harm has been done because of unjust economic systems and to work for change on grassroots level and in our global interactions together with partners of many faith traditions.

Submitted by *Geneva Secretary Rosemarie Wenner*



*Photo by Marcelo Schneider/WCC*

## New Director of Contextual Theology

Wesley House Cambridge is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Richard A. Davis to the new post of Director of Contextual Theology. His key responsibilities at Wesley House will include the supervision of research students engaged in qualitative research projects from across the world, and developing the work of our Centre for Faith in Public Life.

The Principal of Wesley House, the Revd. Dr. Jane Leach said of the appointment: “We are delighted that Dr. Davis will be our first Director of Contextual Theology. He brings a wealth of experience in teaching and student supervision, and we are positive that he will serve our students and institution well. As we collaborate with global south partners in decolonising theology Dr. Davis’s expertise and experience will be invaluable assets for us.”

Richard comes to Wesley House from the ecumenical Pacific Theological College (PTC) in Fiji where he has been teaching theology and ethics since 2014. He brings experience in successfully supervising research students from a variety of Pasifika countries who have engaged in qualitative research in their own contexts. Dealing with diverse groups of students of several cultures, ages, and genders has helped focus his theological work on practical and contextual needs.

Richard has a PhD in Public Theology from the University of Edinburgh and other degrees in theology, philosophy, and business studies. In 2019 he enjoyed research leave at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, USA, researching religion and violence. His current research interests include political theology, climate change, domestic violence, child poverty, and Christian spirituality.

Richard was baptised at the Waiwhetu Methodist Church in Lower Hutt, New Zealand and was raised in a strong Methodist family. He is now an (lay) Elder of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. Richard brings extensive experience working in the church, including four years with the Methodist Church of New Zealand leading national social justice ministry. He is a Senior Friend of the Student Christian Movement.



*New Director of Contextual Theology Dr. Richard Davis*

Speaking from Fiji about the move to Cambridge, Richard said: “I am very excited to take up this role at Wesley House. It’s a big move for us at this time of COVID-19, but I’m sure we’ll feel very at home at Wesley House. I look forward to working with a diverse group of students working on their fascinating research topics and in offering a theological perspective on issues of public concern through the Centre for Faith in Public Life.”

Richard and his wife Ruby will be joining the Wesley House community. Ruby, an Anglican originally from Ghana, works globally as an independent development consultant with special interests in deliberative democracy and peace-building. We look forward to welcoming them as soon as COVID-19 travel restrictions allow. Wesley House is a community of Methodist scholars and students at the heart of the University city of Cambridge. It was a founding member of the Cambridge Theological Federation, an ecumenical grouping of theological colleges in Cambridge.

Submitted by *Alastair Oatey*



### Your magazine, your stories: The fall issue of Wesleyan Life is here

Read about everyday Wesleyans with multiple ministries in their marketplace, a Kentucky pastor who shepherds two congregations for a common good, a pastoral couple who hesitantly answered God’s call and Global Partners missionaries who are sharing Jesus in a country still resistant to the gospel.

These and other stories testify to God leading The Wesleyan Church through a variety of people in a variety of ways in a variety of places.

Check it out here <https://wesleyan.life/>

## A prayer and call for justice and peace in Papua

Warm Christian greetings from the Pacific Conference of Churches were sent to the WMC on All Hallows Eve. They asked Council members to pray and to help in seeking justice.

Linked for your information is the preliminary report of a team made up of NGOs, Churches, Academics and Human rights workers, that investigated the killing of Pastor Jeremiah in Intan Jaya, West Papua. It is acknowledged to be difficult reading due to the sensitive nature of the report. (Click here to read the report)

“We continue to pray for West Papua and urge your continued calls for a UN Human Rights Commission team to investigate ongoing and increasing human rights abuses in Papua,” says the Rev. James Bhagwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches.

The Pacific Churches ask you to join with them as they hold a 40-day fast (28 Oct. - 6 Dec.) to pray and call for justice and peace in Papua.

Submitted by *General Secretary Rev. James Bhagwan*

## Palermo, honorary citizenship to Rev. Peter Ciaccio

Rome (NEV) - **Leoluca Orlando**, mayor of Palermo, conferred to the Methodist pastor Peter Ciaccio the honorary citizenship of the city. The official ceremony took place 26 October at the Palazzo delle Aquile. “I’m very happy, I didn’t expect. I am very pleased,” says Peter Ciaccio. “I think it is not a personal but collective recognition to our church, to our testimony, for the good of the city, to the social work we did in Palermo, to the many initiatives in which we were involved, also thanks to the Methodist and Waldensian Otto per mille. Important was also the ecumenical work done in these years in the Sicilian capital. We have tried to rebuild a social framework where there were many reasons for laceration.”

Pastor Ciaccio served the Methodist and Waldensian church of “La Noce” from 2011 to 2013 and the Waldensian church of via Spezio from 2013 to 2020 in Palermo. He currently carries out his ministry in Trieste. “And I am particularly happy that this recognition comes from Mayor Orlando, because I know that it is not a matter of whining, but of a real affirmation of esteem for what we have done together,” he adds.

An important recognition that Ciaccio commented, in the [www.chiesavaldese.org](http://www.chiesavaldese.org): “The conferral of the honorary citizenship of the City of Palermo was for me an unexpected event and, above all, not sought. All citizens should be committed to the good of the city where they live without seeking recognition. This is why I lived my nine years of service in the Methodist and Waldensian churches of Palermo as an opportunity to be at the service of the city as well. I believe it is a fundamental Protestant principle: to integrate (without confusing) in the public and private dimensions, the dimensions of faith and civil commitment. This is why I believe that the conferral of honorary citizenship is also an acknowledgement to the contribution that Methodists and Waldensians have given to the city of Palermo since 1861.”

The Waldensian presence in the city of Palermo has ancient roots: the foundation of the Waldensian Institute in 1863, the first school for all, had allowed the poorest to be educated, even before the onset of the public education.

In 1963, **Revd. Pietro Valdo Panascia** was the first exponent of a Christian church to denounce the crimes of the Mafia. In the seventies, then, Rev. Panascia himself had renewed the Waldensian Institute by creating the current Diaconal Center “La Noce,” one of the most important works of the Waldensian church at the national level. At the same time, it is good to remember the activity of the late Methodist **Revd. Alfonso Manocchio** who, in the eighties, had understood how Italy had changed and how the mission of the church would be to assist not (or not only) the emigrants, but the immigrants.

Alongside this commitment, mention should be made of the intuition of the Methodist **Vivian Wiwoloku**, Nigerian and Palermitan, who first took to heart the trafficking of human beings starting from work on the streets where too many sex slaves are forced to prostitute themselves. Native of Palermo, finally, is also the deacon **Alessandra Trotta**, current moderator of the Tavola Valdese.



*Rev. Peter Ciaccio, conferral of Honorary Citizenship by the city of Palermo, Italy.*

Submitted by *OPCEMI Secretariat Stefanie Gabuyo*

## A Monthly 'Call to Pray'



### A Call to Pray

for November

Sustainable  
Development Goal 2:  
End hunger, achieve  
food security and improved  
nutrition and promote  
sustainable agriculture



The World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women supports the Sustainable Development Goals

The World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women have begun a new series of their monthly 'Call to Pray'. Starting in October 2020, each monthly invitation to pray will focus on a United Nations Sustainable Development Goal. November's 'Call to Pray' will focus on SDG 2- Zero Hunger, an issue that is of concern in many parts of the world, including those normally considered wealthy.

We would invite all members of the WMC family to join us in prayer each month, by checking the World Federation website link.

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

## Innovations from Epworth Old Rectory

This year has been difficult for Epworth Old Rectory with all the restrictions due to covid19. Due to partial, and sometimes full closure, and travel restrictions our visitor numbers have dropped considerably.

It was decided that, as our national and international visitors couldn't come to us, we would reach out to them in a series of Zoom talks from Susanna's kitchen, the first of which took place at the end of September. The topic for this was "Susanna, a role model for today's Methodist women" with discussion between Revd. Michaela Youngson and Revd. Dr. Barbara Glasson. It was very well received with 98 people joining in the conversation.

The second Zoom session is due to happen on November the 30th, with others to follow in due course. The speaker for the November session is Revd. Donna L. Fowler-Marchant, author of "Mothers in Israel" an examination of the beginnings of Methodism through the eyes of women who knew John Wesley, which should be a very interesting topic of conversation for all involved.

For more information on how to log-in to the talks email [talks@epwortholdrectory.org.uk](mailto:talks@epwortholdrectory.org.uk) or go to the website [www.epwortholdrectory.org.uk](http://www.epwortholdrectory.org.uk) for information regarding the log-in codes and passwords.

We do hope you can join us.

Submitted by *Catherine Fordham*  
Volunteer press officer, Epworth Old Rectory

**From Susanna's Kitchen...** On-line discussions about women's lives in the story of Methodism

Revd Donna Fowler discusses her new book  
"Mothers in Israel: the Methodist Women in the circle of John Wesley"

Monday 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2.00pm

Further information and log-in details from  
[talks@epwortholdrectory.org.uk](mailto:talks@epwortholdrectory.org.uk)  
or [www.epwortholdrectory.org.uk](http://www.epwortholdrectory.org.uk)



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 **Tuesday, November 23** at [communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org](mailto:communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org) if you would like your story to be included in the December edition of the First Friday Letter.

## 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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