



THE WORLD FEDERATION OF METHODIST AND UNITING CHURCH WOMEN

April - June 2022 / Issue No. 2

# *The* TREE *- of* LIFE

## Mission and witness into all the world

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# President's letter

Dear sisters,

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, the day between Wesley Day and Ascension Day, I was privileged to attend an event at the headquarters of the Methodist Church in Britain. The commemorative stone of the building, at 25 Marylebone Road, in London, was laid in 1939 (the same year as the World Federation charter was signed in the USA). For over 80 years this building, known as Methodist Church House, has been the hub for the mission work of the British Methodist Church, sending and receiving partners to and from many parts of the world. I first went there over 20 years ago, when I had little idea of the traveling I would do as a lay person

responding to God's call on my life. I was pleased to be able to share some of my memories at the poignant service of thanksgiving held there on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2022. For this building is now found to be unsuitable for the present age, and the Connexional Team is moving out, moving on to another base in London, more suited to the modern era. Letting go of a loved home is hard. There were

some moist eyes among those who were attending the service. In some ways, it felt a little like a funeral except for the knowledge that the work would continue. The mission of the church does not depend on a building, or indeed the ministers, administrators, and leaders who work from that building. The mission of the church is dependent on the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is always beckoning us to new horizons.

Before I left Church House that day, I was unexpectedly invited to sit in the chapel and read from my favourite passage, Acts 1:1-11, the story of Christ's Ascension into heaven and His promise that the Holy Spirit would come upon His disciples and empower them for mission and witness into all the world.

You and I are all still involved in that work.

You and I are not tied to a building. We connect with each other via the internet, and in the Spirit as we pray, and we know that we are engaged in God's unending work of sharing the gospel message wherever we are and wherever we are sent.

This is the last *Tree of Life* to which I shall contribute as World President.

Another ending but

looking ahead to a new beginning for the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women.

Let's go and bear witness, bear fruit that will last!

- Alison Judd, World President



Photo of the chapel at Methodist Church House, London

# Editor's word:

## Grace

My husband is a Methodist pastor in Romania and here we have a problem when you go to a church that doesn't belong to the state religion: there are no church buildings. It is very expensive to have your own building, so usually, the churches rent places. By the grace of God, we have managed to borrow money to buy a very nice building, but it needs renovation. We are in this process right now, building our small church. We have hired workers that come and break walls, build others, paint, and renovate rooms and bathrooms. One day I was in the yard, and a young girl in her early twenties named Rahela arrived at work – usually what is believed to be a man's work. The manager of the construction site hired her, and I was surprised to hear that she is a billionaire. Rahela came day after day to work, parked her very expensive Porsche near our house, worked in the building, and then with dirty clothes entered her supercar and drove home. She did this thing to find out how hard it is to earn money because her billions were not gained by her, but by her parents.

I thought highly of her: she is rich, but she doesn't take this for granted. And I suddenly thought of Christ's grace. It is for free, but we never should take it for granted. I have read in a book that Christ's grace is free,

but it is not cheap. And my heart is shrinking. Why, as Christians, do we take it for granted and as something cheap? It was so expensive, paid for with the precious blood of Christ. We should never sin easily or willingly. Our sins were paid for with such a big price. Every time Jesus Christ approached a sinful person, His grace intervened, and that person was immediately healed and forgiven, but Jesus didn't simply say "Go", but "Go and sin no more".

This is the message of His grace, always loving, always forgiving, but at the same time transformational because His grace is not cheap. It cost God the life of His one and only Son. What a gift, what a treasure!

*When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (John 8:10-11) But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)*

*...live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (1 Peter 1:17-19)*

-Ligia Istrate, Tree of Life Editor

*Every time Jesus Christ approached a sinful person, His grace intervened, and that person was immediately healed and forgiven, but Jesus didn't simply say "Go", but "Go and sin no more". This is the message of His grace, always loving, always forgiving, but at the same time transformational because His grace is not cheap. It cost God the life of His one and only Son. What a gift, what a treasure!*

G<sub>2</sub> R<sub>1</sub> A<sub>1</sub> C<sub>3</sub> E<sub>1</sub>

# Chosen

Over 520 million people are globally affected by Covid-19. Over 12 million people have been displaced due to the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and over 20 million people in Sri Lanka are facing an economic crisis. The statistics are staggering – but what can I do?

We read in the book of Esther that King Ahasuerus issued a decree to annihilate Jews - men, women, and children - in Persia. When Mordecai, Queen Esther's uncle, and a Jew, heard of this devastating news, he sent word to Esther, imploring her to intervene with the King. But what can one woman do? She would be risking her life, for no one could meet the King without his permission.

Mordecai's response was, "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14b)

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth". God created the world at the *beginning of time*, which means God is beyond time. He is the author of time. Since God is the author of time, we find meaning and significance in time. In his book, *Carpe Diem Redeemed*, Os Guinness writes, "Time and history have meaning. Under the twin truths of God's sovereignty and human significance, time and history are going somewhere, and each of us is not only unique and significant in ourselves, but we have a unique and significant part to play in our lives, in our generation, and therefore in the overall sweep of history."

We may feel insignificant among the overwhelming numbers, but we have a unique role to play in this time of history. Our life is valuable, and our contribution to God's great plan in this time is significant. It took one Mother Teresa in her time to rescue thousands of people in Kolkata. In her time of history, it took one Amy Carmichael to help over a thousand orphans in Dohnavur. It took one Queen Esther to save her people. What can you and I do today?

God has chosen you and me for such a time as this.

- Lynette Johnson, India

# Don't Stare!

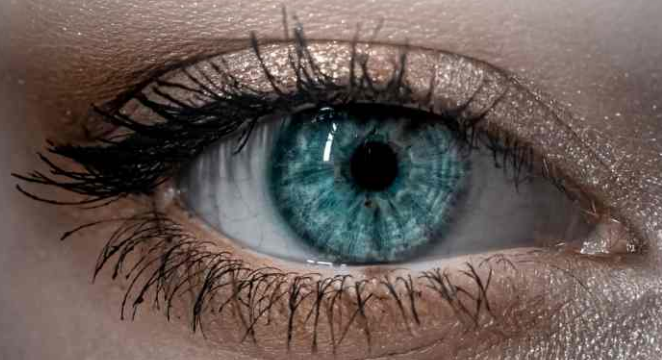
"Don't stare!" is the familiar global admonishment of 'good families'. Mumbai is a city that runs on borrowed seconds each day. "We have no time to stand and stare" (as W.H. Davies wrote in his poem 'Leisure'). The people on the busy streets, the crowded local trains, and the pavement hawkers all seek attention with just one glance. But we are reminded – "Don't stare!" And strangers are not welcome in our line of vision.

The death of my daughter's friend by suicide a couple of days ago reminded me of the unrealistic apathy that we exude by our unwillingness to look around ourselves. Eyes that hurt from violence, eyes that cry out silently for help, eyes that speak of abuse, eyes that are weary with troubles, eyes that plead for comfort, eyes that long for a smile, eyes that look into the horizon waiting for someone to turn around and look ... Look at them!

A pregnant, young, run-away slave who was the victim of ill-treatment and injustice encountered *El Roi* – the God who sees. Genesis 16: 13 says, "She (Hagar) gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees **me**.'" *El Roi* is the God who sees **ME** – every single person on this earth! Ladies! There are eyes calling out silently for our attention. We worship a God who sees you and me! Look into those bruised, blackened eyes! Share a locked-eye moment with the lonely eyes! Whisper a prayer for hurt eyes! Spare your precious seconds with haunted eyes! Our eyes have a purpose to be the eyes of our God on earth. Let's be eyes that see!

- Glory George, India

**Our eyes have a purpose to be the eyes of our God on earth. Let's be eyes that see!**



# News



## 14th World Assembly of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women.

**Theme:** 'Go and bear fruit - fruit that will last'.

**Date:** 9th – 14th August 2022

**Venue:** ONLINE

**Registration will open on 9 May** – look out for further details online

**Registration fee US \$50**

To register for the World Assembly, go to <https://events.humanitix.com/wfmucw>

### Don't delay!!

Assembly merchandise may be purchased NOW! Click the links to UK Shop or US Shop from the home page of our website [www.wfmucw.org](http://www.wfmucw.org)

Your World and Area Officers have been busy preparing reports and devotions that will be inspiring and informative.

Just look at our program when you start to register!

### Assembly Business

Official voting delegates will do their voting online between mid-June and 26th July, via 'Election buddy' They will each be sent documents to help them, including profiles and videos of each nominee for a World Officer role. Delegates may vote as they wish but may want to discuss nominations and other business matters with others before they do so. The

business meeting via zoom on Tuesday 9th August will confirm decisions and be attended by voting delegates only. This session will be recorded and made available to others as soon as possible.

The planning for our groundbreaking World Assembly continues and steering group members are grateful for your prayers as they prepare for this exciting event.

Come to our Assembly and Go and bear fruit that will last!

### The XVIII Confederation of Methodist Women of Latin America and the Caribbean

After two postponements and in His time, according to His will, and with His grace and presence, our XVIII Congress of the Confederation of Methodist Women of Latin America and the Caribbean took place! How many mixed feelings: gratitude, joy,

emotion, sadness for those who could not be present ... smiles and hugs, meetings, and reunions!

The Congress took place in the city of Cabo Frio, State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 28th April to 1st May, with representatives from ten countries: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, and Uruguay. The theme was "Chosen women called to proclaim, hear the voice of God", based on Isaiah 6:8, which says "Then I heard the voice of God saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I answered: Here I am, send me".

On the night of the 28<sup>th</sup>, we had a procession, with President Leila





de Jesus Barbosa leading, the directory following, and then the entry of the ten participating countries. With the music of a happy song, the atmosphere was very enthusiastic.

At the opening service, the message was given by the Vice-President of the Feminine Federation of Costa Rica, Ana Cecilia Vasques. God spoke to us through the devotions of Claudia Lira, who reminded us that “I have one plan, but God has another” and Jessica Solar (Area Vice-President), who stressed that “when a person prays with the heart it is different”. Other women that served were Eloísa Altino, President of the 4<sup>th</sup> Region's Methodist Federation of Women (Brazil), along with her sister, Pastor Elizabete. The guest

speaker was Débora Corsi, who spoke about the Samaritan woman and challenged us with the question “Are you a well or an



ocean?”, giving us this word from God: “Whatever the well, I will draw you out”. Another message was about Jochebed, and we learned how to know and distinguish the right time to act and face problems head-on. Ivana Garcia, President of the Brazilian Methodist Confederation of Women, stressed the importance of listening to God and each other and praying for each other. Besides the messages, we had a great time praying, singing, and praising God, being led by

different teams.

On Saturday 30<sup>th</sup>, we had a meeting in which reports from the Board and the Committees were presented and a new Directory Board was elected from among the women of Peru. Once the administrative part was over, everyone hurried to get ready for the Cultural Night. To begin with, Sister Vanda Kratz (Brazil) presented Voz Missionária Magazine and after that, typical dances from the Latin countries took place and we got to know a little about each other's culture. It

was exciting, and joyful, with lots of very contagious laughter! We ended our meeting with worship, led by Reverend Margarida Ribeiro, and a Supper. The message that

touched everyone's heart was from Psalm 23: The Lord is our Shepherd!

Of course, in such a beautiful place, the sisters were given a free afternoon and were able to get to know a little bit of the place, a beautiful creation of God. An unforgettable time, which is recorded in the photos, in the memories, in the heart!

- Geny Amorim, CMMALC Literature Officer



# Thursdays in Black

Swedish Bible Society, spoke about the Swedish situation. Dr. Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, chief executive of Rozaria Memorial Trust talked about child rape, “which the world calls 'child marriage' to make it sound

Assembly in Karlsruhe. Rev. Dr. Tapio Luoma, archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and Hanbeet Rhee also spoke about different involvements on the same issue. Rev. Michael Blair, general secretary of the General Council, The United Church of Canada said, “We are connecting with groups that help bring justice for missing and murdered indigenous women.”

At the same time, the participants discussed future visions. For example, Jessica Roland, senior specialist for Inclusive Peace for the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers talked about the Network of Thursdays in Black, which will host an inclusivity-based community of practice meeting in October focused on how members and supporters are addressing gender-based violence, and which will develop further action points in preparation for November's 16 Days Campaign to raise awareness on violence against women. Marcelo D. Leites, general secretary of the World Christian Student Federation, said the federation is planning to emphasize gender justice at its assembly in Berlin in June. The ambassadors agreed to explore the idea of a joint statement leading up to the WCC 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly. The importance of breaking the silence over all forms of gender-based violence, especially by the church, was emphasized. As Rev. Michael Blair stated: “We do violence by not naming.”

Info taken from the World Council of Churches' site, for further information, see: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/thursdays-in-black-ambassadors-map-how-to-keep-moving-toward-a-world-free-from-violence>



Photo from World Council of Churches' website

President Alison Judd participated in an online event, *Thursdays in Black ambassadors' map. How to keep moving toward a world free from violence* on 12<sup>th</sup> May. The aim of the meeting was to join creative efforts across the world to move toward a world free from rape and violence.

World Council of Churches (WCC) Deputy General Secretary, Prof. Dr. Isabel Apawo Phiri, who opened the meeting, said that it is no small thing to be an ambassador for Thursdays in Black at a time when there is so much violence. “Whatever pandemic is going on, there is an increase in gender-based violence ... Ambassadors help guide the churches and the world on how to say no to violence, especially against women and girls.”

Many negative situations were discussed, but also positive actions from different churches. Colleen Geyer, general secretary of the Uniting Church in Australia Assembly, reflected on the challenge of getting political recognition of gender-based violence. Rev. Dr. Anders Göranson, general secretary of the

unities ... What is encouraging is starting to see the faith communities stepping up the public voice,” she said. Rev. Sharon Hollis, an Australian minister and president of the Uniting Church in Australia, noted that after incidents of women bearing the brunt of islamophobia, one social media post started an "I'll ride with you" program in Australia where non-Islamic women accompany Islamic women on public transport, in response to threats and violence that Islamic women face. Rev. Dr Karen Georgia Thompson, associate general minister for Wider Church Ministries and Operations and co-executive for Global Ministries, United Church of Christ, talked about a proposal for gender justice for churches. Alison Judd, World President of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, said that the organization's 14<sup>th</sup> World Assembly in August 2022 will address gender justice. Many ambassadors said their churches or organizations had contributed with quilt patches to the "Waterfall of Solidarity and Resistance" tapestry for display at the WCC 11<sup>th</sup>

## Where is there justice today?

Our Vice-President, Matilda, participated in May at a gathering of African women church leaders in Geneva, where they have inaugurated the “Ecumenical Women's Initiative for Leadership and Learning”. They lamented grave injustices, celebrated women pioneers, and nurtured a spirit of solidarity they hope will blaze a global trail for the future. In a “Litany of Lamentation,” the women expressed grief that the sins of patriarchy and sexism continue to distort the world.

### **Statement from the Inaugural Consultation of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Women's Initiative for Leadership and Learning (WE WILL)**

In recognition of the decisions of many churches in the African region to affirm women to some of the highest levels of ecclesial authority, the Just Community of Women and Men Program of the World Council of Churches, in partnership with the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice, convened a gathering of African women church leaders from 17<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> May 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland. The objectives of this gathering were to:

- *Consider* the long and arduous individual and collective journeys towards ecclesial leadership
- *Celebrate* the women pioneers who opened pathways for the election and consecration of women to positions of ecclesial authority
- *Contemplate* the unique dual burden and blessing of

being "firsts" that comes with challenges and opportunities that call for mentorship

- *Collect* important lessons from those who have walked the path of leadership before
- *Critically* map strategies and approaches for addressing ongoing injustices, exclusion, and marginalization of women
- *Curate* spaces of joy, rest, and hope, amidst the challenges
- *Create* a network of reciprocal and respectful sisterhood, that values spaces of affirmation, transformation, and justice, and to
- *Commit to taking the deep lessons taken from this consultation and invite the WCC and AACC to include those lessons in their programmatic work*

## Litany of Lamentation

We cry out, O God, asking why the sins of patriarchy and sexism continue to distort the world you created.

We lament the suffering of women and girls perpetrated under the oppressive system of patriarchy upheld by religion and culture.

In our gathering,

We remembered and mourned Tamar raped in the name of love.

We remembered and mourned Gomer, and the continued use of texts of terror, violent metaphors, and patriarchal language as a means of expressing divine-human connection.

We remembered and mourned the widow who spoke truth to power and persisted in spite of overwhelming odds.

We remembered and mourned the loss of the stories of women such as Phoebe, Prisca, and Junia who served as ministers, apostles, and disciples.

We remembered and mourned that such stories were sacrificed by centuries of theological and doctrinal pronouncements.

For them, there was no justice.

What about today?

Where is there justice for women who continue to be barred from exercising their God-given gifts in church leadership as ministers, bishops, or moderators?

Where is there justice today for women who daily live in fear that



Photo from World Council of Churches' website -info from the World Council of Churches site, for more information see: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/african-women-church-leaders-where-is-there-justice-today>



they are at risk of being raped by those they trust?

Where is there justice today for widows who lose everything – their homes, their dignity - because of oppressive cultural values?

But God has already shown us what such justice is:

It happens when the church becomes what it is called to be.

It happens when male and female are honored equally as God honored them in the act of creating them in God's image.

It happens when the church lives fully the example of the spirit that does not limit gifts according to gender.

It happens when the church repudiates and works to end all forms of violence against women and girls – civic, religious, economic, political, and cultural.

Hear our cries, O God,  
MAY JUSTICE REIGN ... AND SOON.

Inaugural Consultation of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Women's Initiative for Leadership and Learning (WE WILL), Geneva Switzerland, 17<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

## No human rights for the Rohingya people

Hasina Begum's children looked at their mother behind bars, jailed and hitting her head helplessly against the wall while she waited for her deportation. In April, Begum was separated from her children and became one of sixteen Rohingya refugees to be deported from India - a bellwether for other Rohingya refugees. Elsewhere, this week, a 'manhunt' is ongoing for more than 500 Rohingya in Malaysia as they escaped the deteriorating

conditions of the detention center. In these countries, they are grasping at the straws that are their human rights.

The Rohingya people are a minority facing persecution in Myanmar. Today 980,000 of them are displaced to Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, and other countries. Rohingya protection hinges on the right to non-refoulement – that is, the right not to be sent where one may be subjected to torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (CIDT). The right is owed by all states and cannot be breached, yet countries have ignored the right, deporting the Rohingya to Myanmar, where they risk persecution and mistreatment.

in 2001 deported a 'Tamil Tiger' refugee to Sri Lanka, where he risked torture, citing national security as an exception to the principle of non-refoulement. This case is important as it illustrates deportation being justified by national security.

India follows: its Supreme Court emphasized in 2021 that the Rohingya posed a 'threat to the internal security' and declined to grant an interim stay against their deportation. The Court has avoided even rejecting India's erroneous argument that only “contracting states” are obliged to guarantee non-refoulement. The erroneous judicial construction implicitly accepts 'internal security' as



Breaches are fanned by national courts, with the Indian Supreme Court, in particular, making pronouncements in violation of this right. Otherwise, Malaysian courts have been sympathetic to refugees, but the lack of political will to protect them has nonetheless continued the rights violations.

The right has proven significant in the past, but note Canada, who back

bypassing non-refoulement and slams the court's doors from recourse at the Rohingya against their deportation. The Malaysian High Court is more sympathetic to the Rohingya and has granted an interim stay against their deportation. Still, the government flouted the court order and deported 1,086 Rohingya people back to Myanmar. While human rights groups in 2021 have

challenged the deportation, the possibility of their return to Malaysia is unlikely.

Another problem is their living conditions. For example, Malaysian detention centers are crowded, without room to move or sleep. The Global Detention Project reports deaths in the centers due to tuberculosis, pneumonia, and septicemia. Yet when 528 Rohingyas escaped, a 'manhunt' was launched to reimpose these conditions on them. So as Malaysia seeks to return the Rohingya people to the intolerable conditions of their detention, it must consider the legality of its actions. Even if its court has recognized the right to non-refoulement, its government has, nonetheless, deported more than a thousand Rohingya. Along with the Indian government's deportation, it shows that human rights

Protections for the Rohingya are empty promises unless governments demonstrate political will.

Therefore, we should prepare now for a steep road ahead beyond the textual and the tokenistic, and pressure political will.

- *Rebekah Daniel\**, former  
HKMS

\*Rebekah is a lawyer, currently studying for a Master's degree in International Law at University College London.

## God and farming

I met Kathleen, a wonderful young lady, some years ago and I was surprised to see her great dedication to farming and taking care of animals and vegetables. But the surprise was not only that she loved so much what she was doing, but the fact that she was not doing this for herself. She, together with her father, was a super-team, that

maintained the farm, giving work to the marginalized of the society, donating the products to the poor, and feeding the homeless – of whom there are many in their former mining city. I could see they more than enjoy their work, and they do it with all their heart. I was really touched by their ministry, which meant complete submission to God, being up in the night working (work on a farm starts really early!) and staying with people nobody would stay with. Here is Kathleen's testimony:

“I've been a ministry farmer for seven years now. I actually became a farmer by the grace of God. My position was going to a man who did not have the heart of ministry and wanted control and recognition. Thankfully, a board



Photo by [www.mustardtreeministries.org](http://www.mustardtreeministries.org)

member spoke up on my behalf, expressing that there was another applicant that she thought would be a better fit. Even though I was given the position, I had to fight for the majority of my time here. Any time there was a board meeting, people wanted to fire me. Month by month I had no idea if I was going to have a

job or not.

“However, God kept sending people who needed help. A girl who was going to face criminal charges came out to my farm to do community service. Her life changed as she worked alongside me. We were eventually able to pay her and give her a small income until she made the decision to go back to college. Now she is a college graduate and is working her dream job and has started a family. One thing she mentioned about working on the farm is how therapeutic and healing it was for her. Since then, I have met many women who have come out and worked, and who have said the same thing. There is an overwhelming peace out here and it's a place for people to heal.

I started to shift my focus on what God was doing instead of worrying about if the board would take away my job. I came to the conclusion that God has the final say, and someone taking away my position will not stop me from my calling. Seven years of surrendering to God and letting Him lead me and allowing Him to work through me to help other women have been amazing, and I plan to

keep on going as long as He allows. When the whole world is telling me “No”, God is saying “Yes” and His “Yes” is the only one I need.”

- *Kathleen Ramirez (USA)*  
and *Ligia Istrate*

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