



THE WORLD FEDERATION OF METHODIST AND UNITING CHURCH WOMEN

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# *The* TREE *- of* LIFE

**What are  
you  
thirsty for?**

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# President's letter

## 'What are you thirsty for?'

Dear Sisters,

Do you ever get thirsty? I usually have a glass of water beside my bed and whenever I wake in the night, I take a sip so that when I finally awake in the morning, ready to begin the day, the glass is nearly empty. I know I am fortunate to have clean refreshing water easily available to me. Many do not have this luxury. As I write, the South Asia Area women are preparing the Federation Study Day material for our use later this year on theme of SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation. The Call to Pray for this last month has also focussed on SDG 6. No wonder water is on my mind!

I was reading Psalm 22, a psalm attributed to David, but which has prophetic verses that seem to describe the experience of Jesus during his arrest and crucifixion. Verse 15 'my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws' reminds me of words of Jesus from the cross: 'I am thirsty' (John 19:28). He was offered not water, but sour wine on a branch of hyssop.

What are you thirsty for?

In March, the Commission on the Status of Women met at the United Nations in New York. This year it has been a virtual meeting and several Federation women registered to join the many online side events organised by the UN Women. These range from empowerment of women and girls to gender justice and equal rights to health care, education, and employment. The women who lead and attend these workshops are thirsty for justice for women and girls.

What are you thirsty for?

Perhaps like the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), you are thirsty for true companionship as well as for water. During this global pandemic you may have felt isolated and cut off from friends and family. You may long to be able to meet with others in worship and sing again the praises of God. You may be thirsty for the opportunity to travel and visit other parts of the world. You may have spent this period of Lent reflecting on your own need to repent and are now thirsty for the forgiveness that Christ offers. Thanks be to God for this gift of grace!

This Easter, may we drink of the water that Christ offers us from 'the spring of living water gushing up to eternal life' (John 4: 14). May we be eager (thirsty?) to share this living water with others.

Amen.

Blessings,

- Alison



# Editor's word:

## Change your own destiny so you can change the destiny of others

Year 2020. What a sick year. Not only the pandemic, but many other disasters happened. In March, in Europe, everybody hoped that the pandemic would last for several months and then, life will turn to its normal course. But as months passed by, people realised that this was not possible. Then everybody looked forward to 2021, hoping that the pandemic would be over. 2021 came and nothing changed for good; on the contrary, we all have lost people we knew to Coronavirus. The beginning of 2021 is the wakeup call that life as we knew it will never be the same, and it is a wakeup call to stop agonizing and to fight to live our lives at the fullest in the parameters of the actual global condition. The truth is that we need to learn to live almost from scratch, to adapt to the new environment.

This situation – of something new, but in a bad way – is not actually new for the humanity. Many times, in history, people have faced abnormal life conditions. Dig into history and you will see plague, famine, war and so on. This new situation is not in fact new. What can we do?

One of the most beloved leaders of Romania, the country I live in, is Mary of Romania, the queen of my country in the twentieth century. She was born into the British royal family and, after refusing a proposal from her cousin, the future King George V, she was chosen as the future wife of Crown Prince Ferdinand of Romania.

She was very loved by Romanians and is still very highly esteemed because she showed compassion in times of sorrow. When she was in charge of the country World War One was going on. Imagine that weapons were used in mass and the humanity experienced something it had never experienced before: a global war, and at the same time a global sick society, global death and famine and depression. Something never seen before.

The capital of Romania was soon occupied by the enemy and the beloved queen, king Ferdinand and their five children took refuge in Moldavia. But there, she didn't want to live in luxury. She wanted to help. So, she and her three daughters acted as nurses in military hospitals, caring for soldiers who were

wounded or afflicted by cholera. She was on the front line and she also helped the starving population. She could have demanded to be served as she was a queen, but she chose to serve the Romanian people. Many historical pictures show her helping the wounded and the needy. So, Queen Mary was not loved because of her royal blood, but because of her loving heart.

She fought for Romanians until the end. Besides being among the people, she learned to do politics as a woman, and worked for international recognition for Romania. After the war, on 1 December 1918, the historical regions of Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina, united with the Old Kingdom. Marie, now queen of Greater Romania, attended the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, where she did her best for international recognition of the new enlarged Romania. This happened at a time when women involved in politics were not seen with good eyes. She has appeared in the journals of those days as something uncommon. The queen said about herself: "I refuse to let myself be defeated or to feel defeated until the last shred of hope has been snatched from me" (War Diary II, 1917-1918).

She could have played her role as a queen and she could have chosen not to be deeply involved. But she stepped out of her comfort zone to help. She learnt to rely on God. In the years of pain, as she named those years, she learnt to pray, and she declared: "God always helps me when my hands start to empty." (War Diary II, 1917-1918)

In world history there is always something "new". We cannot rely on ourselves. We have to rely on our Lord and Savior because He alone can help us, and He alone can guide us to do the best for our society. As Queen Mary, we need to learn to pray in times of sorrow and to step out of our comfort zone in order to change not only our own destiny, but the destiny of others too.

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you." (Psalm 32:8)

-Ligia Istrate,  
*Tree of Life*  
Editor



Picture from wikiwand.com: Queen Mary helping a wounded person.



## Women: A pivotal force for change

The California Women Society for Democracy in Iran invited me to be one of their speakers in a virtual forum to commemorate International Women's Day. I am humbled by the honour given to me to share my own experiences and insights on "Women: A Pivotal Force for Change".

I grew up in a home where men supported the aspirations of their women for higher education, for healthy family life, and for worthy community service. I also grew up in a community where women's contributions to society are valued and respected. With these influences, I consider myself as an agent of change if not a pivotal force for change in my own home, in my community, and in society as a whole.

Being a woman puts you in an enviable position to raise children and to influence them to do good, to be fair and to respect the rights of others. But you cannot do this alone. As a poet once said, "As unto the bow the chord is so unto the man is woman; though she bends him, she obeys him, though she draws him, yet she follows, useless each without the other." (The Song of Hiawatha, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

As one of the pioneers of public health education in the Philippines, I worked with a team of women to change the knowledge, attitude, and skills of people towards better health. I was a community organizer at a time when community organizing was not yet a popular term as a process in community development. I made the community aware of what actions to take in order to promote health, prevent disease, and prolong life. Together with other women, we served as a pivotal force in motivating people to assume responsibility for their own health, to strengthen relationships with others, and to improve the quality of life in the community where we live.

When I came to the United States, my desire to make a difference in the lives of others, especially within my own Filipino American community, became more intense considering the challenges of cultural and social adjustment one has to make in a new environment.

Women are strong and resilient. They can sacrifice their own lives for the good of their country and people. I can cite many women leaders in the world who served as a vital force in the fight for freedom and democracy, in upholding the rights of women,

maintaining that human rights are women's rights. The Philippines is very fortunate to have strong women leaders who changed the course of history through their leadership as Presidents of the Philippines: President Corazon Aquino and President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. I have utmost respect for these women who served as our role models in the arena of politics, social justice, economic development and leadership development.

I saw all these as I interacted with women, not only from my own country, but from other countries as well, when I served as a UNESCO consultant in Southeast Asia (1978-83) and then as World Secretary of the World Federation of Methodist Women (1991-1996). I could cite so many women whether in leadership positions or as farmers, teachers, housewives or caregivers, who in their own right are pivotal forces for change. But there is one woman I could never forget: Maryam Rajavi.

Thanks to the generosity of my Iranian friends, I was able to attend the Global Conference on Freedom and Democracy held in Paris, France (2008) where I heard the forceful voice of a gentle lady, encouraging the thousands of people listening to her to continue fighting for freedom, justice, and democracy. I can still feel her soft and firm hand as she shook my hand to thank me for my support of Iran's aspiration to be free from tyranny and injustice. It was my pride and honour to have met Maryam Rajavi up close and personal. I was able to appreciate the beauty of her soul and the strength of her character as she uses her talent and position to change the world. Like her, we can be a pivotal force for change anywhere at any time, but let us be reminded of the Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

- Aurora S. Cudal-Rivera, World Secretary of  
WFMW (1991-1996)



Aurora Cudal at her 85th birthday

# Flip flops and red lights — introducing Brazil

As part of my year of office as Vice-President of the Methodist Conference I was offered an overseas visit on behalf of the church. As the theme for my year is about growth, both personal, and as churches, I really wanted to visit a place where the Methodist Church is growing to see what I could learn from them. The Global Relationships team suggested Brazil and I am so thankful that I had the opportunity to visit this amazing country along with Sandra Lopez (Co-Ordinator for Latin America) and my husband Mark, before the Coronavirus closed all travel!

Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world in terms of area and population. It is home to half the population of South America and covers half the land mass. It is the world's ninth largest economy, but there is huge disparity between the rich and poor. One example of the poor suffering for the benefit of the rich is in the case of Hawaiian flip flops. I was told that these were originally affordable footwear for Brazilians, but since the demand for them overseas has increased, they are sadly now priced outside the reach of most Brazilians and seen as luxury items in other parts of the world.

Politically Brazil has had its ups and downs, and the current president Bolsonaro is considered to be the Trump of Latin America because of his deeply unpopular economic policies. The rate of deforestation in the Amazon has escalated under his leadership and this is thought to be because companies illegally deforesting have become more confident under his 'pro-business' policies.

There are high levels of crime in Brazil, especially in major cities. Brazil is the world's second highest consumer of illicit drugs and has the world's highest rate of firearm murders. Whilst in Brazil we took all sensible precautions, but ultimately trusted God with our safety and didn't feel in danger at any time. I was acutely aware of the supportive prayer of many back home during my visit. I noticed that as we were being driven around Rio, our driver didn't stop at red traffic lights in the evenings, and I wondered if maybe the road laws were different there and perhaps the red light rule didn't apply at night. I asked the driver about it and he said he was deliberately crashing the red lights so that we didn't get shot! Apparently, cars at red lights are sitting targets! After that, the worry of crashing at the intersections paled and we were grateful to keep moving!



Brazil is a country with complete freedom of religion. Its strong Catholic presence is a legacy of European colonization, but today Pentecostal and other evangelical churches are growing in popularity and it has become a great missionary-sending nation. The Methodist Church in Brazil is one of the churches that continues to grow. It has grown from 167,000 members in 2010 to a current figure of around 275,000 in 1500 churches and still growing. It is clear that God is blessing them mightily and I realized that we have so much to learn from them. I was blown away by the passion and commitment of the church and inspired by their strategic approach to mission and outreach. Over the year I have been sharing stories from this visit and pray that we, in the Methodist Church across the world, can learn from a church that is on the whole financially self-sufficient, growing and full of evangelical zeal, so that we can reflect on our own priorities as well as be inspired by their love for Jesus.

- Carolyn Lawrence, Europe: Britain and Ireland Area Vice-President



# News



## Latin America

I believe that despite the situation of the pandemic, Latin American women have managed to be more united than ever, because contact through Zoom has been constant and thus the bonds of friendship increased. The work of the Confederation of Latin America and the Caribbean has not ceased, and different conferences are taking place.

This February we have also started to put into practice a "Systemic Community Integrative Therapy Space", that is "welcoming people, listening, understanding and serving." The program was designed by the Rev. Andrea Reily, a regional missionary of United Methodist Women for the Development of Leadership for the women of Latin America and the Caribbean, and will be developed by the married couple Dr. Eduardo Campaña and Eluzinete Pereira de Souza, who specialize in Community Therapy, and have been developing this project for some years in Ecuador.

The idea has been very well accepted, and, in fact, we are all excited about the possibility that this Community Space is also a space for growth and great friendships for all countries. The first experience will be a Conversation Round with the Presidents and then we

will open this space for those who want to participate.

We hope that our Area will be blessed by this online project! We remain firm and hopeful that our Congress can be held in 2022.

God is good all the time!

- Leila de Jesús Barbosa,  
President of Latin America Area

### Prayer

*Beloved Father, good God, we walk confidently on the path of life, knowing that your presence accompanies us every day of our life until eternity. Thank you for holding us with your steady hand. Thank you because you are the Great I AM that is with us and gives meaning to every moment of our lives. Amen!*

-Jessica Solar, Vice-President of  
Latin America Area

## South Asia

### Blessings to each one of you!

The Pandemic has not been kind to any of us throughout the world. We were jolted out of our senses with all that happened when Covid-19 struck our otherwise comfortable, taken-for-granted lifestyles. Death, separation, pain, unemployment, financial drain, women and children exploited... you name it, we had

it!

Everything around us changed: air was no longer safe to breathe, and we have started to wear masks. Hands and fingers were no longer safe without sanitizers. The feel of a gentle hug or a handshake was no longer possible, one had to be at a safe distance.

Rules were forced, it was called Standard Operating Procedures. Church doors were shut. Schools, colleges, places of learning were all shut too. You name it and we had a 'DON'T'!

In the midst of the turmoil most of our homes became a haven where families had time together. The home became an office, a classroom for studies online under the watchful eye of the parents.

But, in the midst of the struggle we have a Faithful One, Who never changed! If it were not for Him... Through all the struggles, His Presence was felt. The church woke up to the spiritual and material needs of all its believers. Online services, online Bible studies, online prayer; the world was shut out and locked in, but we were never 'shut out' from growing in the Word of God! That's the Awesome God we worship and know!

Having said all this, let me share what has been happening in our South Asia Area of our Federation. At the outset, I would like to recognise the

incredible work done by my predecessor Margarete Mu Mu Than from Myanmar. She has been sincerely serving the Federation and the women in Myanmar in various capacities for many years. Her last role as the President of SAA showcased her skills, especially when Myanmar hosted our Area Seminar at Yangon a few years ago. Unfortunately, her husband, who was her pillar of support, especially in the work of the Federation, passed on and that was a very strong blow for Margarete. She has not been able to get over her loss, and as a result, she could no longer continue her work in the SAA. As the ministry came to a standstill, the mantle of leadership fell on me, the Vice-President. Though it was a tough decision to make, with the many challenges that I face, it is by God's Grace that I am able to take up the responsibility.

The first and biggest challenge I faced was the Pandemic! There are restrictions in travel, social distancing and it is nearly impossible to operate. Then, there was the preparation of the Study Day Resource that was due to be prepared by my Area. But God is good all the time, and with the permission and help of our World President, Alison, and our World Secretary., Mataiva, we decided to meet with the women on one platform, through a Zoom Meeting. It was really encouraging to

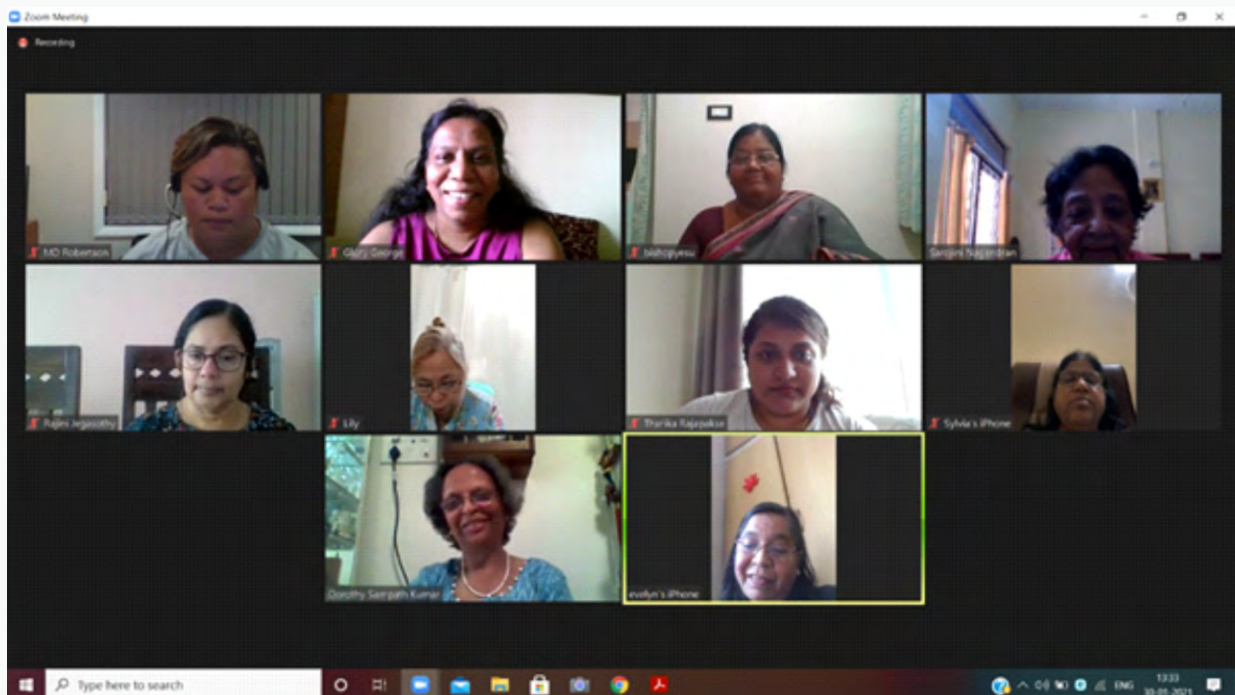
see that the meeting was attended by Sri Lanka, Myanmar and India. After the initial introductions, our World Secretary shared a short message. Our World President has also addressed our women and shared how and what is required for the Study Day Material, highlighting the theme SDG 6, Clean Water and Sanitation. As a call was given by me for volunteers to contribute with articles, stories, plays, etc., the response from each one was very, very encouraging.

Myanmar: As we all know, sad things are happening in Myanmar. I am in touch with our Myanmar sisters to encourage and give support, especially in prayer. Our SAA women are also praying. I request and appreciate that each of you would spend some time every day to keep our dear sisters of Myanmar in prayer. This would be my only request, to pray, as our World President, Alison, so aptly places at the end of all her emails to us: 'Prayer is the Powerhouse that generates results.'

Let us pray:

*Father, we thank you for this time as women united all over the world in the World Federation, to pray and ask you for forgiveness if we have hurt You or caused any one pain. We seek your forgiveness. Today, we place before you our dear sisters, children, and families in Myanmar, who are going through this peculiar struggle. God of Love have mercy upon them! We do not know where to go or whom to turn to, but You are our unfailing One. Grant our dear ones in Myanmar the Peace that passes all understanding and which You alone can provide to Your children! Grant wisdom for all officials and leaders to get together to make the right decisions so that peace and harmony will prevail! So, help Your dear children to know that they are never alone, that you will never give up on them. We thank You, we Praise You and give You all the glory! In Your sweet and precious Name, we pray. Amen*

*- Evelyn Mercylin,  
South Asia President*





# Announcements



Introducing: Members of the World Executive are meeting on Zoom on the 26th day of every month to pray about the Global Online Event.

You can find the prayer diary on the website <https://wfmucw.org/prayer-diary-for-the-global-online-event> Facebook and Twitter @WFMUCW.

## Global Online Event 13th and 14th August 2021

Plans are progressing well for our online event in August.

We do hope that you will be able to join us LIVE at 12 noon to 2.30pm UK time on 13th and 14th August.

Registration will be via Eventbrite from May and, once registered, you will be sent a link to join on Zoom. Translation into 7 languages (French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Korean, Mandarin and Cambodian) will be available and you can indicate if you will require this at

registration.

This event is FREE but please consider making a donation to the work of the World Federation by using the donate button on our website.

Meanwhile please pray about this event that it will bring glory to God. If you would like to pray alongside others on the 26th day of each month, you may wish to use the prayer diary that is on our website.

Prayer Diary for the Global Online Event – World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women ([wfmucw.org](http://wfmucw.org))

WORSHIP / BIBLE STUDY / STORIES / ACTION

GLOBAL ONLINE EVENT  
13TH & 14TH AUGUST 2021

**A NEW VISION**  
FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

FOR MORE INFORMATION  
[www.wfmucw.org](http://www.wfmucw.org)



World Federation  
of Methodist and  
Uniting Church Women





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