



# *The* TREE — of LIFE

## When God laughs

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# President's letter

## An extra-ordinary meeting

There has never been a World Executive meeting quite like the one that was held on 8th May 2020. In so many ways it was an extra-ordinary meeting. It was extra to our normal pattern of four meetings each quinquennium. It was called to address the issues raised by the Covid-19 pandemic. It was held via Zoom which required our sisters in North America and Latin America to rise before dawn, those in Europe and the African continent to go online during the morning, and those in Asia and the Pacific to join in the afternoon and evening hours. What a coming together it was! All World Officers, most Area Presidents, some Area Vice Presidents were present, and every Area was represented.

I sensed a mixture of delight to see one another on the screen, and of course some element of dismay at the reason for our meeting. We shared our hopes and anxieties and concluded that we must postpone our 14th World Assembly for a year. We have booked the venue in Gothenburg for 2nd-7th August 2022, the week prior to the World Methodist Council event, also postponed from 2021.

We recognise that little is certain about the future

of a post Covid-19 world. For now, we trust God to guide us, and do our best to respond obediently to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. One morning in March I woke up with the words of Revelation 21: 5 ringing in my ears: 'Behold I am making all things new!' I confess I may not always be sufficiently open to God's 'new ideas' but would ask you to pray for the World Executive as we continue to make important decisions.

It has been hard to live in a nation that has been so severely affected by the coronavirus pandemic. I am thankful that most countries have avoided the huge number of deaths that we have suffered in the UK, and I cannot help noticing that many of those least affected countries are led by women. Wherever you live, please do everything you can to reduce the devastating effects of this virus.

Meanwhile, many Federation women are again at the forefront of helping those less fortunate: working on the front line as key workers, helping out in their community with those who are struggling, providing for their families under intensely difficult conditions, donating money and food where they can, and making protective clothing for others to use.

Thank you to all those who sent messages to me on Mothers' day in May. In the UK we celebrate our mothers in March so I was interested to listen to Harriett Olson speak online about the history of Mothers' Day as instigated by Ann Jarvis and her daughter Anna in the USA and how it is now celebrated by so many around the world in May each year. You can listen to Harriett here: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/methodist-history-the-founding-mothers-of-mothers-day>



*Thank you, Lord for the wonders of modern technology.  
Thank you that we can be guided by Your Holy Spirit.  
Thank you that your rainbow promise of hope still encourages us to trust You.*

*Thank you for our mothers and sisters in Christ.  
May we always work together for the healing of the nations.  
For Christ's sake. Amen.*

*-Alison Judd*

## Editor's word: When God laughs

Many people nowadays do not believe in miracles, but they do exist. I think every Christian has experienced in her or his life a situation when a miracle happened: maybe you were cured from a serious disease, maybe you lacked money and someone suddenly gave you money, maybe you prayed for a member of your family to re-join the family and they did, or you wanted a deeper relationship with God and God talked to you in a new powerful way, maybe you prayed for someone else and God fulfilled the prayer. There are many wonderful things that happen if we have eyes to see.

But what happens when you do not see anything, and you feel your cause is lost? DO NOT despair.

A wonderful Bible story is the life of Abraham and how God promises him descendants. Abraham was 75 years old when God promised him a child. But time passed and Sara, his wife, still did not bear him any children. That is how it went, for almost a quarter of century, and still ... nothing.

Then 24 years after the promise was given, when Abraham was 99 years old, God showed Himself in the personification of three angels (or one of the three) that are on the way to destroy Sodom, and they say to Abraham that Sara will have a child next year. Sara, who was standing close by, hears and laughs. For her such a thing is impossible, her body is not working anymore to produce children and God's promise appears to her aberrant.

Then the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh...?" Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But God said, "Yes, you did

laugh." She was not the only one that laughed; Abraham laughed on other occasions, too. (In Hebrew the verb "to laugh" is litzchok (לִצְחֹק).)

But even though God's promise was received with derision, He fulfilled His promise. "Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age." (Genesis 21:2). With the birth of Isaac another laugh is produced. 'Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." (Genesis 21:6)

So, Isaac, or Yitzhak (יִצְחָק) in Hebrew, is born - "He will laugh", from the same verb, litzchok. This laughter is no longer the laughter of distrust, but it expresses pleasure and joy. A metamorphosis takes place now. The laughter of doubt and unbelief was changed by God into laughter of joy, and this joy was not limited to the Abraham-Sarah couple, but was extended to the people who will hear about how God intervened, creating life out of sterility.

God laughed together with them, because it is a pleasure for Him to bring joy when the circumstances seem impossible. In Romanian, we have a proverb: "Who laughs at last, laughs better." This means that many time people mock one another, but if you continue to trust and act, you will have success and you are the one that will truly laugh and laugh better. You did not give attention to the mockeries of others and through perseverance, you succeeded.

Do not doubt God, and do not doubt His promises. He is almighty and all powerful. Wait upon your Lord, even if that means a quarter of a century. He is the God that transforms the laugh of mockery into a laugh of joy. Wait to laugh together with your God, because when He laughs, great things happen!

*-Ligia Istrate, Tree of Life Editor*

GOD LAUGHED TOGETHER WITH THEM, BECAUSE IT IS A PLEASURE FOR HIM TO BRING JOY WHEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES SEEM IMPOSSIBLE. IN ROMANIAN, WE HAVE A PROVERB: "WHO LAUGHS AT LAST, LAUGHS BETTER." ...WAIT TO LAUGH TOGETHER WITH YOUR GOD, BECAUSE WHEN HE LAUGHS, GREAT THINGS HAPPEN!



## The Shulamite Woman

Come with me and let us journey back in our minds to our first love. Do you remember how you felt? How when you mentioned their name you would smile from ear to ear? Well, that is how the Shulamite woman felt about her beloved King Solomon. Although Solomon composed 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32), the one before us from his gifted pen was in a class by itself, the one he named, "The Song of Songs", meaning a very excellent song, or the most surpassing of his songs. Solomon's "Song" is not simply an oriental love poem, full of exquisite beauty and charm, set amid beautiful pastoral scenes. In the beginning of the story, the Shulamite woman talks about her beloved Solomon, her true love. In our verse, Song of Solomon 1:5-6, says: "I am dark but beautiful, O women of Jerusalem – dark as the tents of Kedar, dark as the curtains of Solomon's tents. Do not stare at me because I am dark – the sun has darkened my skin. My brothers were angry with me; they forced me to care for their vineyards, so I couldn't care for myself – my own vineyard". This Shulamite woman looked at herself as being flawed because of this, but her beloved Solomon felt otherwise.

You should clothe yourselves with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. What makes a Christian woman truly beautiful? "The unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit". This beauty is just as beautiful when you are 57 as when you are 17. It is unfading because it never goes out of style and never has to be replaced. This is how women get more beautiful as they grow older. Their gentle and quiet spirit shines through so that when their physical beauty diminishes, their inner beauty remains. We must understand that our value lies in that we are holy and dearly loved by God. We cannot earn God's approval because we already have it. God has loved us even before we were ever born. God loved us as He formed us and put us together. He knows everything about us, our coming and our going. He is intimately acquainted with us. He knows our thoughts, our ways, our pain, our hurts, and sees our tears when we cry. He knows when we are depressed, and about our hidden sins. And even though we are not perfect, He still loves us.

"He will rejoice over you with joyful songs". Singing represents God's joy. After a time of hardship, our loving Lord dries His people's tears, comforts their

hearts, and welcomes them to a new world. I'd say that the Shulamite woman was also a phenomenal woman who has imperfections. She is phenomenal for what she does with her imperfections and because she is true to herself. Thank God for the gift of being a phenomenal woman.

- Dr. Sandra L. Gadson,  
North America Area President.

## A Jar of Thanksgiving



Spending more time in thanksgiving to God builds your immunity to withstand anxiety, stress, fear, and a sense of hopelessness. Vitamin C is to the physical body as

Spiritual C (Christ) is to the soul, to keep us spiritually healthy. The **JAR**: Jesus; All-powerful; Replenishes us when we spend more time giving thanks to Him. Less complaining and more and more of thanksgiving.

Four years ago, at 'Holiday with a Difference', a Retreat for Methodist church women, one of the presenters taught us how to make inspirational jars from discarded material. Among the women making jars were a 93-year-old woman and another in her late 20's with a broken leg. I found it interesting that nothing stopped these two women from being a part of the Retreat. Since then I have taught other women to make jars to serve several purposes. However, in January 2019 it made a significant impact on my life. After reading the Daily Bread Devotional on thanksgiving, I made a thanksgiving jar for myself and invited my neighbour to make one for herself. Just spending at least one minute each day to write a note of thanksgiving on a strip of paper I had cut from an old calendar, truly strengthened my walk with God. I have seen so many impossibilities become possible. I invited the women's group at my church to make jars of thanksgiving before Covenant service, and the minister blessed the jars at the

service. Some women shared with me the difference this simple act has made in their lives. Early this year, my brother came to visit, and I invited him to make a jar and he did without hesitation. The most touching part was, he returned to make two jars for two friends because using the jar had brought about a change in his life.

It is amazing how things that are insignificant, like old coffee or jam jars and old calendars, things we normally would discard, can be used to make a difference in our lives.

As I reflect on Covid-19, I am reminded of Deborah the judge, prophetess, military leader, songwriter, and minstrel, a woman of humility with a heart of thanksgiving. Most of the judges in the book of Judges became leaders after a military battle. In the case of Deborah, she became a judge before the battle. In addition, she was the only one to be a judge and a prophet. Deborah settled disputes under the palm tree in the hills of Ephraim. We now face the battle and disputes of Covid-19. People are locked in, locked down, and locked out. We are thankful to God that we can have worship services online. Just as Deborah held court beneath a palm tree, so we as women Chosen by God: Called to Proclaim we must find our "palm tree"; innovative ways to settle disputes and be mediators. You can begin by making your own 'Jar of Thanksgiving' and sharing the idea with others. Strengthening ourselves and others is important at this time to face the battle and disputes of Covid-19. Deborah was chosen by God to use her gifts and skills to save His people, thus revealing the power of God.

Amidst it all, Deborah never forgot the power of thanksgiving:

*When the people offer themselves willingly  
Bless the Lord!*

*Hear, O Kings; give ear, O princes;  
To the Lord, I will sing,*

*I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel. (Judge  
5: 2b-3)*

*God calls us to be bold like Deborah, "To know Christ  
and make Him Known". Jesus All-powerful Replenishes  
us when we practice acts of humility and  
THANKSGIVING to God.*

*-Lois Hector,  
North America Area Vice-President.*

## The Solidarity Table

*"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of  
these who are members of my family, you did it to me."  
(Matthew 25:40, NRSV)*

We are living in troubled times. Our lives, families, jobs, everything seems to be falling apart. It is a time of a pandemic in our physical health, in our emotions, and in our feelings.

We are perplexed. We are dealing with an enemy that we cannot see, but that we feel in our skin, heart, and soul. The

question then remains, "How do we survive? How do we win? How do we fight back?"

Our only hope and strength are the Word of God and the presence of Jesus in our hearts. It is only by putting the Word into practice, bringing it into our life, that we will be able to win. Love and giving, as taught by Jesus, are now available, "EVERYTHING YOU DO ...!"

The desire to help grew in my heart, the burning desire to do something more than just sit around and mourn in front of the television. There is a lack of hospitals, ventilators, hospital beds, jobs, money - even life. It was necessary to take action, to hear the call, to be a true disciple of the Lord. It was the renewal of the call; it was a new vision. It was God saying to me: "Get up and act!"

The vision was clear: Call the church! Ask for help! You cannot do this alone. I heard the Lord, so I invited the Central Methodist Church in Volta Redonda to be part of this mission. So, the "Solidarity Table" was born on the balcony of my house. Soon, sisters and brothers started to bring food, and the joy of being able to help spread to the whole church. The table with the food was set on the balcony for those who were hungry, thirsty, foreigners, naked, in prison. And they have started to come. They have been arriving one after another, day after day. Because of the support of the church in this vision that God had given me - thank God for this beloved church - we have been able to give some relief to those who are suffering. And the vision has grown, and the Holy Spirit has been at work. Now, it is not only the church members who help, but also our friends; they have started to send money to buy what is missing.

The Holy Spirit is at work. People who pass by the parsonage ask if they can help. One lady gave us the bags of groceries she had in her hands; another went to her car to get some items she had just bought. And so, our table has been full every day by the grace of God. On the table that the Lord has prepared is written, "DONATIONS - NEED IT? CALL!"

And the Holy Spirit continues to act as those in need share with one another what they have. Sometimes we do not have enough rice, beans, or pasta for everyone; nonetheless, the sharing continues among themselves.

Oh, dear sisters, I see once again the miracle of bread and fish happening before my eyes. I see honesty happening, when even with a table full of items, people only take what they need. It is only the Holy Spirit that can move in this way.

When it was time to bless the city of Volta Redonda, God gave me a vision to put a banner in front of the church, with the following words: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer." (Romans 12:12, NRSV). And so, it was done.

I can only declare before all things that this, dear sisters, is God's Grace. It is HOPE and LIFE amid the pandemic.

*- Rev. Rubem Mandú,  
Pastor of the Central Church in Volta Redonda.*

# News



## United Methodist Women meeting in Hungary

in fellowship. His love becomes real and tangible in our relationships with each other. That is why it is always so good to organize seminars and meetings, assemblies, and conferences. At least for me, sure!

Tell your story! Storytelling - more precisely biblical

discovery for me was to see messy women exactly right there in Jesus's genealogy. He is not ashamed to have Rahab, Ruth, and Tamar in His family-tree. Jesus is not ashamed having you in His family! We all can access these stories in the Scripture. All is God's story.



How good it is to get together with women from other countries for a long weekend! How good it is to stop and recharge our spiritual batteries! How good it is to develop our relationship with Christ Jesus! Jesus loves us; this is nothing new for you, I suppose. But the expression of His love for me can be shown

storytelling - was our theme during our days near Budapest, Hungary on 3rd-10th October 2019. From Albania to Poland, and from Bulgaria to France women were staying together and sharing their own stories. With the help of our wonderful speaker, Wendy Johnston, we explored stories and genealogies from the Bible. The most remarkable

Barbara Buenger, the UMW president, and her team did a great job again!

*-Lilla Lakatos,  
Europe: Continental Vice-President.*



## Story from Papua New Guinea

A decade or so ago, UnitingWorld contacted Mission Liaison Group (MLG) about sending a container with donations to the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. We were excited at the prospect. John Connan tried every means he knew – and got nowhere. He was contacted a little later by the same person to be asked about the outcome. When he said he'd not been able to make contact by phone or email, he was told that the UnitingWorld staff-person would do it instead! After a brief period, he got back to John to admit he had not been able to get through either.

Years passed.

Then in June last year Ann Connan was at the South Pacific Area Seminar of the World Federation of Methodist & Uniting Church Women. She noticed one of the Papua New Guinea representatives was a Highlander. They got into conversation. Mary Angobe



Mary and Ann at the South Pacific Area Seminar, Fiji.

wanted to know why the Highlands could not be included by Mission Liaison Group with other Pacific partner churches receiving donations.

Things took a little time, but this is Mary's report on the very first container sent by MLG:

The container left Melbourne on

22nd February 2019, arriving at Lae three weeks later. It took until 25th March to reach the rugged Hela Region of the United Church in Papua New Guinea.

The women of the province face many challenges. Nevertheless – or maybe because of that – the Hela Women's Fellowship is one of the most active in the United Church of Papua New Guinea. They welcomed the first-ever container with great joy. As

it made its way along the highway from Margarima to Tari, welcoming committees of local women sang and threw flowers. At Tari itself women from the twelve circuits of the Hela Region were there with the Bishop to celebrate its arrival.

2018 had not been a good year for the province. Tribal warfare led to mass killings, leaving many widows and orphans. Houses were burnt to the ground. The disruptions to gardening meant food production was hit and incomes reduced to almost zero. A 7.5 earthquake in May added further losses of homes and schools.

Before Mary Alfred, as Fellowship President, had left for the Area Seminar in Fiji, there had been a prophecy that she would return with gifts. The news that this was to happen was seen as evidence of God's love. There was some apprehension about the logistics and paperwork involved, but confidence that God would guide them and help get things done. Now that the container has been received and the goods distributed, there's even greater confidence that next time around, things will happen much more easily!

The total costs at the wharf and then the two-day transport up into the mountains was a little more

than K26,000 (Australian \$11,000). Those costs were more than covered by selling at cheap



The women receiving the container with the Bishop in white shirt.

prices household goods and clothing.

School goods were given without any cost to Hoiebia Secondary School, to a primary school, and to an Early Childhood Centre. Glassware went to circuits for use in service of Holy Communion.

The report from Tari concluded:

“It is our prayer that God will continue to bless you, so you can continue to bless those in need around the Pacific. Should there be any chance for us to receive another kind donation from your end; we would like to highlight our areas of need: clothing for cold climate, clothing for children and women and men, shoes, Bibles and religious materials for women and Sunday School, stationery and school materials (books), desktop computer for administrative use, gardening tools.

Now that we have gained experience in logistics and administrative paperwork, we have confidence in God that more blessings will be forthcoming to reach the underprivileged in this part of the world.

With kind regards and God's love,  
Hela Region United Church Women's Fellowship Executive.”

*-Ann Connan,  
President Emerita of the World*

# Locked Down from the World but not Locked Out from the Word

While India has been battling with Covid-19 like other countries, it is so encouraging to see that during despair and suffering, especially amongst the migrant workers, how the church in India is growing.

Live streaming of church services, Bible studies, Vacation Bible Study for Children (which is normally run during the summer vacations), women's groups (WSCS), Men's Fellowship, and Young Adults Fellowship have not stopped. Praise God for modern technology! The Methodist churches in Chennai have been active.

It is so encouraging to see the church rising during the pandemic. Praise God!

Church has grown in homes, families have drawn closer to one another, the needs of church members especially the sick, lonely and elderly are being cared for. Where the elderly have not been able to go out to get necessities, the young people of the Anna Nagar Methodist Church came to our homes to procure and deliver the necessary needs of seniors. Being careful with the social distancing, wearing masks and all norms being followed, I have been one of those recipients. Migrant workers, who before had been working in other cities, are all returning home. Their basic need of food and water goes unnoticed, but thank God for the church which has met many of their needs too. Auto Rickshaw drivers, who because of the lockdown have not been able to drive and lost their income, were also being provided with basic needs.

The poor and hungry, who

otherwise don't know when they will have their next meal, are being catered for to some extent by the Government, but here again the Anna Nagar Methodist Church has come forward and is reaching out to the people in slums.

Locked down or Locked in, the church, though its buildings are closed, is rising up to build people up because WE ARE THE CHURCH! Praise God!

*-Evelyn Mercylin,  
South Asia Vice-President*

## Tributes:

**Rev. Glenna Spencer** of MCCA

The Women's Work representatives of Guyana District, Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) pay tribute to Rev. Glenna Spencer, whose sudden death on 11 May 2020 in Antigua, where she worked at the MCCA



Conference office, has left them shocked and greatly saddened. Fondly referred to as 'Sis Glenna', Rev. Spencer was the first female President of the Guyana District, the first female to be inducted as Bishop in the MCCA, and the first female to serve as Connexional Secretary. She will particularly be remembered for her work among children and young people. May her soul rest in peace and rise in glory.

A full tribute can be found on the North America and MCCA Area page of the World Federation website. Please pray for the MCCA women as they mourn her

passing.

**Mrs. Dorothy Louise Goldsmith (Nee Capron)**

Dorothy was an educator for 35 years and served as Principal at five schools in Cat Island, Rum Cay, San Salvador and Grand



Bahama, and a District Education Officer in all except Grand Bahama. Her continuing dedication to Christ caused her to support others less

fortunate than herself, and together with her husband she fostered about twenty children. She became very active in the Wesley Guild, Peer Mentoring, and the Drama Circle and subsequently became a Sunday Schoolteacher.

Dorothy was a dedicated member of the Methodist Church in Freeport, Grand Bahama: she served as Class Leader and Congregational Steward, President of St Paul's Methodist Church Women's Fellowship, President of the Grand Bahama Circuit Women, Women's Work Secretary for the Bahamas, Turks and Caicos Islands District Conference and Executive Women's President of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas. She hosted and produced the very popular weekly radio programme, "Great Hymns of Inspiration".

Following the successful hosting of MCCA Women's 5th Quinquennial Assembly in Freeport, Grand Bahama in July



2010, Dorothy was elected to the position of MCCA Women's Executive President. She then began several initiatives providing opportunities for persons to be taught practical skills to empower them to earn a living, and in turn to share their knowledge with others. In 2011 she started a sewing project in which sewing machines and fabric were provided for the women's groups.

In 2012 she was diagnosed with a brain aneurysm. She was placed in a senior home care facility late last year, while her husband (diagnosed with cancer) received medical attention but returned home a couple of weeks ago. On Wednesday 27th May 2020, while holding her husband's hand, she quietly passed away. She will be missed but her impact will live forever.

## Announcements

### ! World Assembly postponed

The World Executive met recently to discuss and evaluate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic worldwide.

Considering the current Covid-19 pandemic, the World Executive has decided to postpone the 14th World Assembly to the 2nd – 7th August 2022.

These are certainly unprecedented times. A year ago, none of us imagined such a possibility. There is a lot of uncertainty around travelling abroad from different countries and it would be remiss of us to not consider this potential barrier. We always need to be prepared for the unexpected but be assured of God's guiding hand in all we do.

### ! HKMS process postponed

! Executive decision regarding

its members: since the World Assembly will take place in 2022, the World Officers and Executive members will remain in office for an additional year.

! Reminder: You are welcome to contribute to the World Council of Churches campaign, the 'Tapestry' that is being made to support the Thursdays in Black. Women are invited to create a square panel with images and messages that show why they are involved in Thursdays in Black and to give a powerful message of their commitment to end rape and violence. All the sections will be joined for a huge exhibit, Waterfall of Solidarity and Resistance, that will be displayed at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva and at major events and will hopefully be displayed in Gothenburg in 2022. All the instructions are available on: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/get-involved/thursdays-in-black/global-exhibit?searchterm=waterfall>



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