



FIRST FRIDAY LETTER

The World Methodist Council April 2021

Greetings from the General Secretary

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

For many, this past Coronavirus (COVID-19), which has affected every family, has been a time of loneliness, disillusionment, suffering, and loss. During Holy Week, we were encouraged to cast our burdens on Jesus, who stands in solidarity with us through his torment and suffering on the cross.

This is the second Eastertide that we experience the darkness of the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected every facet of life and exposed the fault lines in global health, security, social structures, and the economy. As never before, we need to reset, recalibrate and reimagine “a different church” and “a different world.” The center is no longer holding. Furthermore, we need to celebrate the greatest and the immovable miracle that God, in Jesus Christ, is with us in our struggles to deal with the challenges of the day, namely, climate justice, racial inequality, growing nationalism, and gender-based violence. These are some of the burning issues the World Methodist Conference identified at Houston in 2015.

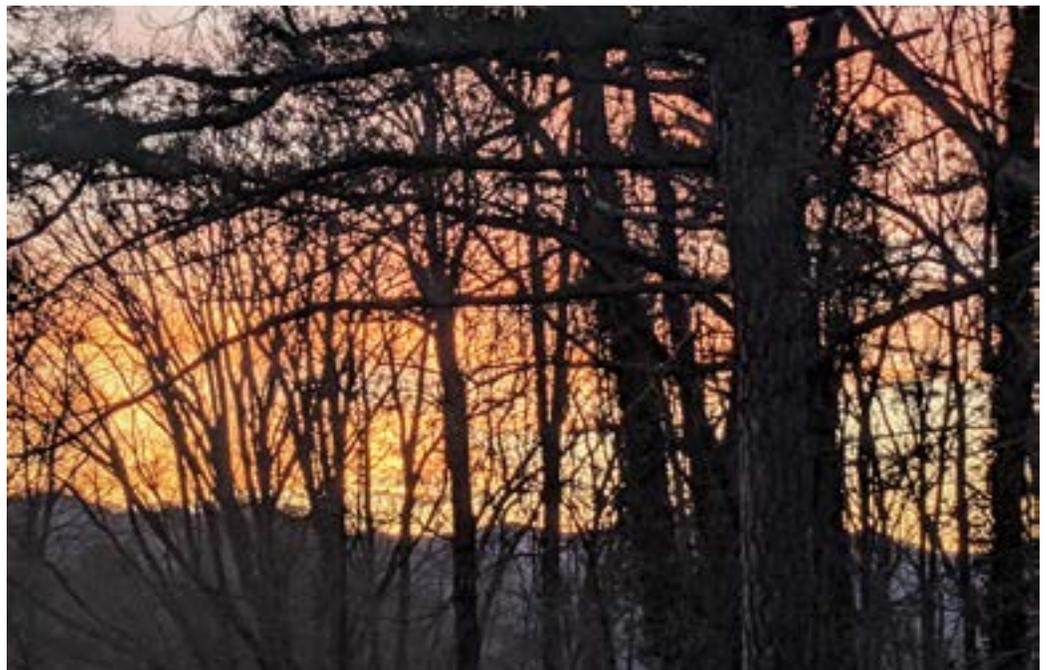
The President of the World Methodist Council’s Easter message (<https://youtu.be/V3alKKjZxL0>) and this edition of the First Friday Letter bear testimony that “the people called Methodist” are alive to the issues of the day. Climate Justice For All, Praying with and for Migrants and Refugees, Peru Nazarenes respond to flooded communities and more stories in our newsletter emphasize on some of these issues.

We are an Easter people, a people committed to justice and grounded in the hope that the Risen Lord, *through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.* (Ephesians 3:20)

I pray that you will stay safe and healthy, that your hope will be renewed, and that your life will be filled with joy this Easter.

Shalom,

Ivan



World Methodist Council Museum Statement

To everything, there is a season and a time for every purpose under the heaven

Ecclesiastes 3:1

The World Methodist Council announces that the Museum contents in entirety will go to Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology and SMU Libraries at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX.

The Archival Committee carefully reviewed all the proposals that were received from institutions and individuals, and after prayerful discernment, chose Bridwell Library as it will allow the World Methodist Council Museum collection to continue.

“Having been to the World Methodist Museum of the World Methodist Council several times, I was saddened to hear about its closing. Then I was surprised to be asked to help direct the deaccessioning of the holdings,” explains Robert J. Williams, Retired General Secretary of the United Methodist Church General Commission on Archives and History. “But now I am relieved and excited that the collection will remain intact and under the care of the Bridwell Library. All who care about this collection can be confident that its future impact for faithful ministry in the Wesleyan tradition is assured.”

In addition to Williams, other Archival Committee members included the CEO and General Secretary of the Council, Bishop Ivan Abrahams; recently Retired General Secretary of the United Methodist Church General Commission on Archives and History, Alfred T. Day; WMC Headquarters Coordinator, Jackie Bolden; and other experts as needed throughout the process.

“The long history of the World Methodist Museum and its collections is distinctly vital to the church, and it is important to maintain that historical continuity. We are honored to be chosen as the recipient of the WMCM’s collections and will continue to oversee and curate these items with the highest quality and standards. In this stewardship, we are also committed to expanding public engagement in a major US city like Dallas with as broad a public as possible that reflects the global nature and endeavors of the worldwide church,” Anthony J. Elia, Director and J.S. Bridwell Foundation Endowed Librarian, said upon learning his institution had been chosen as the repository.

Longtime contributors to the Museum also expressed pleasure at the decision. “My family and I are delighted that the collection in its entirety will be maintained at SMU for study and research about the early Methodist movement and its founder John Wesley. I shall continue to support the collection in whatever way I can to help spread Wesley’s Christian message of, ‘The best of all, God is with us,’ said Thelma Barclift Crowder. The Crowders have shared Wesley artifacts, information, and finances with the Museum for many years.

Charlotte and Winston Rhea were excited to hear that the items they and their family had secured for the Museum would soon be only 30 miles from their residence. “My parents, Jimmy and Fleeta Davis enjoyed providing funds to the World Methodist Council under the direction of The Rev. Dr. Joe Hale for the purchase of historical items for the Wesley Museum. Since their death, my husband and I have continued to make donations from the James H. Davis Foundation,” Charlotte explained. “We are very excited that the entire collection will remain intact in the Bridwell Museum at Southern Methodist University. This is especially exciting since we met at SMU in 1955.”

“We thank the many people who have contributed to the life, witness, and ministry of the World Methodist Council Museum at Lake Junaluska for the past 65 years,” Bishop Abrahams said. “This is a historic undertaking that will create a larger footprint for the Council and allow many more people to utilize the collection in a new way. It will allow the Council to become even more global as it moves into the future. We are very pleased and feel this is a great moment for Methodism. The Council is also in final negotiations with the Lake Junaluska Assembly regarding the closing of the Council’s properties there. It will allow Junaluska to enhance their educational opportunities and allow us to broaden the mission and ministries of the Council.”



Bridwell Library

Nominees sought for 2021 Peace Award

If you have been planning to nominate someone who exemplifies Courage, Creativity, and Consistency for the World Methodist Peace Award, you must act now.

Applications submitted by 31 May will be considered for this year. Any application received after 31 May will be reviewed later for 2022. All supporting documents must be included at the time of submission.

The nominee should show courage in regard to physical danger or putting personal interest at risk. Creativity should include opening new initiatives and attracting others in working for the cause of peace. Consistency is judged by effort over a period of time and intensity, despite setbacks. Here is the link to read the full criteria:

<http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/whatwedo/world-methodist-peace-award/>

The recipient receives a medallion, citation and US \$1,000 which is symbolic of the larger recognition achieved in working for peace, justice and reconciliation. The recipient is included in the World Methodist Council Peace Award booklet and a featured article in WMC and Wesleyan/ Methodist publications.

Go to www.worldmethodistcouncil.org and click on the “What We Do” tab and then click on the “World Methodist Peace Award” tab and complete the online application. Please send all nomination forms to Bishop Ivan Abrahams at info@worldmethodistcouncil.org



Climate Justice for All launches 5 April

On Monday, 5 April, Climate Justice for All (CJ4A) is launching its youth-led campaign calling the global Methodist family to take climate action leading up to the UN’s COP26. CJ4A is inviting Methodist communities worldwide to engage with the issue of the climate crisis and declare, ‘We believe in Climate Justice For All.’

For Climate Justice For All to be a reality, CJ4A believes there should be fairness with the highest emitters being the most ambitious in reducing their carbon to net-zero. Communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis must be equipped with the right resources.

The campaign asks Methodist communities to do three things prior to COP26: listen, call and commit.

“First, we will listen because as a team as we realize that telling our own stories and listening to others was an important tool for learning about and responding to the effects of the climate crisis. Second, we will call because we know that it was not enough to just talk about climate justice within our Methodist communities but take that message to our political representatives. Third, we commit because it ensures that as communities make personal commitments to enact change, the work of the campaign is sustained after the COP and change is truly embedded in the lives of Methodist communities,” said Iemaima Vaai, Fijian CJ4A Worker.

To enable communities to listen, CJ4A is releasing monthly short films and worship resources to tell the stories of Methodist communities taking action for the planet.

To find out more about CJ4A and to check out the upcoming short film and worship resources, visit the WMC website and CJ4A social media accounts listed below starting on 5 April.

<https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/cj4a/>

<https://www.instagram.com/climatejustice4all/>

<https://www.facebook.com/CJ4All>

<https://twitter.com/Climatejust4all>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCg1kqmLvWxwV-P3HEiUwqS8Q>

Submitted by Climate Justice For All Team



WMC Webinar in the Week of Prayer on COVID-19 Praying with and for Migrants and Refugees

“So let us not reject the refugee or mistreat the migrant. Teach us to shelter the stateless and admit the asylee. Let us never forget that we are migrants.” Rev. Jack Amick, Director of Global Migration in the United Methodist Committee on Relief, used these words at the beginning of the Webinar and Prayer Service on March 25.

As a contribution to the Week of Prayer on COVID-19, one year after the WHO declared the novel SARS-Cov-2 Virus a global pandemic, the World Methodist Council initiated a webinar as a reminder that migrants and refugees are vulnerable. These groups are severely affected by COVID-19.

About 60 participants listened to stories of compassion, solidarity, and transformation from three regions in the world. Marta Bernardini, Coordinator of Mediterranean Hope, a program of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, a Methodist and Waldensian church, explained how poorly refugees and migrants are treated at the border of the European Union: “Fear of COVID-19 infection has spilled into hysteria toward migrants, who are often considered primary carriers of the virus.” Migrants who manage to survive the trip across the Mediterranean Sea must stay in quarantine on the ship for another 14 days. Bernardini also spoke of the exploitation of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, who work illegally in citrus farms in Calabria for the lack of better opportunities. Those workers live in precarious settlements with little possibility to keep social distancing and no access to health care. Mediterranean Hope seeks better living conditions for these workers. Bernardini concluded, “Working on the border during the pandemic means to be aware that migrant people are more vulnerable and badly suffer from restrictions and lack of services. They often become the target on which fear and frustration converge.”

“In Peru, 70 % of the working population works informally. Today you work. Today you eat,” said Carmen Mollo from the Methodist Church in Peru. She explained that this precarious situation is even worse for the more than 1 million refugees who come from Venezuela. Mello leads a shelter called “Casa de la Esperanza” in Lima, where mainly Venezuelan single mothers and their children find refuge. Starting in March 2020, confinement began for nearly 100 days. The Methodist Church Peru sought partners such as Action against Hunger, the Jesuits, and other Christian and Muslim faith communities to feed the families in the shelter. Refugees and locals together prepared food baskets and distributed them. When the confinement ended, a community dining room was established. Locals and refugees befriended one another. To increase the assistance for refugees and locals, Casa de la Esperanza recently moved to a suburb of Lima called Comas, where many poor Peruvians and refugees live. Basic needs are provided, and single moms are supported to start small

businesses. “In the midst of terrible circumstances, life manifests itself. God blesses,” Mello said after the birth of three babies in the shelter.

Before the pandemic started, Rev. Jonavern Lungub from the United Methodist Church in the Philippines went as a missionary pastor to Abu Dhabi. More than 15 % of over-seas workers in the United Arab Emirates are Filipino. During the pandemic, migrant workers lost jobs or had to face drastic salary deductions. The Abu Dhabi Christian fellowship organized relief missions. Distributions included food, sanitary items, Christian literature, and provided financial support to help migrants to travel home to the Philippines. Access to health care and vaccination are only available for locals and registered foreigners. Many migrant workers are excluded from these support systems. “We stand with the migrant workers as fellow humans and as an expression of God’s love and love of neighbors and Christ’s representatives,” Rev. Lungub said.

These thought-provoking reports lead to prayer by Rev. Amick, “Grant us the courage to heal and be healed; to ensure that everyone is safe, and no one is blamed; to sit with those who are mourning loss of so much; and to begin to live into wholeness that is wide and wonderful.”

Submitted by Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, Geneva Secretary



Speakers for the webinar

Youth and Young Adult Scholarship Application registry now open

Scholarship opportunities for the 22nd World Methodist Council Conference are open now. Register by clicking on the link below.

<https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/YYA-Application-Form.pdf>



Peru Nazarenes respond to flooded communities

The Church of the Nazarene and Nazarene Compassionate Ministries responded to communities in the Madre de Rios region of Peru after torrential rains caused the Tambopata, Madre de Dios, and Inambari rivers to flood over 3,500 homes.

Lila Ventura, who is in charge of a work team in the town of El Triunfo, Peru, said that many of the families were trapped in their homes when the rivers flooded on 21 February. They were later rescued by boats and housed in schools, which have become temporary shelters.

Susana del Aguila, NCM coordinator for the Peru Sur (South) District, worked with the district superintendent to help the victims. An offering was taken among the churches of the district, and they also collected clothes and purchased supplies that were delivered to the church members in El Triunfo. Around 70 families in the El Triunfo neighborhood are being helped.

Silvia Mantilla Clemente, a resident of El Triunfo, said that when the floods started, they did not know how to react because it happened so quickly and they were not prepared. She is hopeful they can overcome everything that has happened and thanks God that they are alive. In the neighborhood where she lives, they do not have drinking water or electricity, and the road that gives access to the neighborhood is destroyed.

Thousands like her are affected, many of whom have lost everything. The regional authority of Madre de Dios also

reported that agricultural areas were hit very hard.

Celia Osorio Soto is a mother of six children. She said the situation was very unexpected, and she felt helpless when she saw her possessions floating away.

“I took my children out and I lost my things,” she said. “My house is a mess.”

Both Mantilla and Osorio are very grateful to the church for the help they received.

“I already have a little food to give to my children and thanks to all those who are supporting, I have a lot of hope.” Osorio said. “With God’s help, I know that all the families that have been affected are going to move forward.”

Many needs such as clothes, sheets, mattresses, mosquito nets, and medicine are still unmet, but Ventura is optimistic and says that they will keep praying for God to touch hearts so provisions, including spiritual help, will continue to arrive.

“Aid has impacted people’s lives by showing that the Church of the Nazarene does care and is prepared to help in difficult times,” Ventura said.

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



Flooded homes and businesses in Peru

Crisis in Myanmar

Dear People Called Methodists,

“Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns. How long will you wander, **O protesting feisty daughter?** The Lord will create a new thing on earth – **a woman will surround a man.**” (Jeremiah 31:21-22)

Greetings on the third Sunday of Lent! Justice and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be upon you! Let’s affirm in our Christian faith the strong bond of Christian love as well as the evergreen solidarity of Christian hope! Yes, indeed, in the time like this! As we reflect on the prophetic word of God, I would like to share on the struggle and suffering of our sisters and brothers in Myanmar.

The Spirit of God must have been outpouring into the people of Myanmar, especially the young women among them. In Myanmar’s protests, young women are on the front lines, rebuking the generals of Tadmaw, the Myanmar military, who reimposed a patriarchal dictatorship that has suppressed women for half a century and ousted a female civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Ma Kyal Sin, 19, was shot in the head by the security forces who killed 38 people on the single bloodiest day of March 3, 2021 since the Feb. 1 coup. Ms. Kyal Sin loved taekwondo and dance. She was one of Gen Z, a fearless generation in Myanmar. When she rallied her fellow protesters, she dressed in sneakers and torn jeans which General Min Aung Hlang, the junta chief, called “indecent clothes contrary to Myanmar culture.” The black T-shirt that Ms. Kyal Sin wore to the protest and carried a simple message: “Everything will be OK” has become a slogan of people’s movement in Myanmar. I strongly condemn the junta’s crime against humanity as they exhumated and further insulted, even murdered twice the body of Ma Kyal Sin in order to conceal the fact she was killed by their forces. And I insist the junta should be brought to the International Criminal Court. Otherwise, I imperatively warn them they will have to stand before the judgement seat of the Almighty God.

What’s going on in Myanmar today? I cannot but believe that a prophesy of Jeremiah 31:22 has come true: “A woman will surround a man.” The numberless protesting feisty women like Ms. Kyal Sin keep on marching today and tomorrow till the restoration of democracy and human rights in their conflict-ridden country. Contrary to the worldview of the Tatmadaw considering women weak and impure, they are no less brave than men and as pure as Ms. Kyal Sin which means “pure star” in Burmese. Truly the stars on the shoulders of the generals have already fallen down while the 54 lost souls who led many to righteousness will shine like the bright stars of the heavens for ever and ever.

I would like to urge you to discern that the time is com-

ing, the time when the Lord will create a new thing in Myanmar. The misogynistic Tadmaw males are loath to walk under the clotheslines of women’s sarongs, called htamein, because they are afraid of losing their masculinity. Flouting gender stereotypes with defiant creativity, people not only protect protest zones but also liberate the silly men from the bondage of “the basic principles of the world” (Galatians 4:3). Not the sarongs but the guns are replacing and removing their masculine symbols as long as they shoot their women down. The sarongs are rather for embracing in love and for fertility the cowering men in the colonized world dominated by the empire.

Let us boldly and joyfully affirm that a woman will surround a man. Yet let’s do not omit our lamentations for the lost ones of the beloved communities in Myanmar. “This might be the last time I say this. Love you so much. Don’t forget.” This is Ms. Kyal Sin’s last message to a friend on social media. We will never forget you, Angel, which is her English name, and also your good people. Since our God of the Lenten season is like “Rachel weeping for her children” (Jeremiah 31:15), she has great compassion, i.e., rahamim in Hebrew for the oppressed from the depth/womb (rehem, the root word for rahamim) of God (Jeremiah 31:20). It is no wonder that Jesus’ women followers, despite their traumatic memory of the materiality of the death of their beloved Lord, became the first witnesses of the empty tomb of the risen Christ which was transformed into the womb of new creation.

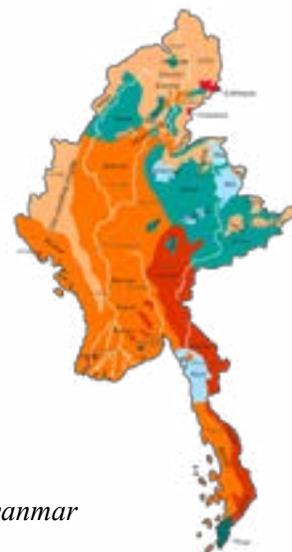
Therefore, we hold the Methodist churches of Myanmar in prayer as you do prophetic witnesses and provide comfort to your people in this anxious and uncertain time. And we want to assure you that we stand in solidarity with the patriotic and courageous people of Myanmar struggling and suffering for the cause of justice, truth, freedom, and peace. May God create a new thing in Myanmar! Praise the Lord who declares that a woman will surround a man!

Reverently looking forward to the day of resurrection of free and flourishing Myanmar,

Your humble servant in Christ,



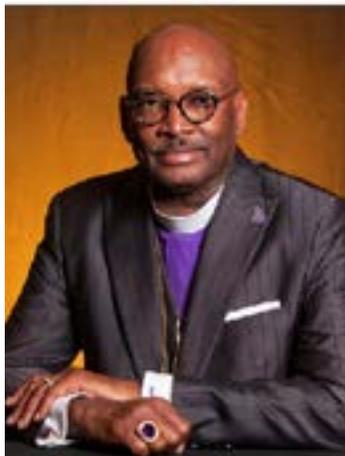
Rev. Dr. J. C. Park
President of the
World Methodist Council



Map of Myanmar

Bishop George E. Battle Jr. Scholarship Fund

Charlotte will soon be included on the list of the largest U.S. cities with a four-year medical school. For months, following the announcement that Atrium Health and Wake Forest Baptist Health have combined to operate as a single enterprise, the discussion around the Queen City has been where a second campus of Wake Forest School of Medicine will be located in Charlotte. Leaders from Atrium Health, Wake Forest Baptist Health and Wake Forest University today announced they've chosen a 20-acre site in midtown Charlotte, at the current corner of South McDowell Street and Baxter Street, adjacent to US-277.



Bishop George E. Battle Jr.

“Through our partnership with Wake Forest School of Medicine, today we fulfill a long-held desire for Charlotte to have a four-year medical school that will usher in a brand-new era of healthcare education, innovation and social impact,” said Eugene A. Woods, president and CEO of Atrium Health. “The significant investments we are making will not only enrich countless lives as we train the next generation of top-tier clinicians but will also be a pivotal economic driver that will propel us forward as we emerge from the pandemic, stronger than ever.”

The school of medicine campus will be located less than three-quarters of a mile from Atrium Health Carolinas Medical Center. The campus of the health system’s flagship hospital is undergoing an extensive renovation, ensuring the school of medicine students will have access to the most modern, state-of-the-art facilities and technology in all of their learning environments.

“This location for Wake Forest School of Medicine’s Charlotte campus will provide our students the perfect mix of expertise,” said Dr. Julie Ann Freischlag, chief academic officer for Atrium Health and dean of Wake Forest School of Medicine. “And with the latest technology, whether students are learning in Winston-Salem or this new, second campus, their immersive experience will be second to none. In addition to having the opportunity to learn from some of the finest minds in academia and take part in life-changing research, Wake Forest School of Medicine students and residents will have easy access to the renowned experts practicing at our combined world-class service lines across multiple specialties.”

“A second campus for Wake Forest School of Medicine in Charlotte is truly a significant milestone for both health and education in the Southeast,” said Nathan O. Hatch,

Ph.D., president of Wake Forest University. “It will also be a driving force for innovation in the corridor between Winston-Salem and Charlotte. This will further strengthen the academic bonds Wake Forest has with Charlotte and help advance learning, economic growth and opportunity. We are excited about the significant opportunities that our partnership with Atrium Health and the new facility will afford us, as we seek to better serve our communities in Charlotte and Winston-Salem and enhance the dynamic connections between the two vibrant cities.”

In addition to the location of the medical school, Woods announced Atrium Health has established the Bishop George E. Battle Jr. Scholarship Fund to support the continuing education of those who live in underserved communities. Battle is the present Bishop for the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church of the Piedmont District in North Carolina and in Jamaica. Bishop Battle is an emeritus member of the Atrium Health Board of Commissioners and Atrium Health Foundation Board, and has led efforts for affordable housing, parks, small businesses and extracurricular programs throughout community, including in Biddleville-Five Points, a historically Black community in West Charlotte. He also served for 17 years as a member of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education, including four years as its chairman. A lifelong advocate for at-risk and those economically disadvantaged, Bishop Battle has received more than 100 awards and honors during his career, including the Long Leaf Pine Award, the highest award bestowed by the state of North Carolina.

Through an initial seeding of \$5 million, the Bishop George E. Battle Jr. Scholarship Fund will benefit those who are in pursuit of a degree in health sciences at an Atrium Health-affiliated college or university, including Wake Forest School of Medicine, Carolinas College of Health Sciences and Cabarrus College of Health Sciences. Atrium Health will be engaging the community to match the initial \$5 million to create a \$10 million fund by the time the first students are seated at the Wake Forest School of Medicine in Charlotte in 2024. “We believe Atrium Health can play a significant role in providing equity in access to both healthcare and education. And that first starts by ensuring that students from disadvantaged and low-income communities have equal opportunity to pursue careers in health sciences. Through the Bishop George E. Battle Jr. Scholarship Fund, our hope is that these young professionals will stay and join the Atrium Health family after they earn their degree – addressing the growing shortage of clinicians in both urban and rural communities across the Carolinas and beyond,” said Woods.

Wake Forest School of Medicine – Charlotte is expected to break ground in the first quarter of 2022, soon after completion of the zoning approval process. Atrium Health’s technology offices currently on the site will be replaced with a large, mixed-use campus.

Continued...

Bishop George E. Battle Jr. Scholarship Fund continued...

It is envisioned it will become, over time, the nucleus for collaborative efforts that will bring about new innovations in health technology and research.

Wake Forest School of Medicine began sending its first students to Atrium Health Carolinas Medical Center earlier this month, as part of its rotations. The initial class of Wake Forest School of Medicine – Charlotte first-year M.D. students is anticipated to begin their education in 2024.

A comprehensive philanthropic campaign will also be forthcoming this year, a component of which will be dedicated to supporting the infrastructure and naming of the facilities and programs at the school of medicine, as well as seeking ongoing support for the Bishop George E. Battle Jr. Scholarship Fund and other education initiatives. As Atrium Health's strategic combination is investing heavily into the Charlotte school of medicine, it is also continuing to invest into major infrastructure projects in Winston-Salem as well.

Last year, Atrium Health announced \$3.4 billion in planned investments into Wake Forest Baptist Health

Secularism for the 21st Century

In the absence of divine commandments, secular ethics often faces difficult dilemmas. What happens when the same action hurts one person but helps another? When secular people encounter such dilemmas, they do not ask 'What does God command?' Rather they weigh carefully the feelings of all concerned parties, examine a wide range of observations and possibilities, and search for a middle path that will cause as little harm as possible.

Yuval Noah Harari in 21 Lessons for the 21st Century

Secularism is sometimes defined as a negation of religion and spirituality, resulting in secular people being characterized by a negation of their beliefs and actions. Harari makes the point that secular society is open to everyone and anyone of different faith creeds and none, provided that they abide by the secular ethical code. The secular ethical code is an ideal toward which all people may aspire, but also one from which one is able to fall short. In the same way that Christian societies and institutions deviate from their ideals and miss the mark (hamartia), so too does the modern state of France struggle with the ideals of liberty, equality and living together (le Vivre Ensemble). For Harari, the values toward which secular society aspire are truth, compassion, equality, freedom, courage and responsibility. These form the bases of modern scientific and democratic institutions.

Secular people do not confuse truth with dogma and faith. The strong belief by a person in a story does not necessarily prove the story to be true! Secular people sanctify the truth wherever it manifests itself since this truth has en-

abled humankind to split the atom, decipher the genome, track human evolution of life and understand the history of humanity itself. Together with truth, secular people are committed to compassion as a deep appreciation to suffering. Secular people's commitments to truth and compassion result in a commitment to equality, refusing to conflate "uniqueness" with superiority. They acknowledge their duties toward humanity as a whole. Seculars cannot search for truth and for overcoming suffering without freedom to investigate and experiment while refraining from "investing supreme authority in text, institution, or leader as ultimate judge of what is true and what's right."

Based on a recently commissioned economic study by Tripp Umbach, the new school of medicine and the anticipated spin-off activities – in healthcare and other economic development – is projected to generate an additional \$5.2 billion in economic impact and create nearly 43,000 jobs over the course of the next 20 years.

Read more of this story at <https://www.wccbcharlotte.com/2021/03/24/wake-forest-school-of-medicine-to-be-built-in-midtown-charlotte/>

Seculars acknowledge that it takes courage to fight biases and oppressive regimes. Secular education teaches that, if we don't know something, we shouldn't be afraid of acknowledging our ignorance and looking for new evidence. "Questions you cannot answer are usually far better for you than answers you cannot question."

Finally, secular people cherish responsibility. If, says Harari, the world is full of misery, it is one's duty to find solutions. Secular people take pride in the immense achievements of modern science such as curing epidemics, feeding the hungry and bringing peace to large parts of the world. For this same reason, seculars need to take full responsibility for the crimes and failings of modernity, from genocides to ecological degradation.

Written by WMC researcher Keith Anthony Vermeulen

Carrying the Cross...

He features, by name and home place, in each of the synoptic Gospels - Matthew 27: 32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26. His sons, Alexander and Rufus, get mentioned by Mark. Perhaps this is the Rufus who Paul mentions in his letter to the Christians in Rome (16:13), whose mother 'has been a mother to me.' And perhaps this family was among the Cyrenians who proclaimed the Gospel in Antioch as Luke reports (Acts 11:20). Who knows?

But what is known is that Simon of Cyrene was forced by the Roman soldiers to carry the cross of Jesus to Calvary. This pain-full action is remembered by those recording the story. His name is remembered and spoken every Good Friday as the story of our salvation is rehearsed. Simon did not offer to carry that cross, he was obliged to do so – and he did. And for this, some Christian traditions revere him as a saint.

Cyrene was a town in what is now Libya, on the north coast of Africa. It is thought-provoking to recall that, at each end of his life, Jesus is helped, one way or another, by people from the continent of Africa. When he was an infant, his parents sought refuge in Egypt and stayed there until Herod was dead; on his way to death, a citizen of Cyrene carried his cross for him in his moment of extreme weakness.

The Irish artist, Jack B. Yeats (1871 – 1957), has painted the scene in all its brutality and pain...

This Eastertide, we might take a moment to reflect on the crosses we - and others – are obliged to carry and for whom, ultimately, we do this.

And may we remember in prayer the suffering peoples of the continent of Africa, many persecuted because they follow Christ; many afflicted by war, famine, drought, climate change; many needing to flee for safety.

Lord, in your mercy...Hear our prayer.

Gillian Kingston, Vice President of the WMC

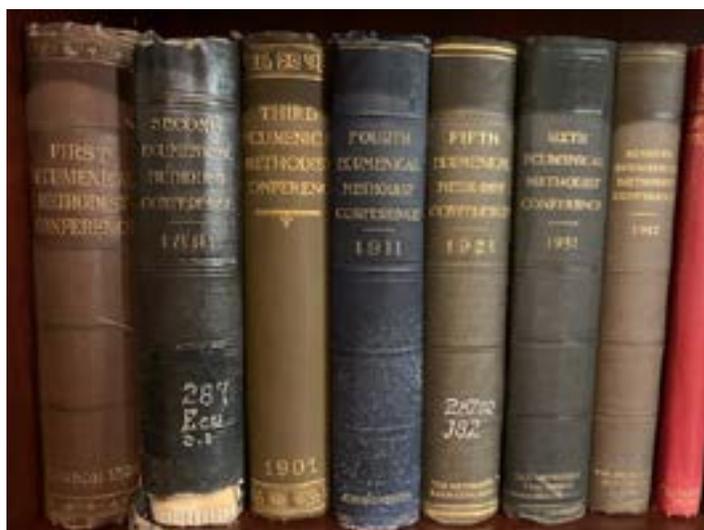


Simon the Cyrenian

<https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/SIMON-THE-CYRENIAN/3216DADE96375E31>

Museum sells extra copies of Conference Proceedings Books

Please contact the World Methodist Council Headquarters to buy a copy. The books are first come first serve. Please email us at communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org.



Older editions of Conference books

Conference	Year	# of Copies	Price - US\$
3	1901	1	20
4	1911	1	20
7	1947	3	20
8	1951	4	20
9	1956	1	20
10	1961	2	20
11	1966	2	20
12	1971	1	20
13	1976	4	20
14	1981	3	20
15	1986	2	20
16	1991	2	20
17	1996	3	20
18	2001	2	20
19	2006	2	20
20	2011	3	20

Christ UMC ‘Community Healers’ minister to health care heroes

Daphne Soleil wanted to figure out a way to minister to health care workers—who she describes as the “heroes of the pandemic.” As someone with decades of nursing experience, she knows firsthand the demands in the field of medicine, which have increased substantially amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the church she attends, Christ UMC in Rochester, is situated literally across the street from the world-renowned Mayo Clinic, so health care workers are a key part of the church’s community and mission field.

Soleil partnered with some physicians, nurses, and chaplains in the congregation and started a new “Community Healers” ministry.

“I imagined us being the roaring crowd that health care providers never had,” she said. “They deserve it more than athletes do.”

The Community Healers team, which came together in late January, is 14 people strong and has a multi-faceted plan underway. Its members developed a “how to love a health care worker” document that they’ve been circulating throughout the congregation. They are also sending a letter of support and encouragement to health care workers in the congregation and community, along with two-inch crocheted “pocket prayer circles”—to serve as a reminder that they are not alone, they have community support, and they can hand their worries over to God.

Soleil hopes to do mailings to health care workers every few months; perhaps future ones will include origami cranes or a poem, she said.

The team is also creating a website that’s meant to serve as a sort of virtual healing garden. It will include links to sacred music, recordings of soothing garden sounds, art and prayer cues, yoga lessons—and other things that are nourishing to the soul, said Soleil.



The Community Healers team is giving these “pocket prayer circles” to health care workers along with a letter of encouragement

The church will have a physical healing garden too. Its courtyard—which includes flowers, various native plants, and a labyrinth—will get new signage inviting staff and patients from the Mayo Clinic and nearby Olmstead Medical Center to enjoy the quiet, reflective space.

“We want to be a bigger resource for all of the medical tourism that flows through Rochester,” said Soleil. “People are in need of healing places and resources.”

The Community Healers ministry will extend to worship, too: Christ UMC has planned an interfaith healers service in its parking lot on April 11 that’s for everyone in Rochester. Representatives from the Jewish, Hindi, Muslim and Native American communities have been invited to participate with a three- to five-minute reading and/or discussion on healing as honored by their traditions.

“We are thanking and celebrating everyone from the ICU physician to the child who stayed home from school, grocery store outings, and trips to grandma’s house,” said Soleil.

Attendees will receive cards to write down the people they want to thank, and as they are read at the end of the worship, brightly colored crepe paper representing the various groups named will be unspooled and crisscross the parking lot in a beautiful visual display. The entire service will later be posted to the Mayo Clinic intranet to spiritually buoy employees as an ongoing resource.

Rev. Elizabeth Macaulay, lead pastor at Christ UMC, describes the Community Healers ministry as holy work.

“The trauma of this pandemic time is lodged deep in all of our bones,” she said. “It has been a privilege to hear how providers—nurses, chaplains, physicians, and the myriad of folk who have provided healing graces—have carried the pain of battling this unseen and powerful virus. Our question in forming has centered around how we as a congregation can reach out, support, pray for, and bless those who are blessing to so many. This aligns with our sense of being Grace in the City... We lean into the power of Jesus as healer of body, soul, and mind and seek to offer grace through tangible and intangible touches. We breathe each other’s pain and hope.”

Soleil articulates her goal for the Community Healers ministry and the health care providers it aims to support as this: “I want people to have a sense of strength and well-being and, if that’s too much to aspire to, just not giving up—hanging in there and knowing that not only are there people willing to walk beside them, but that God’s there for them too.”

Christa Meland is director of communications for the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Crisis of Calling

In 1996, World Methodist Evangelism launched the Order of the FLAME, an annual gathering for young clergy. The goal of the Order was to instill the DNA of evangelism into young clergy leaders. Our prayer was that these young leaders would recognize that evangelism is not a separate or specialized emphasis, but a foundational element in all aspects of ministry. The name is telling – it is the Order of the FLAME, which stands for Faithful Leaders as Mission Evangelists. The heart of the mission of the FLAME to equip young clergy to be mission evangelists in their own communities, encouraging them to see themselves as appointed not just to an individual congregation, but to their entire community.

I had the opportunity to attend the first Order of the FLAME gathering in 1996. At the time I had three young children and was appointed as a less than full time associate pastor with minimal responsibilities. Because the FLAME is an invitational gathering of young clergy who have shown promising gifts for leadership, there were many talented young clergy at that first gathering, as there are at every gathering of the FLAME. I too, had been invited; and yet, I felt very out of place, so much so that as the days progressed, it became somewhat of a “crisis of calling” for me. What was I doing? Why was I even there?

Of course, I also received a great deal of encouragement and insight during those days and the teaching was outstanding. Even so, by the last day of the gathering, I was quite discouraged, thinking that if this was the direction God was calling me, I definitely didn’t have enough gifts or talents to follow. In my mind, I must have misunderstood my call to ministry completely.

The final worship service of the FLAME gathering occurred in the midst of this crisis of calling. Now that I have served numerous years in ministry, I have witnessed and experienced many amazing things as the Holy Spirit moves in the hearts of people; but at this point in my life, what I experienced was a first. It was a deeply moving time of worship for everyone present yet it holds very special meaning for me.

After the sermon we were invited to stand and pray aloud as a body. As the prayers swirled around me, I felt the immediate urge to leave the room. There was no way God could use me the way he was obviously using those around me. I decided to leave right then, when no one would notice.

Just as I was turning to leave, I felt “hands” on my shoulders pushing me firmly back down in my seat and holding me there. As I sat unable to get up, on the other side of the room a man who was then a stranger, but who has now become a dear friend began speaking in a loud voice. Oddly, no one else in the room seemed to be aware of what he was doing, and I couldn’t really understand what he was saying. But as he spoke, I heard a voice as clear as crystal in my own head:

Yes, Kim. You may not have all the gifts and talents. I know you don’t have all the ability. But none of that matters. You will do what you are able, and I will do the rest. I am your source of power and strength. It is not you who is working; it is me, working through you. Trust me.

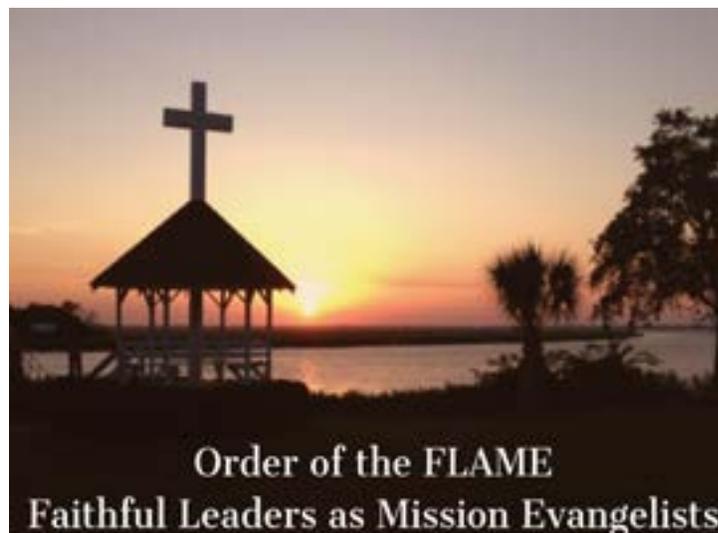
Looking back on my ministry, this watershed moment at the Order of the FLAME was the beginning of a theme that has continued to mark my spiritual journey – trust. I have come to understand that it’s ok not to have all the gifts necessary to accomplish the tasks that God places before me, as long as I trust God. I do what I am able, and trust God to do the rest.

I credit my Order of the FLAME experience for redirecting my trajectory of ministry and instilling in me the trust necessary to follow Jesus and lead others to him. Over and over God has shown that he will provide exactly what I need – whether by teaching me a new skill or placing someone in my path who has the gifts and talents and that I do not. And over and over he has given me signs of his faithfulness – as I have traveled, as I have learned and taught, as I have led.

In leading WME and continuing to nurture and grow the FLAME community, my desire for the next generation of leaders is that they will discover (or rediscover) who the source of their power and strength really is. That they will realize that God is the one doing the real work and if they trust him and do what they are able, God will do the rest.

For this 25th anniversary of the Order of the FLAME and we are marking the event with a special gathering October 4-8, 2021. We will gather to celebrate, learn, and fan the flame of our commitment to Jesus Christ as mission evangelists. It will be a wonderful time of physical and spiritual refreshment.

Written by *Kimberly D. Reisman*



Tennessee church embraces Hispanic congregation

Iglesia del Nazareno Betel Hermitage became an officially organized church on 24 January 2021, a year earlier than they were hoping. When news that they were going to be an officially organized church spread to members of the English-speaking congregation they share facilities with, they were sad because they thought their Hispanic brothers and sisters were going to be moving out. While that wasn't the case, the concern underscores the relationship both congregations have built in just four years.

Howard Plummer, pastor of Hermitage Church of the Nazarene, was at a MidSouth District Assembly when he felt prompted by a speaker who asked the assembled pastors how many churches they were going to try and plant in the coming year. He wrote down the number one. Because of a growing number of Latino people moving to the area near their church, he had been wanting to start a Hispanic ministry and congregation at their building.

"I immediately went to [the Hispanic ministries coordinator for the district] Eduardo Lelli and told him that I wanted to start one, and I asked for a pastor," Plummer said. "So he assigned a pastor to us and told us from the beginning that he was going to give us a pastor that every time he preaches, the altars are full."

After Ramón and Alma Rosa Gonzalez arrived at the Hermitage Church, Plummer and the staff gave them a tour, making it clear to the Gonzalezes that they would have equal access and priority for every facility. That gesture and the staff's faithfulness to that promise set the tone for their relationship over the last few years.

"As the scripture says, love is the element that binds everything together," Gonzalez said. "We are one family. Language has not been a barrier. For the last four years, it has been a great journey together."

Each year, the congregations come together for an event called "Latino Fest." The September event is a way for the Hispanic congregation to share their culture with the English church while recognizing all the help and hospitality the English congregation provides. A large part of the Hispanic congregation is of Mexican heritage, and September is the month in which they celebrate their independence.

"On that day, we also celebrate the partnership we have with our English brothers and sisters," Gonzalez said. "We celebrate the independence festivities and we reach out to the community. In a way, we kill 'three birds with one stone.'"

The Hispanic congregation brings food and mariachis to celebrate their independence festivities and even bring the community in. According to Plummer, it is their biggest event of the year. The Hispanic congregation also refuses help for it from the English congregation, only asking that they continue to participate and learn more about Hispanic culture.

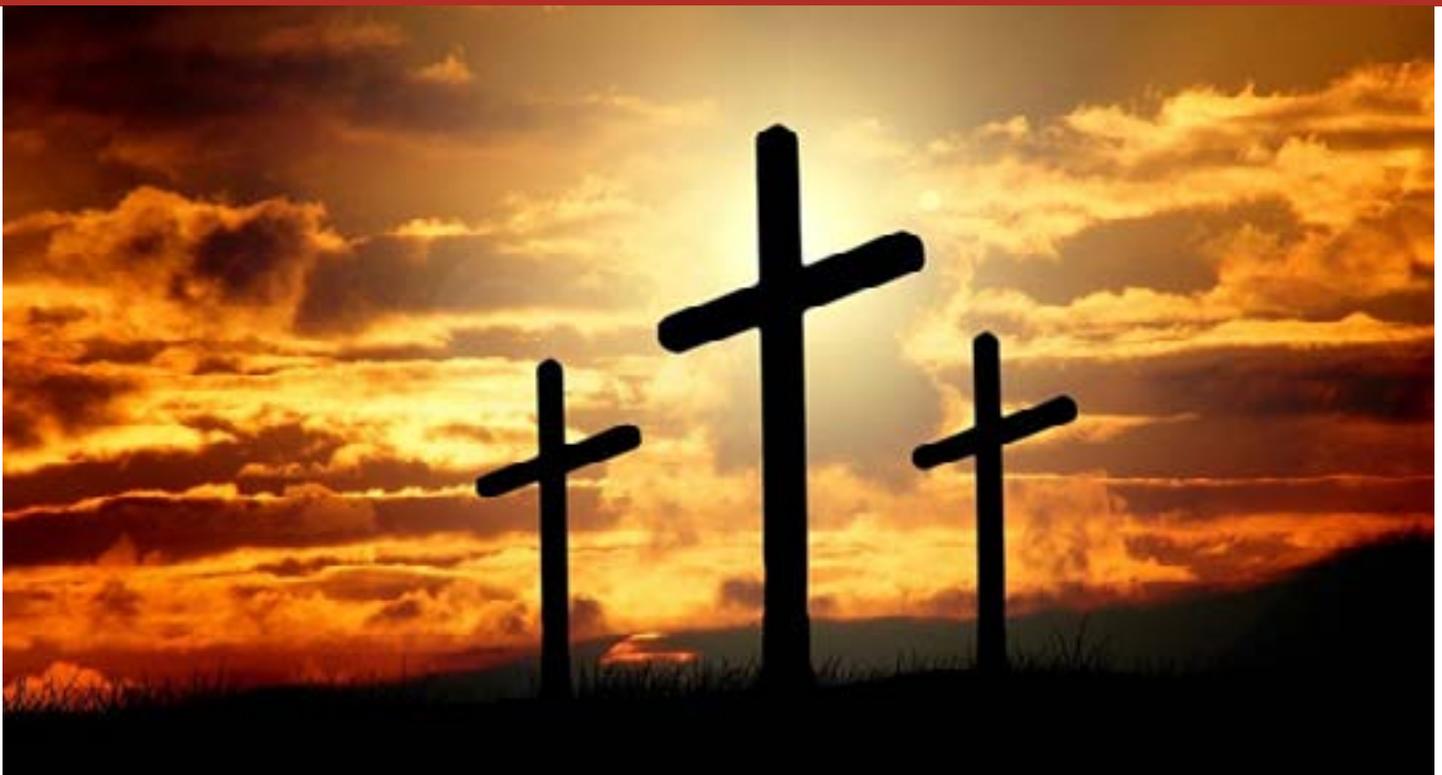
The English-speaking church membership was on board with the partnership from the beginning.

"Our relationship with them isn't like [the pastoral staff] are the only people who get along together," Plummer said. "I can't emphasize enough how it was a whole church buy-in. From the very beginning, it's never been a hard sell. There has never been anything that we had to guilt or oversell people about. It has just been this very natural melding together."

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



Hispanic congregation coming together for an event called "Latino Fest"



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 **Friday, April 23** at communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org if you would like your story to be included in the May edition of the First Friday Letter.

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