



The TREE *- of* LIFE

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peace and joy**
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President's letter

Abiding in God brings peace and joy

“In those days it was not safe to travel about, for all the inhabitants of the lands were in great turmoil.” (2 Chronicles 15:5) The situation reminds us of the situation in many countries today. Kidnaping, child trafficking, high jacking, burglaries, and assaults that create fear in many people. The current increasing statistics on violent crimes in many countries are enough to discourage anyone. Considering all these things in the early months of the new year, you may seriously doubt whether you will be able to survive an entire year of living in such negativity.

But in the very next chapter of Chronicles, another verse gives us hope: For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him. (2 Chronicles 16:9) God is watching over His world from above, with all the disasters happening and the wars, so that He can see when and where His children need His help. As in the time of King Asa,

the Lord is still completely capable of helping and protecting us in the same way that He protected His people.

We must cease being so negative and doubtful, and trust in Him completely. In John 15:5 Jesus says: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit, apart from Me you can do nothing.” We must remain in Jesus like the branch in the vine in order to bear much fruit. He knows what is best for us, and we can confidently leave the problems of this year in His hands. Let us not only see the darkness surrounding us but rather focus on the glimmers of His light and pray for His world in all its glory and terror. Where there is war, may peace prevail. Where there is injustice, may His righteousness come. Where creation is breaking, may it be restored.

After reading 2 Chronicles 15 and 16, it was clear to me that seeking and abiding in God brings peace and joy and makes us fruitful.

- Sipiwe Chisvo, World President



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Editor's word:

I am a worm

Romans 20:1 states: For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. (NLT)

Nature speaks about Who God is and God speaks to us through nature. Psalm 22 is known as one of the three Shepherd Psalms and is prophetic because it shows the sufferings that Jesus will endure and His death 1000 years before it happened. Dying on the cross, Jesus quoted this psalm, crying: *My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?* This should have stirred in the mind of the spectators the facts presented in it.

Reading the psalm, you get to verse 6: But I am a worm and not a man. It is shocking to imagine Jesus, God, the most amazing being in this world, talking about Himself in this way.

But God speaks to us through biology, through images, through symbolism. The Hebrew word used in this verse refers to a specific type of worm, not the typical kind we think of. It's called the crimson or scarlet worm (תולעת), found in the Middle East and known for its deep red color. The facts about the life cycle of this worm are fascinating. When the female crimson worm lays her eggs, she climbs a tree and attaches herself to it. As she attaches, a hard crimson shell forms around her body. Under this protective shell, she lays her eggs, and when they hatch, they feed on her living body for three days. After this time, the mother worm dies, and her body releases a crimson dye, staining the wood and her offspring in dark red. On the fourth day, the mother's body

transforms because she produces a chemical that turns her color from scarlet to white and it looks like wool.

The life of the scarlet worm is in fact the story of our redemption. Just as the scarlet worm hangs on the tree, Jesus is the One Who was hanged on the cross. Galatians 3:13 says: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree. (NIV)* The image of the mother worm giving herself as a living sacrifice for her children is the message of Jesus willingly giving His life for us so we can have eternal life. Jesus said *Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood*

has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. (John 6:53-57, NIV). Finally, the sacrifice of the worm transforms what was left into something similar in appearance to wool. Isaiah 1:18 says: *Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. (NIV)*



What a sacrifice! We are alive in spirit and body because of Him! We continue to feed on Him every day because without Him we are nothing. This is the work He did for us on the cross, the work that shows unconditional and sacrificial love. And He is our supreme example. Remembering His sacrifice, and being grateful for all that He has done for us, we must answer with our lives. As He was consumed for others, we have to consume ourselves for others, serve others sacrificially, and love unconditionally.

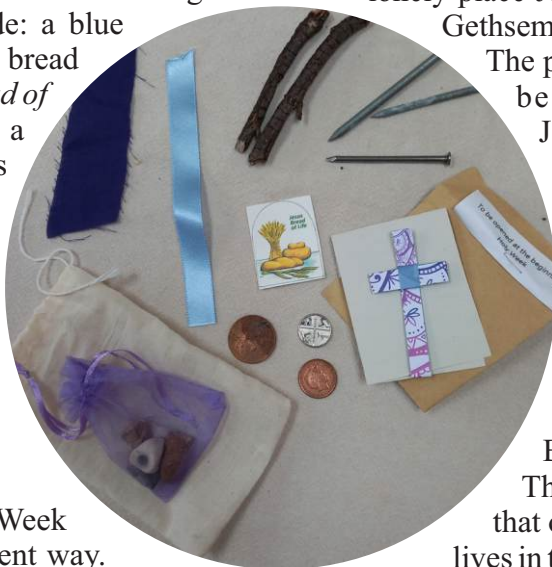
- Ligia Istrate, Tree of Life Editor

A n E a s t e r message in a bag

Last year, a friend gave me a little muslin bag with several small items inside: a blue ribbon, a picture of wheat and bread with the words *Jesus is the bread of life*, some coins, some stones, a bit of purple cloth, three nails and two sticks of wood. There was also an envelope with the instruction 'To be opened at the beginning of Holy Week'. This contained a little paper cross and a paper with writing on it.

This is what I read:

Now, at the beginning of Holy Week look at the symbols in a different way. They remind us of the path Jesus took to his death on the cross.



The blue ribbon, the water of Jesus' Baptism is now the water that washed the disciples' feet.

The bread that Jesus shared throughout his ministry is now the bread he broke at the Last Supper.

The coins of the widow, given so generously, are now the coins received by Judas when he betrayed Jesus.

The stones of the wilderness remind us of the hard lonely place Jesus found himself in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The purple cloth, like those that were laid before him welcoming him into Jerusalem, is now the robe that was placed on him as he was mocked and ridiculed by the soldiers.

The two pieces of wood and nails that remind us that Jesus, the son of God, was also the son of a carpenter, are now the cross on which he was crucified to give us salvation.

But we know that this is not the end. The small paper cross is to remind us that on the third day, Jesus rose again and lives in the heart of all those who believe.

- Alison Judd, President Emerita

“Jesus rose again and lives in the heart of all those who believe.”

News



20th of January in Hungary

Let me share with you that in Hungary, the 20th of January is a special day. The mother of the wonderful Wesley brothers is Susannah and you know of her, I am sure. Her birthday is on the 20th of January, and on that day each year, we celebrate, greet, and appreciate our ministers' spouses. Well, feel free to join us in this initiative!

The national women's group in Hungary sends a greeting card to each of our pastors' spouses and tells them that they are appreciated in the church, although very often they prefer to stay in the background and are almost 'invisible', but their important contribution in a congregation's life is undoubted.

If you are also the wife of a Methodist minister, thank you for your work and efforts in the church, be blessed!

If you feel that it might be relevant in your country, join this initiative!

Example of greeting card messages:

This message is addressed to you all, spouses of Methodist ministers. Each of you has a different church, each of you has a different situation in life, and some of you are just beginning to discover this new role alongside your spouse, and what it means to be a pastor's spouse. Some of you are coming to the end of your years of ministry. You may be surprised by our letter since the addressee of the mail that arrives in your mailbox is usually not you, but your spouse. But this time it is you. We know that being a pastor's spouse is an art. It is truly a challenge. The burdens of the congregation, the burdens of ministry, are not just for the pastor, and we recognize that you are just as much an active part of what

goes on in the congregation and the church. There are joyful moments and difficult moments. We also know that one of the most difficult times are the ones with new assignments. These events put you and your whole family in a new situation: changing schools, changing jobs, changing churches. You, pastors' spouses, are there in the background or even in the foreground. There are few occasions when we can express our thanks. So above all, we want to acknowledge your service and thank you for your presence, for all that you have done and said, for who you are and how you are. Thank you for everything!

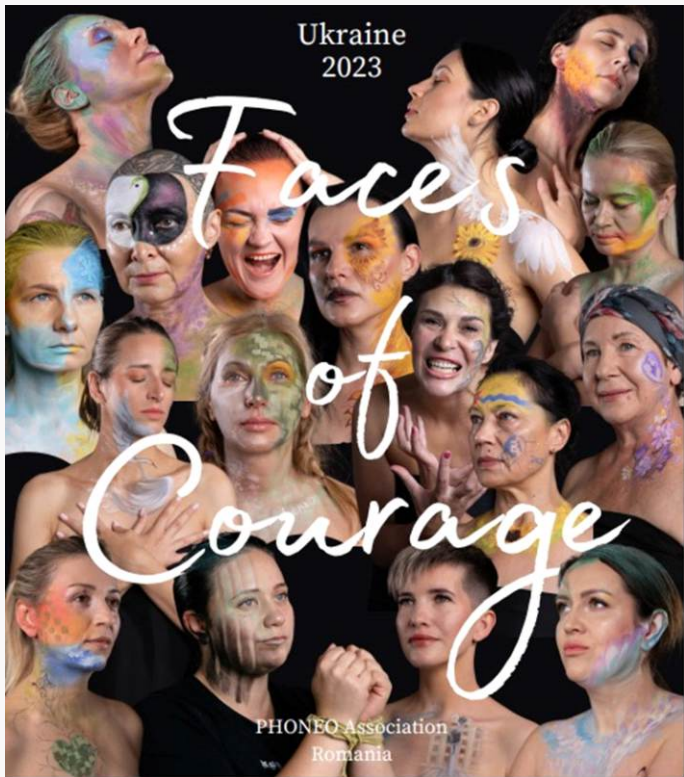
Hope you are doing well,

Peace, Shalom

- Lilla Kardosné Lakatos,
Europe: Continental President



Faces of Courage



Saturday, February 24th 2004, the exhibition *Faces of Courage* took place in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. It is a project initiated by Anca Beu from the United Methodist Church Romania. *Faces of Courage* portrays a world born from pain, a world of feminine courage and resilience, and it is more than an album of pictures of seventeen Ukrainian women and their biographies; it's a celebration of human strength and ours, the Phoneo Association (a United Methodist Church-affiliated NGO based in Romania), as we desire to offer hope and support. For many, the story of the last

years is written in blood. It's crucial not to become accustomed to war, to evil. Conflicts and human suffering risk becoming mere

background noise in our lives. But they are not just numbers and news but realities that grind and destroy destinies. It's a trap to think we are too small, that we do too little. Every act of kindness, altruism, every helping hand, and every exchanged thought, tilts the balance toward a more humane world.

We can't help everyone, but imagine helping those who have influence, those who can, in turn, multiply the good.

With this in mind, we invited seventeen women from Ukraine to join us for two weeks. The group consisted of leaders, doctors, rescuers, volunteers, instructors, military women, artists, therapists, survivors of abuse, cultural figures, activists, journalists, women working in humanitarian organizations, and mothers. Helping women is crucial as they represent a vital source of stability and resilience, responsible for caring for their families, maintaining social cohesion, capable of saving tens or even

hundreds of other lives, and bringing hope for the future even in times of war.

Their stay with us was intense, for both sides. They arrived with heavy emotional baggage, soul wounds, with few resources, some of them in deep depression generated by the events in their country. They found here a safe and empathetic place where they shared their stories and began the healing process, found support and solidarity in our community, a refuge amidst conflict. Trauma specialists and psychotherapists accompanied them through group or individual therapies. It was a period of respite where they allowed themselves the luxury of self-care and self-reflection. A time when we gave them a voice, and they were heard.

A wide range of enjoyable activities was designed to provide relaxation, to make them forget the ugly reality back home: nature outings, sightseeing tours, painting and ceramics workshops, swimming, horseback riding, bowling, massage, sports, music, discussion evenings, and photo sessions. Thus, we recreated the lost normalcy of their lives, contributing significantly to the therapeutic process.

Two emotional interactions crowned the project and laid the foundation for this album: meeting a professional visual artist who, through body painting, 'wrote' the story from their hearts on their faces, and meeting a writer who knew how to listen to each woman, empathize, and



when you want - are allowed to anyone, but not in my world. I won't just be left with pleasant memories and beautiful photos, but also with a taste of true spiritual freedom. Something in me has changed because of you, and I want it to stay that way.

children of the fallen, missing, captured heroes... Difficult and painful, a world where in front of you are the little eyes still waiting for their father and are happy with the gifts 'from dad'... I hold back my tears and give them to the child... But now I have a new world, for myself- a world of power and care, a world where I finally felt care and support, understanding and warmth. I talk about the project and wonderful Romania. Thank you all for this little world, for two weeks of peaceful life, for every day spent in a beautiful and hospitable country!

extract the essence of their experiences. This resulted in seventeen portraits and seventeen testimonial stories reflecting contemporary history and the incredible strength of women to transform suffering into a symbol of courage and human resilience. You might wonder how all of this was perceived by them.

I always say I have three worlds. One is the world of the frontlines, of pain and blood. Another is the world of the free



Anca Beu, the initiator of the project with Ligia Istrate, ToL Editor

I don't know how to say farewell... because in war, it's a bad sign to do so. So, I just want to thank each and every one of you from the bottom of my heart for such an incredible gift over the past two weeks. Each of you is so rich in love... I feel it every day. You've done almost the impossible in these days. You gave me freedom. It seemed that small things like being where you want, with whom you want, speaking or being silent

military weddings I organize. A gentle celebration... Will this day be or not be the only celebration in the life of the lovers? Will the groom return alive...? The third world is the world of the

We were transformed by the experience of meeting these women. The album is an invitation for you to enter into their world, it is a voice and a plea not to remain indifferent.

- The Phoneo team



WORLD EXECUTIVE 2022 – 2026 CONTACT DETAILS

TITLE	NAME	EMAIL
WORLD OFFICERS:		
President	Sipiwe Chisvo	world.president@wfmucw.org
Vice-President	Ivonne Pereira Diaz	world.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Secretary	Louise Wilson	world.secretary@wfmucw.org
Treasurer	Mrs Ngui Ting	world.treasurer@wfmucw.org
President Emerita	Alison Judd	president.emerita@wfmucw.org
AREA OFFICERS:		
Southern & East Africa:		
President	Patricia Mapani	seafrica.president@wfmucw.org
Vice-President	Rebecca Matongo	seafrica.vice-president@wfmucw.org
West Africa:		
President	Muriel Nelson	westafrica.president@wfmucw.org
Vice-President	Marcelline Beda	westafrica.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Latin America:		
President	Jessica Milagros Solar Munayco	latinamerica.president@wfmucw.org
Vice-President	Claudia Lima Carmargo Lira	latinamerica.vice-president@wfmucw.org
North America:		
President	Lois Grant-Hector	northamerica.president@wfmucw.org
Vice-President	Jeanette Bouknight	northamerica.vice-president@wfmucw.org
East Asia:		
President	Mary Devadason	eastasia.president@wfmucw.org
Vice-President	Chao Hui Min	eastasia.vice-president@wfmucw.org
South Asia:		
President	Rajini Jegasothy	southasia.president@wfmucw.org
Vice-President	Glory George	southasia.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Europe: Britain & Ireland:		
President	Barbara Easton	britainireland.president@wfmucw.org
Vice-President	Wanda Hogan	britainireland.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Europe: Continental:		
President	Lilla Kardosné Lakatos	europa.president@wfmucw.org
Vice-President	Filipa Teixeira	europa.vice-president@wfmucw.org
South Pacific:		
President	Olive Tanielu	southpacific.president@wfmucw.org
Vice-President	Rev Gloria Marke	southpacific.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Editor Tree of Life	Ligia Istrate	treeoflife@wfmucw.org
Web Manager	Naomi Allison	webmaster@wfmucw.org
UN REPRESENTATIVES:		
New York	Joan Capel	un@wfmucw.org
New York	Alexandria Carson	
Latin America	Karen Danytza	
Archivist	Judith Siaba	world.archivist@wfmucw.org



Editor: Ligia Istrate

ligiaistrate@gmail.com

Cover design, interior
design:
Cristian Istrate

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