



# FIRST FRIDAY LETTER

The World Methodist Council February 2019

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## Greetings from the General Secretary

Warm greetings from Mexico City during this season of Epiphany.

It is hard to believe that we are into the second month of 2019! February is known as Black History Month in which the achievements and contributions of black people throughout the world is celebrated. It is also an opportunity to educate and challenge the dominant narrative about black people. Nelson Mandela echoed the words of American writer James Baldwin when he encouraged South Africans to embrace the post-apartheid era and build a more just society: “History is not the past. We carry history with us. We are our history. The future is in your hands.” The future indeed is in our hands as we seek to build an exclusive world free of racism, sexism, patriarchy, and bigotry.

I look forward later this month, February 17-19 to share in the UBUNTU, Christian Education Summit to be held in Cape Town under the theme; “The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A Social Justice and Liberating Faith.”

The main theme at this year’s World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland was once again global inequality. The 2019 Oxfam Report reveals that billionaire fortunes increased by 12 percent last year while 3.8 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity saw their wealth decline by 11 percent. The growing gap between rich and poor is unacceptable and has led to protest in many countries around the world. Jesus was deeply concerned about economic activities since the economy is the source of life. Economic activities saturate the Scriptures. Every 16th verse in the New Testament, every 10th verse in the Gospels, every 7th verse in Luke and every 5th verse in James speaks about money. John Haughey writes; “We read the Gospels as if we had no money – and we spend our money as if we know nothing of the Gospel.”

This month we call for special prayers as delegates prepare for the special sessions of General Conference of the United Methodist Church meeting in St. Louis, February 23-26 to consider the three legislative plans of the Council of Bishops Commission on a Way Forward.

Thank you to the many readers of the First Friday Letter who have commented on the new and easier to read format.

Blessings

Ivan Abrahams



## Black History Month Celebrated



Black History Month is celebrated in many churches and in a number of countries each February. The World Methodist Council and World Methodist Museum join in this important celebration to recognize the many contributions that have made quality of life better as well as the sacrifices and leadership of Black leaders. It's an opportunity that calls us to look inside ourselves and answer the call to justice.

God's handiwork is honesty and justice; all God's rules are trustworthy — they are established always and forever: they are filled with truth and right doing. Psalm 111:7-8, CEB

Black History Month is not just about what has happened in the past, but it is also about what is happening now. Racism is still making history ... a black sports hero belted by bananas, an African-American celebrity denied access to a purchase a salesclerk deemed too expensive for the shopper, a suburb refusing to allow bus stops to discourage racial ethnic minorities from moving into the community.

With every act of violence we ignore, every right we deny and every injustice we leave uncorrected, we make history. Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner and Michael Brown provide history lessons that the next generation will discuss in school classrooms, portray on movie screens and describe in stirring speeches.

Methodist Churches have long played a part in changing a history of poverty, discrimination and inequality. Many of our pastors stood before the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as he delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech. A retired bishop spent three days and nights in the same jail cell with King. A United Methodist pastor was honored at the "International Civil Rights Walk of Fame." Methodist educators and students have marched in protest and lobbied for justice.

Black History Month is a time to celebrate the historical contributions of African Americans to the worship life, mission and ministry of the church. While February does indeed celebrate progress made, it also reawakens us to continuing issues of poverty, discrimination and inequality.

In a recent commentary, the Rev. Gilbert H. Caldwell, who has long worked for justice, expressed hope "that each of us in The United Methodist Church will dare to speak and share our truth, knowing that truth-telling by some people is viewed by others as being divisive, because they do not take the time to understand what experiences and influences shaped the truths of people different from themselves."

Join in a month-long celebration of Black History Month. Show that you do believe all men, women and children are created equal.

God calls for peacemakers. As the hymn so beautifully says, 'Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.'

Adapted from Black History Month articles, including from the UMC

## An Answer to Prayer for the Bulgarian Methodist Church

In mid-December Margarita wrote: Christmas is approaching and our hearts are burdened with worries. In May, four of the political parties introduced changes to the law on religion that aim to severely restrict all minority religious groups.

Such changes are in direct violation of the Bulgarian Constitution that guarantees separation between Church and State and religious freedom for all citizens. They threaten the existence of all minority groups.

### Protest letters

Despite protest letters from religious groups across the country, as well as from outside Bulgaria, Parliament passed all proposed changes. These included an increase in the minimum number of people required for registration from 300 to 3,000.

If accepted, this would threaten the registration of the majority of Protestant denominations, including the Methodist Church. Politicians here want the law to be passed quickly and implemented immediately.

Despite street protests by Christians, one party leader declared openly that they would fight “with teeth and nails” for the articles to be passed exactly as proposed. Please continue to pray for us.

Then on 21 December Margarita sent us this update: Today, in its final working day for 2018, Parliament passed the new

religious law in Bulgaria. We are happy to inform you that to our great relief 95% of the proposed restrictions were dropped.

### Prayer marches

It has taken a lot of work by many people to reach this outcome. This includes international pressure, as well as seven Sundays of official prayer marches and protests in Sofia and other cities.

It has also involved prayer and fasting, TV interviews, other media activity and discussions with members of the Parliament’s Commission on Religion and Human Rights.

We are grateful to God for all the support that we received. This has shown our politicians that, though we are a minority, we are part of a big worldwide family. We are a force to be reckoned with.

### Tremendous support

As a representative of the Bulgarian Methodist Church I would like to thank everyone who helped. I’m especially grateful to the World Methodist Council, the European Methodist Council and the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church women for their support.

We have one more reason to celebrate this Christmas. Our hearts will gladly sing praises to our Lord Jesus for his power and might, love and faithfulness.

## First African Methodist Conference to be held in Kenya

Excitement is at an all-time high as Wesleyans in Africa count down to the 1st Africa Methodist Conference which will be hosted by the Methodist Church in Kenya from 13-18 March 2019 under the theme: Wesleyans Shaping the Future of Africa.

With an exciting line up of speakers and workshops, the programme is expected to grapple with issues such as women and youth empowerment for sustainable development in Africa; political and economic stability in Africa and migration, drug abuse and the proliferation of small arms in Africa.

The dream of an Africa Methodist Council became a reality when heads of Methodist Churches from across Africa, received and approved the proposal for the formation of such a body at the Heads of Churches Summit which took place in Ghana in 2015.

The Africa Methodist Council is a Pan African association of Methodist, Wesleyan, and related Uniting and United Churches. The Council was set up with the objectives of encouraging Methodist unity in witness; facilitating mission in Africa, and fostering ecumenical and inter-religious activities which will enhance Methodism within Africa. The council also aims to speak with one voice concerning issues affecting Africa.

The 1st General Assembly is expected to ratify the draft constitution and also set in place Statutory Executive officers who will run the affairs of the Council thereafter.

A registration fee of \$600 per participant will cover accommodation, meals and actual conference attendance. We encourage as many Methodists as possible to attend this inaugural conference. We look forward to welcoming you to Kenya! Karibu! Enquiries can be sent to the Very Rev Opeyemi Awe at [africamethcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:africamethcouncil@gmail.com)



## Evangelism in the Digital Age

The modern digital age presents new challenges and new opportunities for evangelism. We are in a time of explosive growth in our ability to communicate not seen since the advent of the printing press in 1448, which proved to be a key in the Protestant Reformation. In a world of always on, anywhere, how can church leaders capitalize on the potential of the digital age? The answer may be more complicated than we might think. First, consider this:

- Approximately 53% of the global population (more than 4.021 billion) are using the internet.
- It took 22 years for the first 2 billion people to gain access to the internet. It took just 5 years for the next 2 billion to gain access.
- The Internet of Things (IoT) will permeate everyday life. Not only are we connected by our phones, but the connectivity of everyday devices is on the rise. More and more people are connecting their thermostats, toasters, refrigerators, cars, lights, etc.
- The IoT will continue to grow at a rapid pace. Currently there are more than 11.2 billion devices connected to the internet. By 2030, 125 billion such devices will be connected, most of which will be consumer owned, nearly 16 devices for each person on the earth.

Such connectivity also spills over into how we relate to one another. Social media users are growing by hundreds of millions each year. The opportunity to connect and share will continue to grow in the near future. These applications allow us to share pictures of our holidays, our families, and our lunches. Social media users share their support for their favorite sports teams or their favorite political candidates. However, it appears that

Christians are not using these means as a way to share their faith. A recent survey from Baylor University found that faith-sharing and the internet still have a strained relationship. Less than 15% of Americans surveyed said that technology improved their relationship with God. Likewise, 77% of Americans reported having never shared their religious views online.

It is clear to see that even though people are increasingly connected, it remains vital to keep relationships personal beyond the device. Church leaders should be cautioned against putting their faith in the latest device, the newest trend in apps, or the cleverest selfies. Rather, the devices of our age should be considered as tools to share the life-changing message of Jesus with those who need to hear it. That means the message will need to remain personal and always sensitive to the needs of the hearers. It means that the need to cultivate meaningful relationships will continue. It means that relying on the next trend in technology app will not replace the work of being involved in peoples' lives in a very real way. Jesus' example of a highly relational, deeply involved ministry should continue to be our model, regardless of the latest technological trends. That does not mean that we cannot use such technologies to connect with others, but they should not be our only means.

Author's note: living into faithful evangelism in such a tension will be a key component of World Methodist Evangelism's Convergence Conference in Durham, England in September. Learn more at [www.WMEConvergence.org](http://www.WMEConvergence.org).

Rev. Dr. Rob Haynes is the Director of Education and Leadership for World Methodist Evangelism. He can be reached at [rob@worldmethodist.org](mailto:rob@worldmethodist.org).

## Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines Celebrates 110th Anniversary

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Our warmest greetings in the Name of Christ!

The Iglesia Evangelica Metodista En Las Islas Filipinas (IEMELIF) also known as the Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines, will celebrate her 110th Church anniversary on March 3, 2019. A three-day General Conference will be held on Feb. 28- March 2 at the IEMELIF Center, Beulah Land, Novaliches, Quezon City and the anniversary celebration on March 3 at the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) in Pasay City, Manila.

This is a significant year for the Church as this would be our first ten (10) years of service to the Lord after celebrating our

centennial year in 2009. In connection with this, we wish to request you if you could send us note of greetings for the Church's Anniversary celebration. We will include your message in our compendium of activities for our 110th year. Since we have a deadline set for its printing, may we request you to please send your message to us on or before February 12, 2019. It would be a great encouragement for our Church members, workers and leaders to hear from you.

Thank you for your partnership with us. May the Lord continue to bless you and WMC!



## Australia Day Honours

Australia Day (26th January) is marked by the award of honours to those given an Order of Australia. This year two Methodists were awarded this distinguished recognition of their services to church and society.

Reverend Professor Emeritus Robert Gribben of Melbourne was honoured for “significant service to the Uniting Church in Australia, to ecumenical relations and theological studies”.

Professor Gribben said his reaction to receiving the award is “simple gratitude”, especially as much of his work has involved extensive travel as a participant in international ecumenical dialogues, including 15 years of representing the World Methodist Council.

He was particularly renowned for his work in liturgical studies and was an important contributor to the Uniting in Worship hymnal as well as other resources. Professor Gribben has an abiding interest in Wesleys and Methodism.

Also recognised was former President of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Churches, Ann Connan, from Melbourne. She received a medal of the Order of Australia for her work with children in the Uniting Church and predecessor denomination groups as well as for her many other contributions to local, national and international church groups and fellowship among women.

Adapted from the original article found on [Crosslight.org.au](http://Crosslight.org.au)



*Professor Robert Gribben* Source: *Crosslight*

## European Conference Encourages Acceptance of Women in Ministry

Qendressa, a Nazarene lay leader from a Balkan country where women are prohibited from leadership over men, was one of 153 women and five men who journeyed to the CALLED: Reimagine conference in Zagreb, Croatia.

The broader Christian community in her nation numbers only a few thousand and represents a very small minority of the general population. She has only seen a woman preach from the pulpit once, and that individual was an American missionary.

The concept of a Wesleyan women clergy conference has been evolving for nearly two decades. The first conference was held in Ireland in 2002 and was attended predominantly by women from Western Europe. This year’s conference in Zagreb reflects growth in numerical attendance as well as an expanding cross-denominational cooperation of Wesleyan-Holiness churches across Europe.

In 2008, JoAnne Lyons was elected general superintendent of The Wesleyan Church, the highest office for that denomination. The Church of the Nazarene has elected two women as general superintendents — Nina Gunter in 2005 and Carla Sunberg in 2017.

A workshop led by Svetlana Khobnya, a Russian theologian and biblical studies lecturer at Nazarene Theological Col-

lege–Manchester, dealt with the biblical interpretations of two passages, 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-36, that are most often used to prohibit or set limitations on women.

Another workshop, led by Tatiana Cantarella, focused on how women can maintain a healthy pastoral identity when the culture doesn’t always approve.

Before moving to Minsk, Belarus, to plant a church, Cantarella pastored in Moscow, Russia. She captured the heart of the conference when she described church planting in a city where there are no other Wesleyans. Khobnya and Cantarella, who are both Russian, represent the religious contexts of the vast majority of women who attended the conference.

Most churches in the former Soviet nations, the Middle East, and the Balkans prohibit a woman in the pulpit or in any place of authority or leadership over a man. For these contexts, those attending CALLED are the first generation of women ministers, and they come with the full blessing and advocacy of their denominations and organizations.

--Church of the Nazarene Eurasia

## Duke Divinity Ministerial Intern Information – Summer 2019

Duke Divinity School offering Ministerial Internship for Summer 2019.

For your convenience, here are some important dates related to summer 2019 placements:

February 18–Deadline for church and agency applications. Applications are available on the Divinity School website at: <http://divinity.duke.edu/academics/field-education/forms-and-policies>. Please send your completed application via postal mail, fax, or email. Early applications appreciated! When we receive your application, we will send acknowledgement of receipt to the primary email address provided on your application. NOTE: The application has been updated for 2019, so please be sure to use the updated form from the website.

### Condolences

Sympathies go to the family and friends of Bishop McKinley Young, valued member of the World Methodist Council and Senior Bishop of the of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and reassigned to the third episcopal district.

Bishop Young was married to Dorothy Jackson Young and they had four children and eight grandchildren.

In addition to being a member of the World Methodist Council, he served as a member of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, the Executive Committee of the National Council of Churches, USA, the Pan-Methodist Commission, the Consultation on Church Union and the Conference of National Black Churches.

Senior Bishop McKinley Young was born in Atlanta, Georgia. He received degrees from Morris Brown College, Atlanta; Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, MA; and the University of Chicago Divinity School, Chicago, IL. He holds honorary Doctorates from six institutions of Higher Education. Bishop Young pastored churches in the 1st, 4th, and 6th Episcopal Districts being elected the 109th Bishop from Big Bethel AME Church in Atlanta in 1992.

Bishop Young's first Episcopal assignment was to the 15th District where he led in the Centennial Celebration of African Methodism in Southern Africa. Bishop Young provided leadership in the Ecumenical Community for more than 40 years.

Serving in the 10th District from 2000-2004, Bishop Young led the church in stabilizing Paul Quinn College which was fully accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). He served in the 11th District from 2004-2012 where Edward Waters College's accreditation was sustained after taking SACS to Federal Court. Two million dollars was raised by the District to secure EWC's

March 22 – Student placements announced via email

May 6-7 – Orientation for NEW supervisors and students at DDS

May 7 – Orientation for RETURNING supervisors and students at DDS

May 25 – August 4 – Student placement period (10 weeks/11 Sundays, 400 hours; placement period may shift by 1 week in either direction with student and supervisor approval without consultation with our office)

Please contact our office if we can do anything to assist you in the application process. We look forward to receiving your application!

fiscal solvency. Subsequently, the EWC Foundation was established. He focused on Christian Education, Ministerial Education, Continuing Education for Lay and Clergy and strengthening the component ministries of the District. He initiated a comprehensive voter education, registration, and mobilization which included a Day at the Capitol. Under Bishop Young's administration, the Eleventh District acquired through purchase the AME first property in Freeport, Grand Bahamas.

In 2012, Bishop McKinley Young was assigned to the Third Episcopal District which embraces churches throughout the states of Ohio, West Virginia, and Western Pennsylvania. He also served as Chancellor of Wilberforce University and Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees for Payne Theological Seminary. At the 50th Quadrennial Session of the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, PA. Bishop McKinley Young was elevated to the office of Senior Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and reassigned to the Third Episcopal District for a second Quadrennium.

Bishop Young was involved with AME/SADA for over 20 years and served as the Chair of the Board. He served as the President of the Council of Bishops and the General Board. He chaired the Commissions on Women in Ministry, Global Witness and Ministry, Annuity Investments and Insurance, and the Commission on Church Growth and Development.



*Senior Bishop McKinley Young.  
Source: The Christian Recorder*



We welcome your press releases, articles and resources! Please keep submissions to less than a page. Please contact us by **the last Monday of the month** at [communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org](mailto:communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org) if you would like your story to be included in our next edition of the First Friday Letter.

## We Are On the Web

This and past First Friday Letters can be found online at [FirstFridayLetter.worldmethodistcouncil.org](http://FirstFridayLetter.worldmethodistcouncil.org).

The World Methodist Council's website may be found at [worldmethodistcouncil.org](http://worldmethodistcouncil.org).

The World Methodist Museum's website is at [methodismuseum.org](http://methodismuseum.org).

To subscribe to this newsletter, please email [communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org](mailto:communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org).

## About the First Friday Letter

The First Friday Newsletter is a monthly publication of the World Methodist Council.

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