



# First Friday Letter

The World Methodist Council July 2021

## Greetings from the General Secretary

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is difficult to believe that I am in the same city where the taps almost ran dry three years ago as I hear the rain lashing at my study window. Today the dams are almost at capacity, and winter has just begun.

For those of us in the Christian tradition, water symbolizes new life, livelihood, cleansing, grace, and salvation. We are born in water, and without it, there is no life insofar as it is life's foundation. Water is embedded in many Biblical stories. God is often referred to as the source of "living water" who leads the faithful to drink from the waters of life and to rest in peace by "restful waters."

The Bible opens in Genesis with the Creation narratives separation of waters on day two and concludes in the Book of Revelation with the River of Life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street.

In an era of economic globalization, instant gratification and a "throw-away" culture, we need to "walk more lightly on the earth" realizing that there is no substitute for water and it cannot be replaced. Climate Justice is not something on the fringes, an option for those with a particular bent.

We facing an environmental crisis and the future of our planet is at stake. A focus on our environmental health provides us all an opportunity to become a little more human again.

Water is the only element that I am aware of that both erodes and creates. It is my prayer that all those rough edges can be made smoother by the refreshing waters of the Holy Spirit and allow God to "make all things new."

Please support the climate-focused, youth-led global campaign to mobilize Methodist churches worldwide on issues of climate justice. The campaign is called '**Climate Justice for All.**' Learn more about the campaign on the World Methodist Council website: [worldmethodistcouncil.org/cj4a](https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/cj4a). Follow the campaign on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

In this issue of the FFL we cover Nazarenes respond to Nyiragongo volcanic eruption, Groups help alleviate hunger in Zimbabwe, The Wesleyan Pattern of Prayer and Fasting and more.

Grace and Peace,

Ivan



*Photo by JRB*

# Needed: 500,000 Ecumenical Intercessors, Prayer Sentinels & Prayer Warriors

Needed:

# 500,000



Ecumenical Intercessors,  
Prayer Sentinels & Prayer Warriors

## July 6-10, 2021

Join The Bishop Sarah Frances Davis Covenant Keepers & Intercessors  
as we pray before, during & after the

**51st Quadrennial Session of the General Conference**

of the

**African Methodist Episcopal Church**

ONE GENERAL CONFERENCE IN 2 LOCATIONS

**Capetown, South Africa & Orlando, Florida, US**

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- Shifting the atmosphere through prayer
- Ecumenical Evangelism Efforts
- Safety & Protection from COVID 19 & all illnesses
- Powerful & Spirit-filled worship experiences
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- Strategic Legislation
- Flawless Technology
- Continued Prayer Covering for the Lay Biennial Convention July 11-12, 2021

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The Bishop Sarah Frances Davis  
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*~Praying our way through!!~*

July 6-10, 2021

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Read more at <https://www.ame-church.com/news/request-for-500000-ecumenical-intercessors-prayer-sentinels-prayer-warriors/>



## Groups help alleviate hunger in Zimbabwe

COVID-19 lockdowns robbed many Zimbabweans of basic necessities for survival, with food topping the list. In response, United Methodist Women, The Nyadire Connection and the Harare East District reached out to 800 vulnerable families with food donations and other relief.

United Methodist Women gave an \$8,000 grant to assist 200 of the most disadvantaged families in the rural communities of the Chimanimani Chipinge and Murehwa Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe districts.

“The project was well-timed,” said Tendai Rebecca Gurupira, area coordinator of ministry with women, children and youth, “especially in rural communities where resources were strained with child-headed families and households led by the elderly; physically challenged and chronically ill people (were) the most affected.”

Octogenarian Julia Chimberengwa of Mutambara Center United Methodist Church said her community — in the Chimanimani Chipinge District — had faced calamity after calamity, including droughts, Cyclone Idai and COVID-19. “All threatened lives, livelihoods and food security,” she said. “The young and elderly people are sleeping without having had a meal. It is heart-rending, seeing grandchildren enduring this suffering. I am very grateful for these food hampers. To God be the glory!”

Lucia Cheza, 90, a member of Mutambara West United Methodist Church, said, “With age, my health is failing, but I had to endure the long distance to Mutambara Center on foot to receive my share of the donation. It took hours, but I do not regret it because I am going back home with something for my family. My church is good, and I love it.”



**Monica Maposa carries a bundle of donated food and sanitation supplies she received during a distribution at Murewa Center United Methodist Church outside Harare, Zimbabwe. Photo by Kudzai Chingwe, UM News.**

Theresa Mutambara, 91, of Mutambara Center was overwhelmed with joy. “I never dreamed of getting all these goodies,” she said. “Where your mind ends, God takes over. This is what has happened to me. I thank you, Lord.”

Monica Maposa, a member of Uzumba East United Methodist Church, said hunger “can reduce you to a beggar. We ended up braving the virulent COVID-19 in search of food.”

Recalling Jeremiah 29, which promises “a future with hope,” she added, “Little did we know that God had plans for our welfare.”

“This greatly motivated us,” said the Rev. Noah Chapfika. “My church has done great.” Since the COVID-19 outbreak, The Nyadire Connection has helped more than 400 in the Nyadire Mission communities and surrounding United Methodist clinics, as well as Mutoko-Mudzi District pastors, with monthly food bundles.

These food supplements, said the Rev. Lancelot Victor Mukundu, Nyadire Mission Station chair, have “been quite a relief for vulnerable families, who were already stressed due to the country’s economic crisis, high inflation, low disposable income and compressed wages. “As we celebrate the 15th anniversary of TNC mission work,” he said, “we pray that the relationship may continue to bear fruit.”

The Nyadire Connection chair Drew Harvey said that the combined crises of severe drought and COVID-19 made food provision an urgent priority. “We went to our supporters,” he said, “and through their amazing generosity, we raised more than \$100,000, which allowed us to fund food purchases for 11 months.

“April was the final month of food distribution,” Harvey said. “We are hopeful that the current harvest will make food more available. This partnership has become mutually beneficial to so many people. We have great hopes of strengthening our relationship.”

In the Harare East District, the Ruwadzano RweWadzimai women’s organization converged at the Melfort Old People’s Home with food and other donations.

David Mavhuramani, a 100-year-old farmer, has lived at Melfort for five years. “I am overwhelmed by your love,” he said. “I do not know how best I can express my joy. What you have done for us is greatly appreciated, and we urge you to continue to do the same for others.” After all of his children died, Mavhuramani moved to Melfort. “When I harvest,” he said. “I supply the kitchen and some of the farm produce I sell. I am very strong.”

*Continued...*

## Groups help alleviate hunger in Zimbabwe continued...

“What The United Methodist Church has done confirms what real Christians are,” said Enercia Mushaba, a worker at the home. “It is our answered prayers.”

According to Emmah Mukahanana, Harare East District, the group also aided 14 student pastors at United Theological College. “Eleven are married with families, and three are single,” she said.

Pastor Ellen Gova, who leads the college’s United Methodist student fellowship, admitted that food challenges sometimes make it hard to concentrate on studies. “We want to reassure you that we are not going to disappoint you,” she said. “We promise to achieve academic excellence with the help of God.”

The Rev. Oscar Nyasha Mukahanana, Harare East District superintendent, was delighted with the response to his Christmas Cheer Fund initiative. “More than 80 church members, destitute and passers-by were assisted,” he said.

“During the giving,” he said, “the atmosphere was

heart-wrenching and an eye-opener as well.” Recipients shared testimonies of going without a decent meal for days.

“God knows the needs of our hearts,” said Rebecca Machangara, 77, a member of St. Paul’s United Methodist Church. “We thank the church for this initiative. I stay alone and had nothing to eat. I am very grateful.”

Charles Gendi, 65, also from St. Paul’s, received food on behalf of his wife, Ester, 78, who can no longer walk. “God takes over our responsibilities when we think we have reached the end of the road,” he said. “We had nothing at home.

“I have run short of words,” Gendi added. “Thank you. This is a miracle from God.”

Chingwe is a communicator for the Zimbabwe East Conference.

Story and photo by <https://www.umnews.org/>

## The Wesleyan Pattern of Prayer and Fasting

Our world desperately needs the healing, hope, and salvation offered in Jesus Christ. Through the act of prayer and fasting, the realization is that those who follow Jesus in the company of the Wesleys will be empowered to become channels for the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting is a significant part of the Christian experience. Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days and taught his disciples to fast. First century churches fasted twice weekly. John Wesley encouraged those in the Methodist Movement to fast and pray. The discipline entails going without solid food after the evening meal each Thursday until mid-afternoon each Friday, and this time of fasting is focused in prayer.

In more than 130 countries, the Wesleyan Methodist family joins in the same weekly fast which John Wesley observed most of his life.

**Fasting is a significant part of the Christian experience.** Jesus fasted and prayed for 40 days and taught his disciples to fast as well. In more than 130 countries, the Wesleyan family joins in a weekly fast, praying that we would all become channels of the transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

**A time of prayer and fasting offers a renewing of the spirit,** in that through the process, we are reminded that ultimately, we are dependent on God.

**Prayer and fasting humbles us.** This self-denial of our physical hunger, for a period of time, causes us to wait in

faith and to trust in God’s mercy.

The World Methodist Evangelism Prayer and Fasting Community brings together Christ followers who are committed to praying and fasting for our world. Each week approximately 1,500 people from over 47 different countries join together on the World Methodist Evangelism Facebook page for a time of prayer.

Become part of this [Prayer and Fasting Community](#) and pray with us each Thursday at 8am (EST) on the [World Methodist Evangelism Facebook page](#).



Story and photo by World Methodist Evangelism

## Nazarenes respond to Nyiragongo volcanic eruption

The city of Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was rocked by a large eruption of the Nyiragongo Volcano on the night of 22 May 2021. Constant and severe earthquakes were felt for 10 days, causing houses to collapse. The quakes also caused cracks within the walls and pavement throughout the city, and lava flow left behind additional destruction.

Around 400,000 people have evacuated and about 20,000 are homeless. The lack of clean water, food shortages, lack of electricity, and even the rain has made life difficult for the evacuees as the crisis intensifies. Many residents headed towards the cities of Sake, Minova, and Masisi, and some people living in the southern part of Goma had to cross the border to Rwanda.

Nazarene Compassionate Ministries in North Kivu Central District, under the supervision of Field Strategy Coordinator Mario Martínez and NCM Field Coordinator Celestin Chishibanji, has been responding to the disaster with help and direction from Regional NCM Coordinator Janice Ballard.

Local Nazarene churches have been housing and feeding people who were made homeless by this disaster. A task force established by the Africa Region will mobilize the church in Africa to take up an offering with the funds supporting the NCM efforts in the affected areas.

So far, emergency supplies of food, water, crisis care kits, and other items have been consistently distributed to shelters. Leaders have identified and assessed household needs with all the pastors of Goma and the surrounding areas. They counted 158 homes that welcomed 518 dis-

placed people, including 17 people who have been treated by Dr. Voté Lwanga, a doctor at the Nazarene medical center, and Safi Muyisa, a psychologist who consulted and accompanied nine displaced people.

“We are trying to do what is necessary and bring hope to the people directly affected and to the shelters that somehow seem desperate and overwhelmed by the situation,” Chishibanji said. “We want to do it by sharing the gospel, but we also hope that they will see it in us by extending a hand of compassion.

“We have seen churches praying and collecting everything possible to help the evacuees most in need but also opening doors to welcome those who have seen their homes burned. We have seen the grace of God through so many people as they reached out and helped each other. I can testify that I am seeing the goodness of the people who come out, and our dear brothers and sisters who are looking for hope will see it too.”

### How to help

#### Pray

Pray for those who have lost homes and shelter. Pray for those still seeking shelter and food. Pray for the evacuees' mental and physical well-being amid the COVID-19 pandemic. To send a prayer or note of encouragement, go to [ncm.org/pray](https://ncm.org/pray).

Story and photo by <https://www.nazarene.org/>





# Global Ministries commits to net-zero emissions by 2050

Witnessing firsthand the devastating impact of the growing climate crisis on its operations and the people it ministers to around the world, leaders of United Methodist Global Ministries have joined a coalition of United Methodist agencies pledging to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across the organizations' ministries, facilities, operations and investments by 2050.

Global Ministries is the worldwide mission and development agency of The United Methodist Church. Founded in 1819, Global Ministries today supports more than 200 missionaries in over 70 countries, including in the United States. It has personnel, projects and partners in 115 countries. As a part of Global Ministries, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), founded in 1940, is the global humanitarian aid and development arm of The United Methodist Church.

"The devastating environmental and socioeconomic impacts of the unfolding climate crisis are witnessed every day by our missionaries and staff around the world," said Roland Fernandes, general secretary of United Methodist Global Ministries and the United Methodist Committee on Relief. "Whether through missionaries serving as evangelists, educators, health professionals or agriculturalists; helping families recover from repeated disasters; praying with those forced to migrate; or working to give people access to clean water and renewable energy, we see firsthand the need for bold action. While environmental sustainability has been a priority for us for a while, we are excited to join with other UMC agencies in committing to net-zero emissions by 2050."

As a part of the first net-zero collaborative commitment of its kind, Global Ministries and the agencies released "Our Climate Commitment to Net-Zero Emissions." The joint statement acknowledges that the UMC "has long affirmed our individual and collective responsibility to address the unfolding climate crisis." Given these values, the group said it was "called by our faith, informed by science and led by our relationships with impacted communities" to respond urgently.

The statement is endorsed by 11 general secretaries and agencies of The United Methodist Church:

The General Board of Church and Society (GBCS)  
The General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM)  
The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM)  
The General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH)  
The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW)  
The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA)

## Discipleship Ministries

United Methodist Communications (UMCom)

United Methodist Men (UMM)

United Methodist Women (UMW)

Wespath Benefits and Investments (Wespath)

The new commitment reinforces previous efforts by Global Ministries and UMCOR to address the unfolding climate crisis:

In 2017, Global Ministries received LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) platinum certification for its building renovation in midtown Atlanta. This is the highest possible recognition for environmental sustainability from the U.S. Green Building Council. The agency was the first faith institution to build and occupy a LEED platinum building in the state of Georgia.

A pilot energy study is planned for 13 of its health clinics in West Africa to help the agency develop a strategic plan for financing renewable energy access at these clinics. Learnings from this process will shape energy planning across health facilities.

In 2019, grants from Global Ministries' Environmental Sustainability program and UMCOR-funded new solar and water pump systems that increased productivity at the Kamisamba Farm in Kamina, Democratic Republic of Congo, which means productivity, nutritious food and income have also increased in the communities of the families trained by Kamisamba workers.

In 2021, the agency approved a pilot project to test solar-powered vaccine refrigerators in three clinics in Liberia. The refrigerators will be installed this summer.

Read more of this story at <https://umcmission.org/april-2021/global-ministries-commits-to-net-zero-emissions-by-2050/>



**Solar array on the rooftop of Global Ministries' headquarters in Atlanta, GA. Photo by Jenny Phillips**

## ‘A New Vision: for a sustainable future’

At 11:00 GMT (12:00 BST) on Friday 13th and Saturday 14th August 2021 the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women will break new ground. We shall assemble, not physically as we would have liked, but virtually, in our first ever global online event.

‘A New Vision: for a sustainable future’ is our theme as we explore the direction God is leading us, both in terms of our World Federation movement and (on the Saturday) our response to the crucial issue of climate change.

We hope many women will join us LIVE and ‘meet’ their World and Area Officers and Helen Kim Memorial Scholars, and be inspired by our keynote speaker Jo Swinney, from ‘A Rocha International’, and by the young climate ambassadors working for ‘Climate Justice for All’. Many of our speakers will be young women. We remember it was a young Korean woman, Helen Kim, who had the original vision of a global movement of Methodist women who would change the world!



**Registration is now open via Eventbrite.** It is accessible from the homepage of our website <https://wfmucw.org/global-online-event> and registrants will be invited to indicate whether they require translation. Don't forget to check the time of 11:00 GMT in YOUR location! Keep watching our social media Facebook and Twitter for updates.

*Submitted by Alison Judd, World President, WFMUCW*

## The Christian Recorder Special Dialogue: LGBTQ+ Inclusion and the AME Church

Scrolling through the internet, I discovered some fascinating dialogue material from the AME Church's recent series of panel discussions and dialogues on the churches' marginalisation of LGBTQ+ persons within the body of Christ.

One of the more prominent clergy and theologians is The **Rev. Dr. Jennifer Leath**, the pastor of Campbell Chapel AME Church in Denver, Colorado, and an assistant professor at Iliff School of Theology. I tracked her concern and passion for the AME Church's Social Justice to proposals that emerged from a Breakout Group on "Socially Responsible; Theologically Sound" issue dated December 3, 2015. It reads as follows: "We recommend developing a common approach to biblical interpretation founded on an awareness of the historical context of the biblical text as the impact of our contemporary lenses. This approach to biblical interpretation must be based on an awareness of the ways that theological, reasoning, experiential/revelatory, and textual engagement is at work. In doing this, we must maintain clarity about the dignity of all people and special regard for those who are oppressed in various and intersecting ways..."

Highlighting "Now on Sexuality in the AME Church," The Rev. Jennifer Leath interviewed **Bishop Karen Oliveto**, first "out," married lesbian woman elected and consecrated in the United Methodist Church. This is what Bishop Karen said to the AME Church: "... I would want the AME Church family, my family, to know... [that] we have so much to learn from you and I pray that your voice-

es will mingle with my voice – will mingle with all our voices – so that the Methodist family can be as strong as possible as we push back hate, and injustice, and oppression in the world in Jesus' name."

The Rev. Leath laments the inability to recognise these issues globally at the Quadrennial focus on social justice. She raises three further points on which the AME needs to be mindful: Those persons who understand their sexual orientation and gender identity – and she includes herself under this category – to be both sacred and outside of heterosexual, cisgender categorisation will neither hide and lie nor leave and disappear ... Integrity is right; Secondly, we as a Church cannot avoid the work of careful and fair discernment with respect to matters of sexual orientation and gender identity ... Discernment is right; Thirdly, our polity must catch up with our problems. Both UMC and AME systems of governance are oblivious to the seriousness of the discourse on sexual orientation and gender identity for the church internally and externally. Updated polity is right.

The August edition will bring you Rev. Dr. Leath's contribution to TCR Special Dialogue: LGBTQ+ Inclusion and the AME Church: "The Fire This Time: AME Sexual Politics."

*The Rev. Keith Vermeulen researcher for the WMC. The opinions expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the World Methodist Council.*

# SMU's Perkins School of Theology receives a nearly \$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to help establish the Testimony HQ program

Southern Methodist University (SMU) has received a \$999,975 grant to support Perkins School of Theology's Testimony HQ program. The grant is being made through Lilly Endowment's nationwide Thriving Congregations Initiative.

The program will work to increase the practice of testimony as community engagement both inside and outside the church. The Reverend Dr. Priscilla Pope-Levison and Bart Patton of Perkins School of Theology will serve as co-principal investigators on the project. This is the second Lilly Endowment grant awarded to SMU to fund the work of Pope-Levison and Patton; the first was a \$1 million grant awarded in 2018 to strengthen congregational ministries with youth.

SMU is one of 92 organizations being funded through Lilly Endowment's Thriving Congregations Initiative. The aim of the initiative is to strengthen Christian congregations so they can help people deepen their relationships with God, build strong relationships with each other and contribute to the flourishing of local communities and the world. The grants will support organizations as they work directly with congregations and help them gain clarity about their values and missions; explore and understand better the communities in which they serve; and draw upon their theological traditions as they adapt ministries to meet changing needs.

The project at SMU will enable the Perkins School to extend the breadth and depth of its mission by capturing the current catalyst of testimony in this COVID-19 moment – people telling stories about God's presence in their lives – and embedding it into the practice of 30 congregations within a 350-mile radius of Dallas.

"Thriving congregations provide safe places to discern when, where and how people have encountered God. Equally essential, they offer safe havens to learn how to form that experience into a testimony. The practice of testimony as community engagement, within and beyond the church walls, will become an indispensable part of the DNA of each cohort congregation," said Patton.

Over the five-year course of the grant, the program will help congregations master how to utilize testimony as community engagement; revitalize the Perkins Center for Evangelism, encouraging it to become an international and ecumenical hub for training congregations in best practices for testimony; lead each cohort congregation in four concentric circles of learning communities; develop a prescribed course of study for a Certificate of Practical Ministry in Evangelism; and establish the grant website ([www.testimonyhq.com](http://www.testimonyhq.com)) as the vehicle for sharing resources, such as podcasts, webinars, downloadable resources and written materials.

"Testimony is a fundamental building block of the church as a welcoming body, where even newcomers can overhear authentic faith stories," said Pope-Levison. "Community and connection flow out from a thriving congregation's practice of testimony into the world around it."

The Reverend Dr. Priscilla Pope-Levison, co-principal investigator, associate dean for External Programs and professor of ministerial studies at Perkins School of Theology, is an award-winning author, pastor, professor and higher education administrator. She also serves on MER-CIC, the Methodist and Roman Catholic international dialogue, co-sponsored by the World Methodist Council.

Bart Patton, co-principal investigator and director of youth and young adult ministry education at Perkins School of Theology, is a proven congregational leader, youth minister, worship leader, teacher and pastor, with more than two decades of ministry experience in three states and seven different ecumenical congregational environments, including large and small churches in rural, urban and suburban contexts.

*Story and Photo submitted by Priscilla Pope Levison*



## TESTIMONY HQ

**The Community Needs Your Story**

**SMU PERKINS SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**



# Methodist Church in Britain: President and Vice-President inducted



***President, Sonia Hicks***

Sonia Hicks, who comes from a long line of Methodists as far back as her great-grandfather who was a Local Preacher in Jamaica, has served as a Circuit Superintendent in three connexions: Britain, the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and Americas and the Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI). She is currently Superintendent Minister in Wembley, north London.

In her [Conference address](#) Mrs. Hicks focused on her theme for the year, “God’s Table: An Invitation for All,” reflecting on the racism and marginalisation she and her family have experienced and how the Church can respond to injustice and division in society today. She recalled the experience of her Great Aunt Lize, who had arrived from Jamaica with her Methodist membership card only to be rejected from her local Methodist Church because she was black. Sonia and her family eventually found a Methodist home at Walworth Methodist Church in South London.

Sonia, who is the first black woman to be elected as President of the Methodist Conference, speaking about her theme, said:

“In a world where people are excluded because of their ethnic background, their sexual orientation, their gender or simply because, like me, they were brought up on a council estate, I believe that we are called to show God’s love for all people. It is a calling that Christian people have always struggled with, but we can and should be better at making God’s love a reality in the British Methodist Church, overcoming the systemic discrimination that exists.”

Sonia’s commitment to oppose all forms of injustice began when she was a member of the Youth Exchange to Zimbabwe. She has since been Convenor of the World Relief and Development Committee for MCI, and has served as a Trustee for both All We Can and Christian Aid Ireland.

Looking to the future, the President said:

“As Christians we are to mirror the grace and the mercy

of God. We are to find ways of issuing God’s invitation of acceptance to those we meet on a daily basis. No ifs, no buts.

“I believe that there is a place for all in the presence of God, at God’s Table. But, as we acknowledge that everyone has a place, we also must acknowledge that we will therefore live with the tension of not all thinking the same. We will also have to recognise that living with such tension is never the easy option.”

The Vice-President, Barbara Easton, was also elected and inducted this afternoon. Barbara Easton’s vocation has been the world of education. Before becoming Connexional Director of Education in 2014 she was an RE teacher, inclusion and interfaith specialist and secondary headteacher in the West Midlands.



***Vice-President, Barbara Easton***

She now leads the Methodist Academies and Schools Trust, committed to shaping our schools as diverse communities of empowerment and transformation in their work at the margins of the church. Barbara is also a Local Preacher and has regularly volunteered at 3Generate and Greenbelt.

In her speech to the Conference, the Vice-President spoke of her rootedness in Methodism that began as a baby when she was adopted by a Methodist family. Speaking about how the Church moves forward ecumenically Barbara said: “I am urging you, my sisters and brothers, to see that we still have something valuable to bring to the Church’s table and to be confident about the colour and texture that we add to make the ecumenical quilt richer. If the Church is called to be a sign to the world, then we are raised up as a sign to the sign.”

The role of President of the Methodist Conference is reserved for presbyters and that of Vice-President for lay people or deacons. During his lifetime John Wesley chaired the Methodist Conference but after his death the Conference determined to elect a President annually.

Watch the Presidential address [here](#).  
The text of the Presidential address is available [here](#).

Watch the Vice-Presidential address [here](#).  
The text of the Vice-Presidential address is [here](#).

Story and photo at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/president-and-vice-president-elected-and-inducted/>

## Mataiva Robertson's service to women, youth and the Pacific community recognised in Queen's Birthday honours



*Itamua Muaiao'omalo Mataiva Robertson has been honoured in the Queen's Birthday honours.*

When Mataiva Robertson saw the domestic violence and suicide rates in the Pasifika community she couldn't stay quiet.

She had to challenge how a lot of her people thought, she said, and that's how she ended up travelling around the country talking about taboo issues.

Itamua Muaiao'omalo Mataiva Robertson, 43, of New Plymouth, has been made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the Queen's Birthday Honours for services to women, youth and the Pacific community.

Born in Auckland to Samoan parents, Robertson witnessed first hand the struggles and difficulties her parents were having. Being bilingual, she was able to help her parents, her extended family and her community by translating for them.

"My home became the hub. People would just come and ask for support – even when I was at primary and intermediate school I'd help families translating when they needed support. And that feeling of satisfaction you'd done something to help. I felt a strong pull towards social justice, and that's where everything else just falls into place."

Her faith plays a big part, she said, and she moved to New Plymouth in 2001 to help her parents, who were working for the Methodist Church. "As a minority I wanted to get touch with the Pasifika community and see what support

I could provide. The main issue for me is housing and I'm also part of group working with housing providers to establish social housing. We have a project going on in Flaxmere Hastings."

She is chairwoman of the Vaimoana Pasifika Charitable Trust, the only Pasifika agency in Taranaki. But her reach extends past Taranaki and New Zealand.

Robertson heard of a Samoan village that had no fresh water, so through the Response Trust, which is based in Wellington, applied for grants and organised the supply and implementation of more than 100 water tanks so every family, church and school in the village had access to clean water. "I pretty much cried every day. You take for granted what you have in New Zealand."

And in her role as World General Secretary of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women she supports women worldwide. This work is "really dear" to her and has seen her travel around the world to places like Myanmar and Africa, she said.

"To see the realities of some people and their lack of human rights because of political unrest...human trafficking in Brazil, South America...each country presents its own issues."

Covid has swapped the travel for late night zoom calls, she said.

"To be recognised for some of these works – I'm really thankful and humbled."

With husband Joshua, Robertson fosters children and has three at the moment. "It's one of the most rewarding things for my husband and I. We have an open door policy in our home." She's busy, she said, "But a good busy. If there's a need I get in and get my hands dirty."

Story and Photo at [https://www.stuff.co.nz/pou-tiaki/125360135/mataiva-robertsons-service-to-women-youth-and-the-pacific-community-recognised-in-queens-birthday-honours?fbclid=IwAR2cVAWa91g6EXEBj3G3OHDqAMp8UPcYmIsVAO-JyY3u-bWTeiUoLA\\_Cn0p4](https://www.stuff.co.nz/pou-tiaki/125360135/mataiva-robertsons-service-to-women-youth-and-the-pacific-community-recognised-in-queens-birthday-honours?fbclid=IwAR2cVAWa91g6EXEBj3G3OHDqAMp8UPcYmIsVAO-JyY3u-bWTeiUoLA_Cn0p4)

## Youth and Young Adult Scholarship Application registry now open

Scholarship opportunities for the 22nd World Methodist Council Conference are open now. Register by clicking on the link below.

<https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/what-we-do/youth-and-young-adult-scholarship/>

Photo by The World Methodist Council





*Photo credits: Perkins School of Theology/ R. Hipps*

Please send press releases, articles and resources! Submissions should be a page or less (500-700 words), edited and ready to publish. Contact us by **Friday, July 30** at [communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org](mailto:communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org) if you would like your story to be included in the August edition of the First Friday Letter.

## On the Web

This and past First Friday Letters can be found online at [FirstFridayLetter.worldmethodistcouncil.org](http://FirstFridayLetter.worldmethodistcouncil.org).

The World Methodist Council's website may be found at [worldmethodistcouncil.org](http://worldmethodistcouncil.org).

The World Methodist Council's Conference website is at [worldmethodistconference.org](http://worldmethodistconference.org).

To subscribe to this newsletter, please email [communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org](mailto:communications@worldmethodistcouncil.org).

## About the First Friday Letter

The First Friday Newsletter is a monthly publication of the World Methodist Council.

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