First Friday Letter
The World Methodist Council August 2020

Greetings from the General Secretary

Dear sisters and brothers,

I pray that you are finding healthy and hopeful ways of living during this tumultuous period in history as we respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is interesting to speculate how this period will be described by those who write history. The Stone Age, Iron Age, and Victorian-era are all descriptions of those who reflected on the past. Will we be remembered as the era that rediscovered the link with creation or as the people who worked towards justice and peace for all, or will we have missed the opportunity to address social and economic inequality?

COVID-19 has exposed the fragility of our planetary home, earth. All humanity is bound together with 80 million other species in the complex web of life. We are interdependent, and every member of the human family is essential to keeping the web in balance. Humans are the crown of God's creation and placed in the ecosystem to explore and maintain the harmony of nature. We should acknowledge the contribution that spe- cies make to our shared ecosystem. (Psalm 8) We should also confess that we have not been good stewards of the earth. Paul sums it up well in Romans 8:19; 23, *"For all creation waits in eager longing for the reveal- ing of the sons of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now....."* God's salvation plan is to establish an everlasting covenantal relationship with all creation. God invites us as partners in this redemptive mission. Let us join this exciting venture. Pope Francis aptly reminds us, "If we destroy creation, it will destroy us."

The WMC offer condolences to the families of Congressman John Lewis and Rev. C.T. Vivian, two giants of the US Civil Rights Movement. We remember and recommit ourselves to John Lewis' challenge, "We have been too quiet for too long. There comes a time when you have to say something. You have to make a little noise. You have to move your feet. This is the time." (See statement by AME Council of Bishops)

On Sunday, August 2, together with the rest of the world, we welcomed US astronauts Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley back to planet Earth after a two-month space mission. The transport of astronauts to and from orbit is a feat that no private company (headed by South African born, Elon Musk) has accomplished before.

May our space exploration make us realize that we need to redouble our efforts to protect our one and only fragile planetary home called Earth.

Next month we celebrate the "Season of Creation." in the assurance that God is *"making all things new."* (Rev. 21:5) No matter what challenges the weeks and months of lockdown have brought you, remember that God is near you and promises never to leave nor forsake you. (Deuteronomy 31:6, Joshua 1:5, Hebrews 13:5)

Wishing all a happy and healthy month ahead.

Shalom,

Ivan

A prayer for Beirut

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

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

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

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

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

Prayer

God of explosions and pollution,

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

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

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

Amen.

To read more on this story follow the link: *https://theology.org.au/prayer-for-beirut/*

The Speck and the Log: Liberating the AME Church continued...

Nevertheless, there is still a gulf in the pastoral and leadership opportunities afforded to women and men. Multiple studies show that it takes women who pastor longer to achieve the same comparative status as their male counterparts. Looking at the Episcopacy, of the 138 bishops elected in the AME Church, four have been women and the current bench of 19 active bishops has two female prelates, with one retiring at the 2021 General Conference, and the other retiring at the 2024 General Conference. We have had only three female general officers, two of which were laywomen and the current one is clergy, the first in the history of the denomination.

While the AME Church has advanced beyond its peers in the Black Church in terms of embracing the role of women in the ordained ministry, much work remains to achieve equity and equality for the women clergy in the leadership of our denomination. Even as we advocate for liberation for Black people, we must liberate the AME Church so it can be a place where all persons called to serve God can be viewed and appreciated for their talents irrespective of their gender.

LGBTQ acceptance and patriarchy are two of the issues that the AME Church must confront for us to be the Church that God called us to be and the church which our founders dreamed. The fact that these issues are openly acknowledged gives hope that we can have honest and meaningful discussions in a spirit of Christ-like love.

We cannot fall into rote positions based upon proof-texting and culture but must seek to find understanding and resolution. Jesus came to liberate the captives and proclaim the Gospel. We must seek to liberate the AME Church from man-made sins that cloud our sight.

By John Thomas, III, Editor of The Christian Recorder

Philippines' Anti-Terrorism Act

CHIANG MAI: The Philippines' new 'Anti-Terrorism Act', which took effect on Saturday, 18 July 2020, is reminiscent of the use of repressive force and human rights violations of the dark history of martial law era, stated the General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Dr. Mathews George Chunakara.

In a statement released on behalf of the CCA, the General Secretary stated that the new Anti-Terrorism Act would undermine basic freedoms and human rights as it would give overreaching powers to the Philippines government and would pave the way for large-scale violations of human rights. He further said that CCA condemned how the contentious Anti-Terrorism Act bill was fast-tracked and approved in both Houses of the Philippine Congress while the entire country's attention was focused on the rampant spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The statement of the CCA General Secretary observed that the new law, under the Act's ambiguous definition of terrorism, granted the government sweeping powers to curtail freedoms and criminalise acts that incite terrorism "by means of speeches, proclamations, writings, emblems, banners, or other representations". It also bestowed the President with the power to create an Anti-Terrorism Council that could tag individuals and groups as terrorists, allow authorities to detain suspected terrorists without charge for up to twenty-four days, and permit the government to conduct ninety days of surveillance and wiretaps.

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Report on the 'Human Rights Situation in the Philippines' (UNHRC 44th Session, 30 June–20 July 2020) also expressed concern on the danger posed by the Anti-Terrorism Act.

Local and international human rights groups have voiced their concern and apprehension that the legislation could be abused to target the administration's opponents, using the presidentially-appointed Anti-Terrorism Council that could designate anyone suspected a 'terrorist'.

The CCA General Secretary's statement also stated, "The CCA stands in solidarity with the peace-loving and progressive Filipino people in opposing the Anti-Terror Act. The CCA is alarmed at and condemns this law as a menace to the fundamental rights of the Filipino people. The CCA calls upon its member churches and councils to pray for the safety of the Filipino people, as they face an uncertain future."

Please click here to read the full text of the CCA General Secretary's Statement on Anti-Terrorism Act in the Philippines.

Thailand student shares faith with family

When Galena was placed in Marvel Vander Kooi's English class, she wondered what her exposure to the Bible and Christian teaching had previously been. From her wide eyes and fascinated demeanor, it seemed clear that Galena was hearing each Bible story for the first time. As she soaked up every story, Vander Kooi thought Galena and her parents must not be believers.

Over the course of the school year, she started to notice a change in Galena. She no longer seemed as fascinated, but she was still eager to learn. She started agreeing with biblical truths, indicating they were her truths. She started making prayer requests and comments as someone who believed. She was so confident that Vander Kooi started wondering if maybe her parents were believers and that she had been wrong about Galena having no prior knowledge.

When she had the opportunity to chat with Galena, she asked, "Do your mom and dad follow Jesus?"

"No, but I'm teaching them some," Galena said.

"What do your parents think?" Vander Kooi asked.

Galena said, "They think it's a good idea."

Galena knew nothing about the Bible prior to attending the School of Promise. Now, her faith has grown so much over the course of the year that she is teaching her parents about Jesus. Her child-like, sincere faith is being used to teach her mom and dad. The Holy Spirit's power is truly amazing!

Marvel Vander Kooi and her husband, Joel, are the founders of the School of Promise in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

--Church of the Nazarene Asia-Pacific

Be a Shepherd

In the tenth chapter of John's Gospel we find Jesus words, "I Am the Gate," as he speaks about the Good Shepherd. In ancient Palestine there were two types of sheep folds. The communal fold was located near home and was a flat area enclosed by low, stacked stone walls with a strong door. Often, however, the shepherd slept across the threshold. The hillside fold was a distance from the city and was a temporary structure of tangled thorn bushes and rude bowers built by the shepherd. It was movable as they grazed. The shepherd then slept at the opening, serving as the gate in order to protect his sheep from thieves and bandits and animals of prey. Anything that entered must step over the shepherd. Becoming a gate is a beautiful image, but most of us could not imagine it ourselves.

In our lifetime, we are rarely asked to physically lay our lives down for another person. In fact, we aren't often asked to be physically inconvenienced for anyone. We really sacrifice very little for Jesus' sake. But, suddenly, COVID was upon us and life as we knew it was gone. Yet, early on, during the most uncertain of times, essential workers everywhere were called to risk their lives for us. With great fear and apprehension they became the gates that protected and guarded us in our going out and coming in.

Now it is our turn to be imitators of Christ. We have been given the great privilege of serving as gates for our community by wearing masks, waiting six feet apart, and washing our hands. Let's tend the sheep! "Be a lamp, a lifeboat, a ladder. Help someone's soul to heal. Walk out of your house like a shepherd." RUMI

--Linda Henley

The link to Hymn Sing from Home XX is:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmXwkj8p9VY

Statement from the Council of Bishops: Honoring the Lives of Iconic Civil Rights Leaders

It is with sadness that we bid farewell to two legendary civil rights leaders: Congressman John R. Lewis and the Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian. There are no words to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation for the contributions of these two gentle giants. Both were willing to lay down their lives and they were beaten and jailed for pushing America to honor its creed that '… that all men are created equal …" and allow African Americans to reap the full benefits of citizenship in a free and just society. They advocated a nonviolent response in the face of violence and hatred spewed upon them by southern White segregationists when attempting to obtain the right to vote.

Congressman Lewis was a man of humble beginnings who was anointed by God to act as the conscience of America. Inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Congressman Lewis did not let his youthfulness deter him from becoming an active member of the Freedom Riders. At age 23, he became the chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and was the youngest speaker at the March on Washington, which was held in August 1963. Eager to make a difference, on March 7, 1965, Lewis along with 600 marchers left Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma, Alabama to begin a march to Montgomery to demand voting rights for African Americans. However, as the marchers began to descend the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they were confronted by state troopers who used clubs and tear gas to disperse the marchers. Congressman Lewis suffered a fractured skull and was sent to the hospital along with 77 others, on what has become known as Bloody Sunday. This horrific event led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Lewis moved his fight for civil rights from the streets to the halls of Congress when he was elected as the U.S. Representative for Georgia's 5th congressional district in 1986. He was still faithfully serving his district and his country at the time of his death. His life is a testament to his belief in the following exhortation: "When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to speak up. You have to say something, you have to do something."

Reverend Vivian was a close friend and supporter of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Vivian was first introduced to Gandhi's nonviolent direct action strategy in 1959 while he was studying for the ministry at the American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee. He, along with other students organized nonviolent sit-ins at local lunch counters in Tennessee. In February 1965, Vivian and other activists visited the Dallas County courthouse in Selma, Alabama to try to register Black voters. As he was passionately stating his reasons why Black citizens should be allowed to vote, he was punched in the mouth by Sheriff Jim Clark and knocked to the ground. As cameras rolled, determined to demonstrate the power of nonviolence, Vivian got up and continued to make his case. In a 2013 interview with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Reverend Vivian recalled that encounter in 1965 and what he did afterwards. He shared, "I got down on my knees and said, 'Thank you Lord' – not because I was alive, but because I had done what I should do, and I'd done it well. Even when I got knocked down, I stood back up. I'd stood up to the powers that be, and I did it nonviolently." As Reverend Vivian continued to pastor churches, he also continued his fight for racial justice. In 2008, Vivian established the C.T. Vivian Leadership Institute which was dedicated to developing sustainable programs to revitalize underserved communities. When asked for advice on how to move forward to accomplish change, Reverend Vivian would say, "It's in the action!"

As a denomination founded out of racial discrimination rather than theological differences, members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church are called to do something . . . to take action. Therefore, let us honor the legacies of these distinguished icons by exercising our right to vote, encouraging others to do the same, challenging efforts by elected officials to engage in voter suppression and educating ourselves on the issues and candidates desiring our votes.

We solicit interest in your prayers for the families of these two great men.

Grace and Peace,

Bishop Michael L. Mitchell, President of the Council of Bishops

Bishop Adam J. Richardson, Senior Bishop

Bishop E. Anne Henning Byfield, Secretary

Bishop Ronnie Brailsford, Assistant Secretary

Read more at https://www.thechristianrecorder.com/category/news/

John R. Lewis

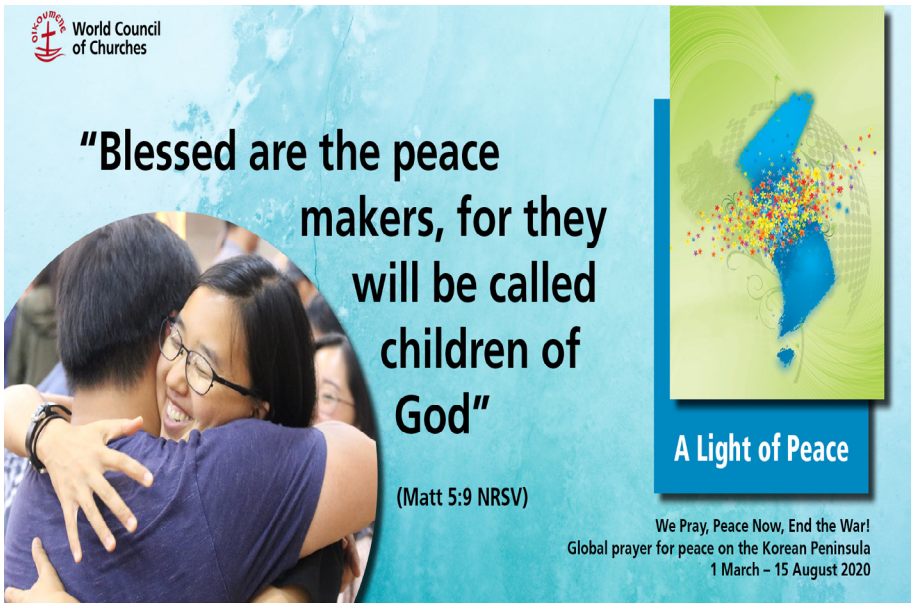
Women of Faith Pilgrim Team Visit to South Korea

Together with several other Methodist and United Church women I was privileged to join a diverse group of sisters from around the globe at a virtual pilgrimage to South Korea organized by the World Council of Churches. We celebrated the gifts of our Korean sisters, we visited the wounds of decades of war, militarization and patriarchy and we learned how injustices are transformed. Our hosts in Korea was the Women's Committee of the National Council of Churches in Korea. In her introduction to the Korean history Rev. Mon-Sook Lee distinguished between "peace-keeping" and "peace-making": keeping is rather static and preserving what has been achieved, peace-making is active and progressing. In the last decades militarism and patriarchism had a negative impact on the lives of particularly women and children as well as on the environment. People were told that systems of division are important to keep peace in the now 67 years of the armistice. Christian women in South Korea are not satisfied with those peace keeping strategies. They actively engage themselves as peace makers. I was particularly impressed by their work for the "comfort women": Women had to prostitute themselves as a so-called friendly service to the soldiers of the US Army.

Since then, for many years Christian women organizations are present in the "Camptowns" in the neighborhoods of the military bases. They create space for counselling, medical assistance, advocacy, and agency of the victims through music and art. It took many years until the evil done to these comfort women was officially recognized by the South Korean state.

Wednesday, July 15 we virtually took part in a Wednesday demonstration in Seoul in front of the Japanese Embassy. In the last 30 years Korean women are challenging the government of Japan to admit that comfort women were misused in the time of the Japanese occupation 1910-1945. The persistence proved in this weekly protest is also expressed in the ongoing work for peace between South- and North Korea. Women engage in humanitarian aid; they are creative in enabling face to face meetings with North Korean women in third countries and they cooperate with international groups towards a peace treaty and an end of the militarization. 70 years after the beginning of the Korean war it is time for peace with justice.

Let us join the Christians in Korea in their prayer campaign "Light of Peace". I pray with the words of Rev. Dr. Hyun-ju Bae from the Presbyterian Church in Korea, who was the moderator at the first day of our virtual pilgrimage: "Grant us the courage to go through the narrow gate that leads to life, not the wide gate that leads to destruction (Mt 7:13-14). May we leave to our children not a painful and terrible heritage, but a life that uses natural energy from your created sun, wind and water…Remembering that on the cross our Lord shared the suffering of the nuclear radiation victims, and hoping that a new heaven and new earth of life and peace may be realized from Mount Halla in the south to Mount Paekdu in the north, throughout Northeast Asia and all the earth, we pray in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen."



Submitted and written by Bishop Rosemarie Wenner

Jubilee for the Earth

September 1 to October 4 people of faith are celebrating the "Season of Creation". This year's motto is "Jubilee for the Earth". An Ecumenical international group worked on a Celebration Guide, a rich resource with prayers, bible studies and suggestions how to celebrate the Season of Creation on a local level.

Click here to download and read more: *https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-jubilee-earth-season-creation-2020-celebration-guide*

Churches celebrate end of 2018-2020 Ebola outbreak

The deadly Ebola outbreak in eastern Congo that killed 2,277 people is over, the Congolese health minister and the World Health Organization said on June 25. The 10th outbreak of the hemorrhagic fever in the Congo began on Aug. 1, 2018. It was the second most serious outbreak since the virus was identified in 1976.

Congolese Minister of Health Eteni Longondo said the epidemic was "the longest, the most complex and the deadliest in the history of the country." Only the Ebola epidemic in West Africa claimed more lives. That 2013-2016 outbreak killed 11,310, mostly in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. But even as the 10th outbreak ends, another outbreak has been identified in Mbandaka, Congo.

"The United Methodist Church has done a great job of raising awareness on this disease on community radios, mass awareness, awareness raising by messages via the UMConnect system," he said.

The epidemic ended just as the country faces the COVID-19 pandemic. Like Ebola, fighting the coronavirus requires the respect of hygienic conditions, physical distance, but also the wearing of facial protection masks, said Dr. Damas Lushima, health board coordinator for the East Congo Episcopal Area.

"This is why I call on the local communities to observe scrupulously these measures and also to the teams of health structures, pastors, clergy and laity to be able to continue with awareness activities on barrier measures at all levels," Lushima said.

East Congo Bishop Gabriel Yemba Unda warned that local communities and even partners should not let their guard down. "We must continue to sensitize local communities so that respect for hygiene measures can remain in our culture," Unda said. "This allows us to protect against not only Ebola, but also several other diseases that can be caused by dirty hands."

In addition to sharing health and prevention information, teams of United Methodist volunteers in eastern Congo are also working to combat the stigma Ebola survivors face. According to the World Health Organization, before leaving an Ebola treatment center, survivors should receive training and advice on possible psychosocial disorders they may face during convalescence.

"Survivors find it difficult to reintegrate because of local communities who believe that they can still contaminate them," Lushima said, adding that community relays are being put in place. Text messages have also been sent to thousands of recipients in the region.

Emile Ulangi Usumbu volunteered to help raise awareness about the issue of stigma after integration difficulties his family had when his son left the treatment center in February. Little David, Ulangi's son, had symptoms before he was declared negative at the transit center."I volunteered to accompany survivors of the Ebola virus disease because I know it is difficult for them. Myself, in my family, I had difficulties because my son had presented symptoms and that it was not easy for our reintegration," he said.

Ulangi and his wife, Masika Bahati Nehema, worship at Jerusalem United Methodist Church in Beni District. "To serve as an example and demonstrate that our loved ones who survived Ebola are not a health hazard, we approach survivors who sometimes feel alone," said Nehema. "We speak with them, discuss, walk in public with them so that the other members of our community see that the survivors cannot transmit the virus to us."

"We prefer the community approach because it uses interpersonal communication. Our community relays, who are very influential leaders in their communities, educate local populations that survivors of Ebola virus disease are not a danger to others," Lushima said.

While the country survived the 2018-2020 Ebola epidemic, another epidemic was recently declared in in Mbandaka. A total of 41 cases have been recorded, with 17 associated deaths, according to the WHO.

Unda believes that continuing to keep the population on the alert is one of the most effective means of protecting oneself. "As we have just finished with this 10th epidemic in East Congo, I have the conviction that we will end with this 11th epidemic which has just appeared in Mbandaka," he said.

Read more stories at *https://www.umnews.org/en/news*

Dr. Damas Lushima, health board coordinator for the East Congo Episcopal Area, provides education for COVID-19 health safety in a Kivu health facility. Photo By Philippe Lolonga, UM News.

Let us pray

Please pause whatever you're doing and join me in this prayer:

"Gracious Provider, food security is so fundamental to our ability to live and work as human beings. As the blight of hunger continues to spread during this time of pandemic, so the crucial importance of nutritious, affordable food that's available to all is being spotlighted again.

We weep before the shameful travesty that in this land of plenty there are children being stunted by malnutrition and youths who are forced to rummage for scraps; that in this land of abundance there are many who have been reduced to begging and more and more who are literally dying of starvation. Forgive us, we pray!

As we bring this complex need before you, so we pray today for one specific and vital part of this equation – the farmers and farm labourers who grow our food. Theirs is sacred work upon which we all depend. We thank you for all that they do – for the way in which they live close to the earth, so attuned to the changing seasons of the year, the rain (and hail) that falls, the sun that shines, and you, the God who is the ground of our being from whose hand these mercies flow. They are truly mediators of your grace. And yet, Lord God, so many farmers and their workers live in great vulnerability and fear as the plague of farm attacks continues with seeming impunity. The brutal and senseless killing of an elderly couple and their daughter on their farm in Hartswater this week is yet another chilling example of this horrific reality. In the Bible, when Cain killed Abel out in the fields, the blood of this murdered brother cried out to you from the ground, and you heard the cry.

So hear the cries of all our murdered brothers and sisters that rise to you from the blood-soaked earth, and the prayers we offer today on behalf of them and all farm dwellers. Raise your arm of justice and open your hand of mercy, we pray, that all may know your gracious provision of security – of food and of life. Amen."

Grace and peace. Rev. Dr. Roger A. Scholtz

Biblical Justice: A Paradigm Shift from Pain and Punishment to Healing and Restoration

We are often told that "perception is reality". *Howard Zehr,* the Mennonite criminologist, often referred to as the father of restorative justice in the USA, writes about ***"Changing Lenses: A New Focus for Crime and Justice"*** in order to illustrate the need for a paradigm shift toward a restorative and healing model of justice.

As discussed previously, the British criminal justice system resulted from perceptions that an offender or "criminal" perpetrated his/her wrongdoing against the King/Crown/State. This perception brought an end to centuries' old paradigm in which community justice was dominant. Community justice sought resolution to crime and violence by assigning responsibility to an "offender" for compensation of loss and/or damage suffered by a victim. This paradigm shift was accompanied by the unfortunate misinterpretation of the biblical ***Lex Talionis*** or ***"Law of Proportionality"*** (which appears only Exodus 21: 23-25; Leviticus 24: 19-20; Deuteronomy 19:21). Such misperception has given scripture a bad name and thereby justified the administration of pain for pain and retribution as "justice".

The Jewish scholar, *Martin Buber,* translates the ***Lex Talionis*** as "an eye for the ***value*** of an eye, and a tooth for the ***value*** of a tooth", rendering biblical law a different understanding. This law should then be interpreted, for example, that should a property to the value of USD 1,000 have been stolen, the owner should not sue for property to the value of USD 2,000. Violations of "law" in the Hebrew Bible, then, indicate that the existence of crime is not so much a matter of individual guilt but the responsibility of corporate community. Similarly, the Hebrew verbs in the Ten Commandments occur not as imperatives but in the future tense, once again indicative that such laws are not about vengeance and retribution. They illustrate, rather, a paradigm that God's justice reflects a future promise of life, freedom and well being for the whole created order. The Book of Psalms and the prophets repeatedly describe the God of justice with words such as *t'sedekah*: the One bringing truth as justice; *t'shuvah*: the One who turns matters around and causes the unjust to repent; *hesed*: the One whose love is motivated by justice; and *mishphat*: the One whose healing justice is reflected in human relations with one another.

Criminal justice, on the other hand, is backward looking and focused on maintaining laws and systems that frequently disadvantage poor, vulnerable and marginalised people and communities. We explore Restorative Justice as a biblical vision for the healing and restoration of the whole, diverse created order in the next edition of FFL.

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

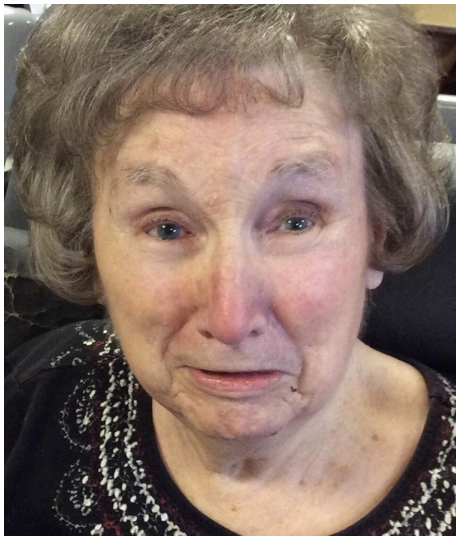
Sympathy extended to the Hale family and friends

Just before press time, the Council was saddened to learn of the passing of Mary Hale, wife of the late General Secretary Joe Hale.

"We are keeping the family and many friends of Mary Hale in our prayers, and asking God's countenance to shine brightly on them at this time and give them peace.

"I found Mary to be a very kind and gracious lady who shared love with everyone she met," General Secretary Ivan Abrahams said. "She brought joy to every situation and will be missed. Her Christian service will continue to impact the many who knew and loved her."

Following is the obituary of Mrs. Hale:



Mary Richey Hale

Mrs. Mary Richey Hale, age 85, passed away on 5 August at Silver Bluff Village near Canton, NC. There will be a private service of interment on 11 August at Maple Grove United Methodist Church. A worship service celebrating her life and ministry will be announced later, as circumstances permit, at First United Methodist Church in Waynesville, NC. Dr. George Thompson, of Waynesville, will officiate.

Mary demonstrated a lifelong commitment to the community of faith - and particularly its youngest members. She was a native of Paris, Texas, the second daughter of the late Byron Richey and Clara Woodby Richey. From a young age, she was active in the Methodist church, particularly with child care, and she aspired to be an educator.

She is an alumna of Paris Junior College, and graduated from the North Texas State Teachers' College in 1957. Upon graduation, she spent a year teaching in a U.S. Air Force school, in Morocco, then returned to Texas to teach in an elementary school in Odessa.

Mary was serving as Director of Christian Education at First Methodist Church in Odessa when she met Rev. Joe Hale, a minister serving on the General Board of Evangelism based in Nashville, TN. In 1964, they were married, beginning a shared life in ministries of Christian education and evangelism, as well as an exemplary marriage of 52 years.

As Joe's wife, Mary truly became a worldwide ambassador for the Faith; Joe traveled and preached extensively, first as Director of Ecumenical Evangelism for the United Methodist Church, and subsequently as the General Secretary of the World Methodist Council. Mary frequently travelled with him, visiting dozens of countries on six continents, and acting as hostess for numerous dignitaries visiting the Council's office in Lake Junaluska, NC.

While she acted globally, she also acted locally, and was extensively active as a volunteer in the Church, first at McKendree United Methodist in Nashville and later at First United Methodist Church in Waynesville. She returned to the Church professionally in 1981, becoming her local church's Director of Christian Education, a capacity in which she would serve until 1991. She was extremely popular with children, and her vacation Bible schools, particularly the Bibletimes Marketplace, and remembered fondly by many long time members of the church and community.

In 1994, Mary suffered an aneurysm which left her wheelchair-bound for the remainder of her life, but her enthusiasm for the Church and its children remained undimmed; still she served, often volunteering in the church office and as a Sunday School teacher. Perhaps more important, though, is the number of people she touched through her cheerful demeanor, and the inspirational example of her and Joe's ongoing relationship, determining that she remain as deeply involved in the community as her changed circumstances would allow.

Her husband Joe passed away in 2016; Mary is survived by her brothers, Jerry Richey and Tim White, of Paris, Texas, and by her son, Jeffrey Hale, of Raleigh, NC, who will be ever-grateful that she was such an important part of his life.

Obituary and photo provided by the Hale family

Join in the work of the Council!

My/Our Commitment to the World Methodist Council and its ministries

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

_____ General Support Contribute toward the Council's ministries and missions

_____ Visionary Help the Council meet its vision, now and into the future as you offer sustaining support! The timeframe is through 2022, but you may opt-out at any time.

_____ Tribute Honor or memorialize a loved one anytime or at a holiday through a donation to the Council. [Your honoree will be notified.]

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

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

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

_____ My gift is one-time and enclosed or form completed below.

_____ My gift is on-going through 2022. Please deduct_____ as follows:

_____monthly _____ quarterly _____ semi-annual _____annually

The World Methodist Council assures you that many others will benefit from your generosity as you "give all you can," heeding the call of founder, John Wesley.

_____ _____

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Bank Address: 420 Montgomery, San Francisco, CA 94104

Correspondent Bank: PNBPUS3NNYC

Beneficiary: World Methodist Council (American Section), A Corp.

Account Number: 9361793855

Please send press releases, articles and resources! Submissions should be a page or less (500-700 words), edited and ready to publish. Contact us **by the last Monday of the month** at communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org if you would like your story to be included in the next edition of the First Friday Letter. Please note that articles should be received by August 31 for the September edition.

On the Web

This and past First Friday Letters can be found online at FirstFridayLetter.worldmethodistcouncil.org.

The World Methodist Council's website may be found at worldmethodistcouncil.org.

The World Methodist Museum's website is at methodistmuseum.org.

To subscribe to this newsletter, please email communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org.

About the First Friday Letter

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