Greetings from the General Secretary

I have just spent the past few days at our office in Waynesville, where I took the opportunity to hike in a national park and experience the wonder of nature with the changing of the leaves. What a wonderful sight to see a riot of colors and to hear the waters of the rolling creek that all speaks to God’s providence.

The World Methodist Council held in Houston in 2016 identified Climate Justice as one of three mission priorities for the quinquennium. I would argue that the prophetic tradition of speaking truth to power is captured in all three WMC mission priorities. Since the Conference, I have been encouraged by the commitment of Methodist Churches and organizations, especially in the build-up to the key climate change summit known as COP26 that will take place in Glasgow, Scotland, between 31 October and 12 November 2021. Many climate justice advocates see COP26 as the last opportunity the world has to avert climate disaster.

Despite growing public support surrounding climate justice issues and investment in green and clean energy such as solar and wind, it is not enough. The demand for oil, natural gas, and coal continues with reports of rolling blackouts in major industrial countries like China and India.

Wangari Maathai, the founder of the Green Belt Movement and internationally recognized human rights environmental conservation activist who was the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate (2004), embodied the Chinese proverb, ‘The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.’ During her life, she planted more than 50,000 trees and empowered many women to plant trees for food security that is vital to the ecosystem. Trees are carbon banks that produce oxygen, essential to life on the planet earth. Wangari, who died in September 2011, was a true “Earth-keeper,” and much can be learned from her life. (see Maathai, Wangari, Unbowed: a memoir. William Heinemann, London, 2007).

We need to confess that our sacred texts have often been appropriated to legitimize the domination of the earth and its resources. However, there is a growing critique in the South to decolonize Christianity and strengthen the bond with African traditional religions and culture. Similarly, in the East, Christians are conversing with eastern religions to find commonalities in addressing the ecological crisis.

I am proud of groups like Climate Justice for All and other youth-led, global campaigns that seek to mobilize the Methodist family on climate justice issues.

Peace, Ivan
WesleyMen publish Advent guide and support refugees in Bangladesh

As an extension of FastPrayGive.org devotion series, WesleyMen is offering a daily Advent through an Epiphany guide. (November 28th through January 6th). You’ll find daily scripture, reflection, and prayer featuring three great “responses” which forms a triptych.

The Magnificat (Luke 1:26-55), The Benedictus (Luke 1:5-25, 39-80), and The Gloria (Luke 2:1-21) The three find mother-to-be Mary, new father Zechariah, and the very angels of heaven “responding” to events by which God will be and is made flesh. All this and other selections from the revised common lectionary help guide us to welcome Jesus coming among us to stay. Like the artwork format (triptych), which shares its name with this guide, all three “hinge” upon the themes of a God who acts, a God who imagines a world made new, a God who proclaims the way of peace.

FastPrayGive.org hopes that this will lead you on a spiritual journey in this season as we remember and rehearse the birth of Jesus. Also included in this guide is the opportunity to act this season by contributing to our Rohingya Refugee program. Download your copy of the PDF in English for free using the coupon code wmc-xf75 at https://fastpraygive.org/advent

Advent also marks the beginning of a new partnership with All We Can, the official relief and development charity of the British Methodist Church, to raise awareness and assistance for Rohingya refugees living in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. We’re matching up to $3,500 in gifts from the World Wesleyan Hunger Fund.

Supporting people who are on the move and yet sequestered in a host country is difficult because the needs are varied and great. Fighting malnutrition and hunger, the primary aim of the World Wesleyan Hunger Fund, requires a multi-faceted approach. This new partnership enables us to understand the critical needs of the Rohingya people, especially during a global pandemic that places additional stress upon humanitarian organizations. FastPrayGive.org still has an emphasis on reducing or eliminating preventable disease and death due to malnutrition, but we’re seeking to achieve this by adapting to other factors contributing to extreme poverty.

FastPrayGive.org is a trademark of the World Methodist Council and is operated by WesleyMen, the men’s affiliate of the World Methodist Council. Learn more at: https://fpg.is/about

Thailand pastor highlights missions impact through testimony

The Southeast Asia Field is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. As part of the celebration of God’s goodness and faithfulness on the field, Siripawn Malakul shared how she became the first Thai member of the Church of the Nazarene in Bangkok.

Malakul was a new Christian who came to Bangkok to work in a Christian organization. She began to look for a place to worship God and visited many churches.

One day, her friend told her that a new Nazarene church was opening near her house. Malakul decided to try this new church. In 1989, she met Michael and Rachel McCarty and the Knox family, who were missionaries and pioneers of the Church of the Nazarene in Thailand. The McCarty’s and Knoxes taught her how to follow Jesus, and because of these teachings, she decided to join the new church and became the first Thai member of the Church of the Nazarene in Bangkok, Thailand.

Malakul had the chance to study at South East Asia Nazarene Bible College (now Chapman International College), and be part of the leadership in the Thailand church.

“I thank God for the opportunity to learn to live God’s love and experience the peace of God in my life,” Malakul said. “Because of the Church of the Nazarene, I have had many opportunities to serve the Lord and share God’s love and peace with others.”

Malakul is an ordained minister and is now the pastor of Chiang Mai Church of the Nazarene. She is also involved in other ministries, including leading the youth group in Maetang Tribal Children’s Home and translating literature and other resources into the Thai language.

Read more at https://www.nazarene.org/
The Recession of Waters, the Rise of the Church

Hurricane Fred brought flooding and much damage to Western North Carolina especially Haywood County where the Council Headquarters are located. Following is a view from one of the hundreds of people affected.

August 17th, 2021

3:00 - There had been a steady rain all day. I prepared to pick my children up from school and checked the radar. It looked like some heavy rain would be moving in right at carline time so I decided to head out a few minutes early to avoid driving in the worst part of it. Sure enough, the kids were loaded up right as the heavens opened and a deluge came pouring down. The effect was immediate. Sheets of rain came pouring down the hillside of the school, flowing into the road below. With our wipers flicking at a furious pace we cautiously made our way home through the rain laden roads. Once home, my phone blew up with alerts:

3:58 - I-40 West Bound is closed at 35 mm due to slide. Landslide on Dellwood

4:12 - The Haywood EOC has advised the school system to return buses to school due to flooding. Parents will need to pick up their child from school if they are not already at home.

4:46 - Wall collapse on Asheville highway blocking road. Smoky Park highway closed. Multiple cars under water. Swift water rescue just arrived. Only access bridge to Worley Cove Road washed out completely. 19-23 CLOSED. Cars submerged underwater. Water rescue in progress. NCDOT asking that you DO NOT attempt to come into Haywood County. They have multiple landslides and flooding that has stranded vehicles. Please shelter in place and give crews time to clear some of the roads.

5:31 - Weather Emergency - Move to higher ground immediately. Do not call 911 unless you have a life threatening emergency. Shelter in place if you see water rising quickly. Portions of the East Fork of the Pigeon River are overflowing its banks. If you are anywhere near the river in the south or east (Canton, Clyde, Cruso, Bethel) sides of the county take action now.

8:05 - Emergency Alert: Extreme - Residents downstream along Pigeon River should seek higher ground immediately.

I watched horrified as the images started flooding social media. People screenshotted posts from their loved ones trapped on the top of vehicles as waters raged around them. School buses were stranded as bridges washed out. Children spent the night at school when their parents were unable to reach them.

The school my children had once attended now had a waist-high lake surrounding it. The Park where I was supposed to preach that Sunday was now underwater—the pavilion, the picnic tables, softball fields, football stadium, basketball courts, all covered with a muddy expanse of water. A road washed out and a car bobbed in the road-turned-river in front of former parishioners’ house, both of whom had passed from COVID just a year before.

In Cruso, the river violently tore through the community. A surge of water lifted mobile homes from their foundations and dozens of campers came cascading down the river, crashing into bridges, several exploding on impact, the remnants joining a slew of debris tumbling downstream. The speed at which quiet streams and lazy rivers transformed into a ferocious, consuming wave of water caught residents by surprise. People in its path scurried to rooftops and higher ground. People frantically took to social media asking for word on their missing loved ones. Most escaped with nothing but the clothes on their backs—six lost their lives.

That evening the river crested and poured into downtown Canton. Streetlights illuminated churning water sweeping through a school and local businesses. Friends lost their farms, homes, and vehicles. Once the water receded it revealed entire communities left in ruin, ravaged by water and now a landscape of mud and debris. Driving through in the days following the air was thick with the scent of dirt and rotting produce—many of the farms losing an entire season’s worth of inventory. Seas of cornstalks lay horizontal, flattened against muddy earth. Emergency responders, rescue teams, and disaster response vehicles began streaming into the county, their journeys marked by the tell-tale sign of dark mountain dirt caked to their trucks.

As with any tragedy, there have been many, many heroes in this story. This is a close-knit community where people care for their neighbors. There were reports of even the mayor rushing door to door and carrying someone out on his back. The clergy of the Canton Missional Network have been my personal heroes as they immediately shifted gears, organizing community relief efforts. They are ecumenical, community-minded, pure servants of God’s Kingdom. They have worked relentlessly and tirelessly over this last month and a half, wearing both clergy collars and work boots as they’ve taken on a plethora of roles. But the road to recovery is a long one. It’s a road soaked in grief that has been damned up in order to simply respond to the current crisis. But this community will need help.

Read more of this story at https://wnc-www.brtsite.com/mission-engagement-blog-detail/15484645

Story and Photo by Rev. Nicole Jones
UN Special Rapporteur encourages Asian churches to increase engagement

The United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Dr Fernand de Varennes, encouraged Asian churches to increase their engagement with the UN as part of their advocacy to promote minority rights.

Dr Fernand de Varennes addressed the participants on ‘Minority Rights: Understanding Asia’s Majority-Minority Contexts’ on the last day of the Christian Conference of Asia’s (CCA) Asia Regional Consultation on ‘Freedom of Religion, Rights of Religious Minorities, and Constitutional Guarantees in Asia’.

Dr de Varennes provided an overview of the development and origin of human rights after the horrors of World War II, saying that humanity was then convinced ‘that the rule of majority has to answer to greater moral and ethical authority of international human rights systems.’

He was of the opinion that ‘the rulers, or majority in states could not be allowed to cross a certain line to commit genocide, atrocities, or other violations of human rights which were fundamentally against dignity, equality, justice, and peace.’ However, Dr de Varennes also noted the massive increase in global violence against those belonging to religious minorities.

“We have reliable data that indicates three-fourth or more victims of hate speech and hate crimes are members of religious, ethnic, or linguistic minorities. At the same time, nationalist majority rhetoric has taken a sharper edge with politicians instrumentalising widespread fears and uncertainties in an unstable world for short-term political gain, to demonise and scapegoat minorities as the enemies, as criminals, as threats to social order,” he said.

“The main threats and challenges to peace and the drivers of instability usually involve non-respect for the human rights of minorities, particularly practices which are discriminatory or deny fundamental rights, such as the freedom of religion,” Dr de Varennes emphatically stated while referring to the disproportionate victimisation of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, the Shia in Yemen, the Hazara in Afghanistan, the Kashmiris in India, and the Muslims and Christians in Sri Lanka.

Speaking of the interrelations between the trampling of minority rights and statelessness, Dr de Varennes informed the participants that 75 percent of the world’s stateless people belonged to minority groups, and that despite the UN’s campaign to eradicate statelessness by 2024, the opposite was happening.

Dr de Varennes pointed out how digital spaces and online media were unequal spaces and were becoming ‘angrier, violent, and toxic places for minorities.’

“Algorithms create rabbit holes, amplifying prejudice, and the COVID-19 pandemic is escalating this violent rhetoric. The unfortunate and unhealthy side of social media is that harmful and mis-informative content can go viral in a matter of minutes to spread to millions of people before platform owners can act to mitigate effects. What is not sufficiently explored is that minorities are most vulnerable on social media and so are easily outnumbered, flooded, and threatened. Social media operates in favour of the largest number, encouraging majority extremism—rewarding the greatest number of shares, clicks, likes, and so on,” he said, while adding that social media had played a widely acknowledged role in atrocities and the attempted genocide against the Rohingya in Myanmar, against the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka, and had contributed to the increase in mob lynching in India.

The UN Special Rapporteur further reviewed the endeavours of the UN towards the protection of minorities.

“Currently, there is a very noticeable reluctance on the part of the UN to talk about minorities. Several initiatives of the UN are not very demanding and are only advisory. We need to have our voices heard as often as possible at UN platforms and contribute our understanding and knowledge in this hostile context.”

“Immediate engagement would be timely as we commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities in 2022. There are several activities to launch a number of initiatives, including a regional forum for Asia and the Pacific to be held in Malaysia in 2022. Such international mechanisms are needed more than ever,” concluded Dr de Varennes.

The CCA’s Asia Regional Consultation on the ‘Freedom of Religion, Rights of Religious Minorities, and Constitutional Guarantees in Asia’ held from 5–8 October 2021 was attended by around 50 representatives from the CCA’s member councils, churches, and partner organisations from across Asia.

Read more at https://www.cca.org.hk/
Congratulations to Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton, Presiding Prelate of the 5th Episcopal District of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, in her new role as Chair of the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. Bishop Jefferson-Snorton was elected in October and will serve a two-year term.

She is joined by the Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, who is Vice Chair; Kimberly Gordon Brooks, first Vice President of the 3rd District Lay Organization, African Methodist Episcopal Church, who is Secretary; and the Rev. Teresa “Terri” Hord Owens, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), who is Treasurer.

The National Council of Churches (USA) has elected an all-female slate of officers for the first time in the ecumenical organization’s 71-year history. Three of the officers are women of color. Eaton is a Thursdays in Black ambassador who helps lead the push for a world free from rape and gender-based violence.

“At this pivotal time in the life of the church in the United States, it is noteworthy that the NCC is modeling inclusiveness in selecting its leaders,” Jefferson-Snorton said in a statement. “The denominations that make up the NCC demonstrate a commitment to embody the diversity of God’s creation in so many ways. This commitment is a call for all of us to show the love of God to all, promote unity in Christ Jesus and to resist the current cultural trends of divisiveness.”

“Serving in leadership in the National Council of Churches is both an honor and a privilege,” said Snorton. “I am humbled to be a part of the life of NCC in this moment.”

Story credit to CME Facebook Page and the National Council of Churches USA

Climate Justice For All

This month the Climate Justice for All team will be in Glasgow attending COP26, the UN’s climate change conference. Some of the team will have accreditation for one of the two weeks, while the rest of the team will be attending events elsewhere in Glasgow. Some of the activities our campaign workers will be involved in during their week of accreditation will vary around topics of climate finance, adaptation loss and damage, youth empowerment, climate science and innovation and so forth. The campaign workers hope to use their opportunity to engage in COP26 to collectively push for a global effort of keeping 1.5 degrees Celsius well within reach. This will require high emitting countries to be held accountable for their actions and for frontline communities to be provided with security against the adverse effects of the climate crisis. The other workers will spend time in the green zone, engaging with events run by faith groups, scientific institutions and businesses. This will provide an opportunity for the team to share information on the climate action being done by other organisations. If you wish to be updated daily during COP26 with news from the CJ4A team, follow one of their social media accounts:

https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/contact-us-3/

The team will also be running several events in Glasgow. There will be an exhibition of science and art pieces contributed by our global volunteers, which expresses the diverse voice of young people and their passion for achieving climate justice in different ways. The exhibition will look at both what individuals can do, and what world leaders need to do, as well as featuring visions of a better world. CJ4A will also hold four talks featuring the voices of our global COP team. Each event will look at how climate justice relates to a different topic and part of the world: Gender in Zambia, Youth Activism in Italy, Livelihoods in the Pacific and Energy in Uruguay. These events will be livestreamed and can be attended in-person in Glasgow. The team will also be running Climate Justice for All LIVE, a livestreamed worship event featuring yet more global contributions. This event will occur at the following times: 15:00-21:00 6th November and 7:00-13:00 7th November (UTC/GMT) and will also be free to attend in Glasgow.

For more information about these events, visit:

https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/cop26-events/

Story by CJ4A Team

Pacific Conference of Churches General Secretary, Reverend James Bhagwan, heads to COP26 this weekend while working on real, practical, sustainable solutions to combat climate change. Continuing to support sustainable sea transport through partnership with the Uto Ni Yalo and climate resilient agriculture through the Lomana Na Vulagi Project at Lawaki, Tailevu. Click here to see the many ways the Pacific Conference of Churches is involved in Climate Justice.
WME and Order of the FLAME Celebrate Anniversaries

2021 has been a milestone year for World Methodist Evangelism (WME)! We have marked the 50th anniversary of WME, the 25th anniversary of the Order of the FLAME (Faithful Leaders as Mission Evangelists), and the 25th anniversary of the original publication of the *Faith-Sharing New Testament with the Psalms*. It has indeed been a wonderful year of celebration!

Our most recent gathering in honor of the 25th anniversary of the Order of the FLAME was especially meaningful. Christ Church in Memphis, Tennessee was a gracious host, and we were able to gather folks both in-person and virtually. As with all our FLAME gatherings, there was dynamic teaching and Spirit-filled preaching, along with ample time to reconnect with others in the FLAME community and visit the sites of Memphis.

The Order of the FLAME is an ethnically and culturally diverse covenant community within our global Wesleyan family that equips, nurtures, and encourages emerging pastors and their spouses in evangelism and mission. Begun in North America, there are now FLAME communities in Ireland and Africa and we are excited to be able to launch a FLAME community in Romania in October 2022.

At the first gathering of the Order of the FLAME, WME provided a copy of the newly published *Faith-Sharing New Testament with the Psalms* to each participant. It was appropriate then, at this 25th celebration, to launch the anniversary edition of the *Faith-Sharing New Testament with the Psalms*. It was an honor to be able to provide each FLAME participant – whether in-person or virtual – with a copy of this updated and expanded resource.

We are grateful for all those who made our 25th anniversary celebration so meaningful. The Foundation for Evangelism and United Theological Seminary are faithful sponsors of our FLAME gatherings, and we deeply appreciate their support. We were also blessed by the outstanding teaching and testimonies of Rev. Luiz Cardoso (UK, Methodist Church of Brazil), Rev. Dan Griswold (US, UMC), Rev. Cristian Istrate (Romania, UMC), Bishop João Carlos Lopes (Brazil, Methodist Church of Brazil), Dr. Luther Oconor (US, UMC), and Dr. Dave Smith (US, Wesleyan Church). Our preachers, Bishop Darin Moore (US, AMEZ), Dr. Luigi Peñaranda (US, Wesleyan), and Bishop Darryl Starnes (US, AMEZ) were especially powerful and Holy Spirit inspired, which was a moving experience for everyone.

The Order of the FLAME has made a significant impact over the last 25 years, instilling the DNA of evangelism in emerging leaders who have gone on to become church planters, bishops, multi-campus pastors, itinerant evangelists, and founders of parachurch organizations committed to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. We are excited to continue to build on this strong foundation by deepening and expanding the Order of the FLAME to include a greater emphasis on mentoring and ongoing cohort-based learning. Our next North American gathering will be March 14-18, 2022 at Epworth by the Sea, St. Simons Island, GA and we look forward to welcoming a newly invited class into the Order.

You can find out more about the Order of the FLAME here: https://worldmethodist.org/trainings/the-order-of-the-flame/

If you are denominational leader or an existing member of the FLAME and would like to nominate an emerging leader in your area, you can do so here:
https://worldmethodist.org/trainings/the-order-of-the-flame/how-to-nominate-a-new-member/

Leadership has never been more important than it is now. We are grateful for the opportunity to identify and cultivate emerging leaders for the global Wesleyan movement.

Story and Photos by Kim Reisman, WME Executive Director

*Photo left: Rev. Dr. Shane Stanford, Rev. Dr. Kim Reisman and Bishop Ivan Abrahams (l to r)*

*Photo right: Dr. Reisman during one of the services.*
Religious leaders urge US President to end Cuban embargo

In a 15 October letter to US president Joe Biden, leaders from the World Council of Churches, ACT Alliance, Council of Churches in Cuba, and other faith-based groups urged an end to nearly 60 years of embargo against the Cuban people, who are facing an appalling humanitarian situation.

“The Obama administration, with your support, sought to rethink the policy and pursue re-engagement with Cuba, by relaxing sanctions, allowing direct flights between the two countries, and easing restrictions on US citizens traveling to and doing business in Cuba,” the letter reads, adding that former president Trump reversed that strategy, leading to severe economic repercussions for the Cuban people.

“The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the problems in Cuba,” reads the letter. “We ask you to take a bold choice and end the embargo against the Cuban people.”

The letter also acknowledges the significant political pressures and obstacles to this course of action.

Tools to reduce poverty, hunger and destitution

The Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ, South Africa) defines a Universal Basic Income Guarantee (UBIG) as one of the best tools available to reduce poverty, hunger and destitution. Furthermore, the IEJ indicates that the South African Government has a constitutional obligation to progressively realise the universal right to social security or social assistance. Also, amidst the COVID-19 suppression of labour and incomes, says IEJ, the SA government needs to introduce social security for adults aged 15-59 years.

Harari in his book, 21 Lessons for the 21st Century points out that the word “universal” refers to “national” or “municipal” as in the case of Finland in the year 2000 where 2,000 unemployed Finns were payed € 560 irrespective of whether they found a job or not. One problem, says Harari, is that globalisation makes people in one country dependant on markets in another, where selling cheap labour of unskilled workers as, for instance, Bangladeshis producing and selling shirts in the United States. With the rise of 3-D printers, robotics and AI, however, unskilled labour could be made redundant when a shirt code could be bought online, printed at home thereby leaving the unskilled Bangladeshi worker redundant. Americans might agree that government tax Amazon and Google to fund their unemployed. But, will Americans agree, Harari rhetorically asks, that these taxes be sent to support unemployed people in places defined by former US President, Donald Trump, as “shithole countries”? 1

Homo Sapiens, says Harari, requires between 1,500 and 2,500 calories per day for survival. But many would include in basic human need today items such as healthcare, decent education and even access to the internet. Should some policy scheme provide services yet not bridge the gap between rich and poor in 2050, there could be extreme anger at “global inequality and lack of social mobility.”

Guy Standing, Professor of Development Studies at University of London (UK), said in 2003 that he recalled the fierce resistance amongst SA politicians and business leaders to the proposed Solidarity Grant. Members of the Taylor Committee of Inquiry into Comprehensive Social Security proposed a small amount to be paid to every citizen and legal resident. The proposal raised many arguments against the solidarity grant, amongst them was one that it would cost more than a “targeted, means tested assistance scheme.” On the flip side to this was that a Solidarity Grant, as in the case of Brazil’s Bolsa Familia, advantaged women, improved their economic status and encouraged children to attend schools and health clinics.

Joerg Rieger in The Poor and the People called Methodists states that “the poor do not exist”... as there is a danger in universalising the term and thus forgetting that poor people have actual faces, names and stories. 2 So, if we combine a universal income guarantee with caring communities and meaningful interaction, the loss of jobs to algorithms might be a blessing in disguise. What we should worry about more, notwithstanding the danger of mass unemployment, says Harari, is “the shift in authority from humans to algorithms,” which might destroy any remaining faith in neo-liberalism and open the way to the rise of digital dictatorships.

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Story by Keith A. Vermeulem, Researcher for the WMC
Prayers for Peace

It is hard not to think of the event that took place in Rome on the 6th and 7th October 2021 as a fitting finale for the annual pan-church celebration of the Season of Creation, with an inter-religious twist.

In 1989, the 1st of September was proclaimed a day of prayer for the environment by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I. Influenced by the World Council of Churches, what was originally thought as a day of prayer for the environment, became a whole Season of Creation, celebrations extending from the 1st of September to the 4th October. The final day of the Season coincides with the great feast of Saint Francis. In a sign of commitment to the environmental cause, in 2015 Pope Francis made the Season of Creation a part of the yearly calendar of the Catholic Church.

This two-day event in October was called ‘Popoli Fratelli, Terra Futura’ and was organised by the San’Egidio Community. But it claimed ‘only’ to mark the 35th anniversary of the Inter-religious Prayers for Peace in the Spirit of Assisi that Pope John Paul II convened in 1986. Nevertheless, the concern for peace was never divorced from the call for a renewed Earth.

Pope Francis in his address to conclude the event (with the Coliseum as the cinematographic background) made sure that the Prayers for Peace in the Spirit of Assisi and the Celebration of Creation were conflated, calling all to a conversion to the God of Peace and to a sustainable relationship with Creation. The letter from the Conference to All, the by now traditional annual Appeal for Peace, was read by a young woman from Afghanistan. It spoke about how religions are about peace, that any use of them to ferment war is a distortion, and also how it is our responsibility to save the Planet.

This Conference brought together representatives from all over the world and from many different religions. First of all Pope Francis was there and gave the last address. Bartholomew I spoke at the opening of the Conference with his characteristic spiritually rich eco-theology. Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, spoke also at the opening ceremony denouncing prophetically the West’s unsustainable economic model in relation to Creation. Using one of Jesus’ metaphors, the archbishop compared the West with the man who build a house on sand, ‘it’s easier to build on sand rather than on firm rock.’ ‘But, is it sustainable?’ he asked. A sunny Muslim leader, the Gran Imam di Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, with whom Pope Frances signed the document about brother/sisterhood in Abu Dhabi also spoke of our common responsibility for peace and in relation to the environment. There were other contributions including from Pinchas Goldsmit, the President of the Conference of European Rabbis. Other leaders in the Coptic, Orthodox and Protestant families including us representing Methodism and the Wesleyan family were present together with around two thousand other participants.

We Methodists had a position of honour, sat in the very first rows with some other leaders amongst the many Christian traditions and amongst some representing world religions. Myself, the Chair of the WMC Inter-Religious Committee representing the WMC General Secretary, Matthew Lafferty, the director of Methodist Ecumenical Office in Rome, and Mirella Manocchio, president of the OPICEMI (the Methodist Church in Italy). Revd Mirella helped to lead prayers with Pope Francis and the Patriarch Bartholomew. (See in photo below)

Dialogue for peace, cultural & inter-religious understanding

In one of the breakout sessions attended by around 400 people, under the title: Is Peace Possible?, there was a telling disagreement. What comes first, peace or justice? The panel was composed of a largely western group of people and argued passionately in favour of peace as a condition of future justice. Not least because if war breaks out dead people cannot achieve justice. These included high profile members including a woman, the Vice-President of the G20 Interfaith Association, Katherine Marshall, and a brilliant speaker for peace, Mario Giro from the Community of Sant’Egidio.

No surprise then that the African woman, a Minister of State from Uganda, Betty Oyella Bigombe, Special Envoy for Peace, would argue the opposite, that justice is the condition for peace, that if people are hungry, without employment, without hope for the future, living in inhumane conditions, with lack of education and health, displaced because of Global warming and climate change, that they will fight for their lives and for such basic needs. War will break out. Therefore, in her view, without justice first, peace cannot be achieved.

I left the auditorium with a deep sense of how immense the challenge to achieve peace is. How much more we need to learn until we are able to see justice and peace join hands, and how much more we need to seek the Kingdom of God that is: justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17).

My consolation was a sense of deep fellowship with new ecumenical and inter-religious friends that spoke of hope and dreams of a future Earth (Terra Futura), of people who know how to live side by side (Popoli Fratelli)

Report on representing the WMC at ‘Popoli Fratelli Terra Futura’ by Revd Dr Reynaldo Ferreira Leão Neto
WORKING TOGETHER IN MISSION

Monday 22 November 2021, 6pm GMT
A webinar hosted by The Salvation Army and the World Methodist Council

Ten years after the second Salvation Army-World Methodist Council Dialogue ended, we look back to a journey of joint witness and service and explore further possibilities to be in mission together.

Featuring participants from Australia, Mexico and United Kingdom, working together in education, refugees, Recovery Church and Church partnerships.

Introduced by Bishop Ivan Abrahams and General Brian Peddle

SPEAKERS

Reverend Dr Paul Chilcote, Director of Global Wesleyan Theology, Wesley House, Cambridge, UK

Lt Colonel Dr Karen Shakespeare, Chair of The Salvation Army’s International Theological Council

Register at sar.my/wtim
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, November 19 at communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org if you would like your story to be included in the December edition of the First Friday Letter.

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