



THE WORLD FEDERATION OF METHODIST AND UNITING CHURCH WOMEN

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# *The* TREE — of LIFE

## AVE MARIA

Editor's word  
*page 2*

President's letter *page 1*

News *page 5*

Something to look  
forward to in 2021 *page 7*

# President's letter

**Dear Sisters,**

In a recent conversation with a friend, we agreed we would be glad to say goodbye to 2020 and step into the New Year. For many of us, 2020 has been the most difficult and unsettling year of our lives. Some of you have endured political upheaval, natural disaster, violence or personal loss. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected each one of us to a greater or lesser degree and our perspective on many aspects of daily life will have changed forever.

I wonder what aspect has been most challenging for you. Has it been the restrictions on travel, or on meeting up with members of your family? Have you missed the opportunity to gather with friends in your church and sing hymns and Christmas carols? Have you longed to be hugged or to be able to plan ahead with a reasonable level of certainty that your efforts will be worthwhile? As I write this, some parts of the world are coming out of lockdown, others are returning to severe restrictions, and yet others are celebrating announcements of zero infection levels. Some are dreading a global financial crisis and others are wondering how to feed their families.

At times I think each of us have greeted the dawn of a new day with dread; a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. We may have asked, 'Where is God in all this?'

As Christians, we can at least cry out to God. The Psalmists did so. The Israelites in the wilderness did so. And even Jesus on the cross cried out in his anguish, 'My God my God, why have you forsaken me?' Yet we know that God was with the psalmists, with the Israelites and with Jesus. We know that with God, all things are possible, even new life springing from apparent disaster. We can know that God is


with us, revealed in Jesus, the word made flesh, God made man, Emmanuel, willing to listen to our own anguish, offering us HOPE. You remember what the writer of Hebrews said: 'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.' (Hebrews 11:1)

So let's go into 2021, trusting in God who is not just with us but goes before us into the future. There may still be uncertainties and sadness but there is HOPE, for God listens and God is faithful. As God's chosen people, we know that each one of us has the opportunity to offer that HOPE to others, reaching out to listen, to care and to encourage.

Blessings,  
- Alison

*A prayer:*

*Faithful God,  
Who promised to be with us forever,  
help us to trust You for all that is to come.  
We reach out to You in hope today  
and every day.  
Help us to reach out to others  
to show your love today  
and every day. Amen*



We know that  
with God, all  
things are  
possible, even  
new life springing  
from apparent  
disaster.

# Editor's word:

## Ave Maria

Since humanity began, the woman's position in society has been debated. From the beginning she was considered physically weaker and man took control over her, because he could. For a long time, brave women fought to make the woman 'human' and equal in the eyes of the man, which was a difficult task and still is. Also, a fight started for the rights of women, because if their status is not stipulated in law, then she is without protection. In all this process some women still pay with their lives, especially in countries where the women are seen as objects and their condition is determined as inferior through religion.

It is true that history is full of great heroes that are women, but even though they did great things, they were hardly acknowledged. This is another battle that we must fight. The Bible has many examples of brave and intelligent women such as matriarchs Miriam, Deborah, Esther, and other women of faith such as Ruth, Hannah, Elizabeth, Priscilla - and the list can go on. But as women, we feel many times that we are being set aside, even in the Bible. Women are almost non-existent in genealogies, and even the act of giving birth seems to have been taken away, as we read that 'Abraham bore' and 'David bore' and all men 'bore', but not the women. Of course, we need to consider the culture first, and the formation of a people, but many times we have a lump in the throat because we know our history of inequality.

Through Jesus Christ an interesting thing happens. He redeems the status of women. First, through His birth, because God Himself chose to become a human, conceived in a

female's body with the Holy Spirit's intervention. Now, the protagonist is not a man, as usual, but a young, faithful woman, called Mary. It is not about a king, a judge, a Jewish hero, but an 'insignificant' human – a simple girl, without title, without fortune. It is about a girl that accepted God's will for her. And that is all God needed.

So, when God became Immanuel, God with us or God living amongst humankind, He had the benevolence to show Himself inside a woman's body and be felt by her and be given birth by her. With this, we can say that not only did He redeem the importance, the value, of women, but He also gave the 'gift of birthing' back to the ones to whom it belongs.

The same thing happened when He died and was resurrected: He first showed Himself to the women. Again, not to the Jewish leaders, not to the disciples, but to some simple women, in the context in which a woman's testimony was considered inferior and it was valued at a half of a man's. Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalene and to 'the other Mary' (the mother of James). Jesus saw and acknowledged the value of women, which is why we need to continue to make women's voices heard.

So, we have three Marys with such an amazing story to tell: the story of the birth and resurrection of God in human form. What a privilege for them and what a privilege for us that Jesus values women and considers them worthy to be the protagonist in both His birth and His resurrection!

Let us rejoice as did Mary, Jesus' mother, and be surprised by Him as were the other two Marys at the grave, because God greeted the women first in these two magnificent events for humankind: 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.' (Luke 1:28)

*-Ligia Istrate, Tree of Life Editor*





# What's in a name?

I wonder if you know the meaning of your name. Some people name their children because of the meaning and others just because they like the name or someone associated with it. In some cultures, the meaning behind names is of utmost importance and reflects the aspirations the parents have for their child and their developing character.

When we read the Bible, we often see names being changed as a person's character develops or when a new meaning becomes appropriate. So, Jacob becomes Israel, Naomi becomes Mara, Simon becomes the Rock, and Saul becomes Paul.

There are many names given to Jesus

in the Bible, but the one we often consider at this time of year is the name of 'Immanuel – meaning God with us.' Never have we needed to be reassured of that truth more than at the end of this difficult year and as we look ahead to a somewhat uncertain 2021.

The name

Immanuel shows us that in Jesus, God came amongst us, to live amongst us – to share our human frailties, problems and temptations so that He could truly identify with us and understand all that we go through. This message continues to give us hope and encouragement over 2000 years later.

It is said that to truly understand someone you have to walk in their shoes for a while, and that is what God did when He came to earth in Jesus. The story of the incarnation is amazing! The great God who created the universe, the mighty king of heaven chose to humble Himself and become a helpless baby because He loved us so much. God stepped down into the grime, mess and sin of this earth to demonstrate that we are not alone – God is with us in whatever circumstances we face and cares about every detail of our lives. He loved us so much that he was willing to take on the nature

of a servant, and even to die for our salvation. God was not only with us while Jesus was on the earth, but after His death and resurrection, He sent the Holy Spirit so that He could be with us at all times and in all places.

At the end of Matthew's gospel, Jesus promises: 'I am with you always, to the end of the age.' In John's gospel He says: 'I will not leave you as orphans, but I will come to you.' And in Hebrews we read: 'Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.' These and other verses are such an encouragement to us, especially to those who have suffered rejection by other people, experienced loss and bereavement and been badly let down by others. The assurance of God with us also brings comfort and hope during these difficult days when our lives have been shaken by COVID-19 and things we previously took for granted have been taken from us.

This Christmas we may not be able to travel as much, or see so many people or attend parties or carol services. But even without those trappings, we can still know the presence of God with us in Jesus. We can still make a choice to fix our eyes on Jesus and put our trust in Him, asking for his strength, guidance and help for each day.

And we can be assured that because of God's great love for each of us, we can have hope for the future. I close with the chorus of an old hymn which was sung in practically every service during my visit to Brazil last February – and I pray that the words will bring you encouragement and hope today: Because He lives, I can face tomorrow; Because He lives, all fear is gone Because I know He holds the future; And life is worth the living just because He lives.

I pray that the truth of Immanuel – God with us; with you; with me; is a comfort and encouragement to you today and that His presence will bring you hope, joy and strength this Christmas and in the New Year to come!

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



## 'Great is thy faithfulness'

Sister Connie celebrated her 90th birthday this year in September. Born in the United Kingdom, trained in a nursery house, she relocated to Hong Kong in 1960, after World War II. At that time, Hong Kong was poverty stricken.

Hong Kong was geographically beyond imagination, remote from England, and she came in a boat, on the sea for months.

'I will give them singleness of heart and action so that they will always fear me and that all will then go well for them and for their children after them.' (Jeremiah 32:39)

This verse spoke to her and her heart was broken after seeing the horrific conditions of the handicapped children. As she prayed, she knew that she was going to serve the severely physically and mentally handicapped children and to be a Mother to them.

Connie devoted her entire life to going where God wanted her to go, to serve in a foreign land just as Ruth relocated herself from Moab to Bethlehem. Together with another missionary, founded a home for the needy, 'Beautiful, gorgeous children' and they cared for them as their own children, despite their imperfections.

For over 60 years she has trusted God and only God for everything; God's loving kindness, His faithfulness never fails. God is the Father, Who faithfully provided all that she needed in her singlemindedness for the care of the children. She trusted God even when they were down to their last dollar.

At 90, Connie depends on a wheelchair, but the Lord has not stopped showing kindness to her. She continues to love and care for her children, showing them Christ's love and salvation. She is still full of humour and strength. More importantly, she is a constant prayer warrior. Throughout the pandemic that has affected and disrupted lives, she is praying and praying. God has graciously protected her and her handicapped children from the infection. So many lives continue to be touched and transformed by Connie. All will then go well for them and the children after them.

Please stay safe, and God bless,

- Mrs Ngui, South-East Asia President

## Waterfall of Solidarity and Resistance

I wonder how many of you have taken up the challenge to produce a section of the Waterfall of Solidarity and Resistance, part of the Thursdays in Black campaign of the World Council of Churches.

To encourage you, here is a sample being shown by Nicola Ashwood and Georgina Nsiah Donkor from Ghana :



Instructions for contributing to the tapestry are on the WCC website.

For more information go to [Contribute to a Thursdays in Black global exhibit: Waterfall of Solidarity and Resistance | World Council of Churches \(oikoumene.org\)](#)

-Alison



# News



## Study Day Program for Southern and East Africa, 21st November 2020

The Federation women from four units in Southern Africa met on zoom to celebrate this day. The theme of the meeting was SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages. The women were blessed as they followed the program prepared by West Africa Area, adapted to their own needs. They were ministered to in worship by Danielle Pape, a songwriter and poet, who rendered a song with the title: On my Knees. It was quite evident that we as women find ourselves in this position most of the time, as we pray. First to speak was Mrs. Elvira Whittles, a professional nurse and midwife, currently a Nursing Manager at Swillendam Hospital in South Africa. She talked about the choices we make and reminded us to take the COVID-19 pandemic seriously as we can expect a second wave. The second speaker was Naledi Mahlangu, who presented the theme Being together. God's creation in faith, trust and transforming service. She is also the founder of Naledi Work Out, a business she started in 2017 when she was in high school, that focuses on developing and empowering women through health and

fitness at all ages, and her talk focused on how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to be fit at all ages.

At the end, prayers for mourning the COVID-19 and gender-based victims were raised.

*-Sipiwe Chisvo,  
President of Southern and East  
Africa*

## Thursdays in Black launched in SAMOA



The Au-Uso Fealofani Women Fellowship of the Methodist Church in Samoa has launched Thursdays in Black on 3rd September 2020. Despite the lockdowns and the state of emergency regulations due to COVID-19, the president of the Women's Fellowship, Mrs Fialelei Faulalo Leti, secretary Mrs Maselina Tuioti, the leaders of the various synods in Samoa, the standing committee members and the general Au-Uso Fealofani managed to launch their Campaign on ending violence against women and children. It was a day of

many mixed feelings as the women came together to unite in solidarity with all the members of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women around the globe to try and put a stop to this rising problem.

Invited guests included the Methodist church leaders, the Samoa Victims' Support Group, Faataua le Ola - Value Life Group, the Office of the Ombudsman and the general Au-Uso Fealofani members.

The day started with a prayer led by the Director of the Methodist Board of Education, Rev. Aмоса Tapuai. Then a very moving message was given, and it was concluded with a dramatic and emotional performance by the ministers' wives that reside at the Methodist central compound at Faleula.

The president Mrs Fialelei Leti spoke about the reasons for the campaign and the importance of solidarity with the rest of the women in the world, to show resistance and resilience in times of violence. Perhaps it is very timely as the world faces a lot of hardships with socio-economic factors affecting the lives of so many people due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In these times many women face all sorts of violence as families lose income due to loss of jobs, schools are locked down and

other factors that incite violence in the families and communities.



The keynote address was a lady judge of the Family courts, Judge Talasa Saaga, who spoke about the role of the court in mediating family violence and the experience of judging perpetrators of violence. She ended with the message: 'we have a mission, and it starts with us' to help eliminate violence of all forms in the family, church, village and country.

The launch ended with light refreshments and reflections by some of the guests like Samoa Victims Support Group who look after women and children who have been abused in their homes, but now they are housed in a shelter.

Thursdays in Black is now official for all Au-Usa Fealofani members in Samoa. We believe that the launch of the Thursdays in Black Campaign is our little contribution to the efforts of all people elsewhere to try and end violence of any form towards women and girls and children. In solidarity with the Au-Usa Fealofani, the church ministers and young women are encouraged to wear black on Thursdays to say that we need this madness to stop!

*-Au-Usa Fealofani*

## W o m e n a s Peacemakers

From November 10th to 13th, 2020, I was able to 'attend' the 1st 'Assembly on Women, Faith and Diplomacy', a conference which took place in Lindau, Germany with an average of 1500 participants via ZOOM from 97 countries. The Assembly was organized by Religions for Peace and Ring for Peace, with the support of the Department on Foreign Affairs in Germany under the theme: Keeping Faith, Transforming Tomorrow. The General Secretary of Religions for Peace, Prof. Azza Karam, stated in the Program Booklet for the Assembly: 'Lindau will host the first ever assembly at the intersection of women, faith, and diplomacy. The time to address this intersection is now, as our world suffers from exclusion, marginalization, and violence, and confrontation and polarization is emerging as 'normal''

Tensions become obvious when we think about connections between women, faith and diplomacy: in all faith traditions there are narratives, teachings and examples enhancing gender equality, and yet there are doctrines and practices of exclusion as well as humiliation and even violence against women justified by religious convictions. Female faith leaders are still a minority. Diplomacy exercised by professional representatives of nation states is male dominated. Yet in the various panels that I listened to, the participants shared examples of liberating practices and empowerment of women. Speakers encouraged the audience to think of the potential

for peace, justice and ecological and economic sustainability in their faith traditions and not only to broaden the topics for the diplomatic work of governments (towards a focus on gender justice, education and peacebuilding), but also to develop models to give stronger agency to grassroot movements, younger people and particularly women in peace building efforts. The key role of education was highlighted, as well as the often little-noticed contributions of women in community building, care, protection of the environment and peace building. Listening to the many voices of inspiring female leaders, as well as men who are committed to living a masculinity that works for gender justice, I was inspired to invest time and energy to learn more about peaceful contributions in all faith traditions. Here is one example of many: in the panel 'Advancing Gender Equality – The Role of Women in Diplomacy' I 'met' Sima Samar. She was Minister of Women Affairs in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2003 and Vice-President of her country, and she was vocal for gender equality of all human beings!

As a Methodist I felt at home as I listened to the many voices inviting us to do no harm, do good and make use of the spiritual sources nourishing our souls and widening our imagination of a better world. At the same time, I realized that Methodism has not been serious enough in studying its complicities with white supremacy and colonialism. Most of the members in the World Methodist Council family live in the global south, yet our style of interacting, of conducting council meetings and programs and of selecting leaders is still dominated by a Western



and patriarchal mindset. We have lessons to learn, and people who are marginalized could lead the way if we only listened to them.

On the Social Wall of the Assembly, I read this sentence: 'Peace is a journey that all of us have to take part in every day'. Will you join me in the journey? Together, we follow Christ who says: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' (Matthew 5:9)

- Bishop Rosemarie Wenner,  
World Methodist Council  
Geneva Secretary

## WFMUCW nominations

Although August 2020 was the time for the Nominations Committee to begin work towards finding the next World Officers for the Federation, the current World Officers have made the decision to delay for twelve months in line with postponing the World Assembly until 2022. This does give us extra time to find the right people for World President, World Vice-President (with the oversight of our UN work), World Secretary and World Treasurer. And you can help by praying, looking at the gifts and graces of any of your Federation contacts, and inviting women you think have the appropriate skills to prayerfully consider putting their name forward for office.

The nomination information

and forms will be sent out to Unit leaders next August.

- Ann Connan,  
President Emerita and  
Nomination Committee  
Chairperson

## Something to look forward to in 2021

Amidst the huge disappointment at having to postpone our 14th World Assembly, we do have plans to hold an exciting event in August 2021.

WHEN will it happen?

**Friday and Saturday, 13th and 14th August, 2021.**

WHAT will be the theme?

**'A New Vision?'**

WHO will attend?

**It will be open to everyone interested in the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women.**

WHY?

**To connect with each other globally for fellowship, worship and learning.**

HOW?

**This will be an online event LIVE on Zoom and recorded on YouTube so that it can be watched later and shared widely.**

WHERE?

**It may be watched in your home or with a group in your**

**church.**

**This exciting, landmark, two-day global event will include worship, bible study, and information about our activities, including our response to the impact of climate change. SAVE THE DATE!**

-Alison

## Invitation and thanks

The Christmas season is slowly approaching, a time of giving and celebrating with family, friends, and our loved ones, something that is even more important this year than in any other year during our quinquennium. Even though many of our members are struggling, many have gone the extra mile and given generously to support the ministry of our World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women during this time of crisis around the world. Jesus Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35). The World Officers are grateful for your financial support and we say THANK YOU! The financial support from member churches of the World Federation, individual gifts, and donations via our website donate button, have made a big difference this year.

The global pandemic has impacted our bank interest rates, to the point that our investments yield a negligible or nil amount. Job loss and financial struggle have affected individuals, to the point that Units have reached out for amnesties.

We pray and hope the spirit of giving will carry on no matter the uncertainty. Keep our hope



alive and witness God's gift of love to all of us who is Jesus the Christ.

We invite you to share in the ministries supported by the World Federation through your prayers and your financial gifts. Your donations can be allocated to any of the following WFMUCW areas listed below, by using the DONATE button facility on our website:

[www.wfmucw.org](http://www.wfmucw.org)

- Helen Kim Memorial Scholarship Programme
- Tree of Life Publication
- World Assembly
- United Nations Programme
- General Fund

We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year!

*-Leu Pupulu,  
World Federation Treasurer*

# Prayer

Lord God Almighty, the beginning and the ending of our faith, we humbly call you our Lord. As we approach the last days of the year, there should be nothing else in our heart, but thankfulness.

Come Holy Spirit and refresh our hearts, souls, and minds. Prepare our souls to receive the gift of Christmas, Jesus Christ alone. Let His Spirit live in us and make us instruments of Peace!

We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour!

*-Ilaisane T. Vaea,  
South Pacific Area President*



Editor: Ligia Istrate

[ligiaistrate@gmail.com](mailto:ligiaistrate@gmail.com)

Cover design, interior design:  
Cristian Istrate

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ROMANIA



## Contact details you may find useful

Role	Area	Name	Email
World President		Alison Judd	world.president@wfmucw.org
World Vice-President		Matilda Johnson	world.vice-president@wfmucw.org
World Secretary		Mataiva D Robertson	world.secretary@wfmucw.org
World Treasurer		Leu Pupulu	world.treasurer@wfmucw.org
World President Emerita		Ann Connan	president.emerita@wfmucw.org
World Archivist		Judith Siaba	world.archivist@wfmucw.org
Editor, Tree of Life		Ligia Istrate	treeoflife@wfmucw.org
UN Representative		Dr Brenda Smith	un@wfmucw.org
Area President	South Pacific	Joy Jino	southpacific.president@wfmucw.org
Area Vice-President		Ilaisaane Kapani	southpacific.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Area President	North America	Sandra Gadson	northamerica.president@wfmucw.org
Area Vice-President	North America	Lois Hector	northamerica.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Area President	Latin America	Leila Barbosa	latinamerica.president@wfmucw.org
Area Vice-President		Jessica Solar	latinamerica.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Area President	East Asia	Ting Sing Hong	eastasia.president@wfmucw.org
Area Vice-President		Mary Devadason	eastasia.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Area President	South Asia	Evelyn Mercvlin	southasia.president@wfmucw.org
Area President	Southern & East Africa	Sipiwe Chisvo	seafrica.president@wfmucw.org
Area Vice-President		Patricia Mapani	seafrica.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Area President	West Africa	Rev Jemima Amanor	westafrica.president@wfmucw.org
Area Vice-President		Aniema Udofia	westafrica.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Area President	Europe:Continental	Lidia Ribet	europa.president@wfmucw.org
Area Vice-President		Lilla Lakatos	europa.vice-president@wfmucw.org
Area President	Europe:Britain & Ireland	Louise Wilson	britainireland.president@wfmucw.org
Area Vice-President		Carolyn Lawrence	britainireland.vice-president@wfmucw.org



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