



THE WORLD FEDERATION OF METHODIST AND UNITING CHURCH WOMEN

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The TREE — of — LIFE

Arise and Shine Women United in Christ's Glory

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President's letter

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The weeks and months are moving quickly toward the 15th World Assembly in Auckland, New Zealand, where our new theme, “Arise and Shine, for the Glory of God Is Upon You”, will be launched.

I ask for your prayers for all those involved in the preparation of the Assembly, and for those who will be leading Bible study, the keynote speaker, and the workshop leaders. I also ask your prayers for those who will bring us before God at the dawning of each new day and at sundown. The World Assembly is a unique opportunity to unite in one voice as Methodist women from around the globe to worship and pray together.

It is my hope and prayer that you had a wonderful commemoration of International Women's Day on March 8, or on any other day suitable to you during Women's Month, which is the month of March. The theme for this year is “Give to Gain”, focusing on reciprocity, mentorship, and supporting women to create collective success. Alternatively, some organizations observed the theme “Rights, Justice, Action for All Women and Girls”, calling women to move from faith in words to faith in action.

These two themes promote gender equality and empower women. The Bible teaches that “God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:27) Male and female alike bear the image of God and together share in the blessing that follows: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” (Genesis 1:28)

In John 4, Jesus met a Samaritan woman beside Jacob's well. The woman came to the well during the heat of the day, when she thought no one else would be there. Her encounter with Jesus affirms that all are accepted by Him. The fact that she was a woman did not matter to Him.

The fact that she was a Samaritan did not matter to Him. The fact that she was not

knowledgeable about the Jewish tradition, yet knew much about the history of the well, did not matter to Him. All that mattered to Jesus was that she was there at that time, and He met her.

In Jesus's acceptance of her, the woman received dignity and self-worth, which gave her the courage to run into the town and reveal the truth about Jesus, calling out, “Come and see the man who told me everything about me.”

Gender equality begins by accepting people as they are, male or female, rich or poor. In every sector of society, it is imperative that opportunities are given to all in order to achieve balanced influence for the common good.

Without acceptance and equal opportunities, women cannot be empowered. God has ordained that both men and women should be empowered and given authority over all that lives on earth.

Let us go, fellow sisters, and bear fruit in every season—not just fruit, but fruit that will last. Let us go and bring justice, healing, and hope to all, and let us continue to know Christ and make Him known.

May the good Lord richly bless you,

- *Sipiwe Chisvo*, World President.



Editor's word:

From Wilderness to Resurrection

The story of Israel's journey out of Egypt is more than a historical memory preserved in Scripture. In the narrative of the Book of Exodus, the path from slavery to freedom unfolds through deserts, waters, and mountains. Each place along the way becomes a spiritual symbol—revealing something about the human heart, about suffering and hope, and about the mysterious ways God leads His people. The Israelites did not leave Egypt and immediately arrive in the Promised Land. Instead, they traveled through stages of uncertainty, testing, provision, and revelation. In many ways, their journey reflects the spiritual journey of every person. Life often feels like a pilgrimage through changing landscapes: moments of beginning, moments of crisis, seasons of dryness, and moments of divine encounter. The story of Exodus teaches that these places are not random. They are part of a deeper path through which God transforms us and prepares us to become who we were meant to be.

The journey begins at Sukkoth, the first encampment after leaving Egypt. Here Israel stepped into freedom, but with no permanent shelter, only temporary booths. Spiritually, Sukkoth represents the courage to begin again. Yet beginnings are rarely comfortable; new paths often come with hardship. From there the people came to Etham, at the edge of the wilderness. Etham is a threshold between the familiar and the unknown. It is the place where one must decide whether to trust God enough to step forward into what cannot yet be seen. When we leave behind what enslaves us—fear, sin, or old patterns—we often step into uncertainty. Yet that fragile step is the first movement toward freedom. At this point, God appeared through the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, showing that divine guidance is always there for us when we step beyond human security.

Soon afterward came the great crisis at the Red Sea. Trapped between water and the pursuing Egyptian army, Israel faced what seemed impossible. Yet the sea opened and a path appeared. This moment reveals a profound spiritual truth: sometimes liberation requires passing through the impossible and what appears to be death itself. But the waters of death became the road to freedom.

After this victory, the people entered the wilderness and came to Marah, where the water was bitter. Sometimes the very things or people we expect to bring us joy become sources of great disappointment.

Yet God transformed the bitter water into sweetness, reminding us that God's grace can change the circumstances.

Not far away lay Elim, a place of twelve springs and seventy palm trees. After bitterness came refreshment. Elim shows that God does not lead His people only through hardship; He also gives moments of restoration, those times of Sabbath where the soul and body can rest again in Him.

The journey then continued into the Wilderness of Sin, where hunger led the people to despair until God provided manna from heaven. Many times, we lack something we believe we need—whether it is security, love, peace, or provision. Here Israel learned a difficult lesson: faith is lived one day at a time. The manna could not be stored; it had to be gathered daily. In the same way, trust in God must be renewed each day for whatever we face or lack.

At Rephidim, the people again lacked water until it flowed miraculously from the rock. There they also fought their first battle against Amalek. The first battle also teaches that life's battles are not meant to be fought alone, but together with God.

Finally, the Jews arrived at the mountain of revelation, Mount Sinai, also called Horeb. Here God revealed His covenant, gave the laws and the celebrations, shaping Israel into a people, and one with a purpose. At the end, the desert was not merely a place of hardship; it was the place where identity was formed.

Just as Israel passed through water, wilderness, and testing before reaching promise, our lives follow a similar path. Sometimes we stand at the beginning of something new. Sometimes we face impossible seas, bitter waters, or long deserts. Yet the biblical journey reminds us that God is present in every stage. The wilderness is not meaningless—it is the road through which God leads His people toward transformation.

For Christians, this entire journey finds its deepest meaning in the life of Jesus Christ. Just as Israel went to Egypt and passed through the waters and the wilderness before entering new life, Christ went to Egypt, was baptized in the water, spent time in the wilderness and passed through suffering and death before the victory of resurrection. The hope celebrated in Easter proclaims that the darkest wilderness is not the end of the story.

As Scripture declares: “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen.” (Luke 24:5-6) Every wilderness we walk—every desert of doubt, every night of pain and struggle—is not the end. Beyond the trials, beyond the suffering, stands the empty tomb. Through the victory of Christ, what

seemed like death becomes life, what seemed impossible becomes hope, and every journey through darkness will cease in the light of resurrection. Dare to live in it.

- *Ligia Istrate*, Tree of Life Editor.

Egypt

(Worship Song)

I won't forget
The wonder of how You brought,
Deliverance
The exodus of my heart

You found me,
You freed me,
Held back the waters for my release,
Oh, Yahweh!

('Cause) You're the God who fights for me,
Lord of every victory,
Hallelujah, hallelujah!
You have torn apart the sea,
You have led me through the deep,
Hallelujah, hallelujah!

A cloud by day
Is a sign that You are with me,
The fire by night
Is the guiding light to my feet.

'Cause You stepped into my Egypt
And You took me by the hand,
And You marched me out in freedom,
(Straight) Into the Promised Land.
(And) Now I will not forget You God,
I'll sing of all You've done.
Death is swallowed up forever
By the fury of Your love.

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News

International Women's Day 2026

The theme for International Women's Day 2026 is *Rights, Equality, and Empowerment: Giving in Order to Receive*. For many years, the term *empowerment* has become increasingly important, especially in relation to women. Countless movements have sought to place women on equal footing with men in all aspects of life—personal, professional, and social—so that women may have ownership of their decisions and access to equal opportunities. To be *empowered* means to have autonomy and strength, and this is not wrong. A Christian woman, however, is empowered through the power and influence that come from God, our Creator. This truth is affirmed in Scripture: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

We live in times when many women feel tired, insufficient, or limited. Often, we try to move forward in our own strength and end up exhausted. Yet the Word of God reminds us of a fundamental truth: true empowerment comes from the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not send His disciples to fulfill their mission alone; He first promised them power. That same power is available today to every woman. This power is not human; it is spiritual. As Acts 1:8 declares, it does not depend on age, education, or experience, but on the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is not about what we can do for God, but what God does in us through His Spirit.

The Holy Spirit equips us. In Judges 4:4–5, Deborah was not empowered by a human position, but by God's calling. In the same way, the Holy Spirit equips women to lead, serve, raise children, teach, heal, and bring transformation. God does not call the qualified; He qualifies those He calls.

The Holy Spirit also guides us daily. As Romans 8:14 teaches, those who are led by the Spirit of

God are His children. This empowerment is not only for great moments, but for everyday life: making decisions, facing trials, speaking with wisdom, and living by faith. A constant prayer should be: “Holy Spirit, guide me today.”

A woman empowered in Christ is a woman of prayer, confident that God hears her. “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 John 5:14). She recognizes that her strength comes from God and that she depends on His guidance. She also understands her value and identity. As Psalm 139:13–14 reminds us, we are fearfully and wonderfully made. God created each woman with purpose, gifting her with talents and abilities to fulfill His plan. An empowered woman entrusts her decisions to God. She sets goals, plans wisely, and moves forward with confidence, not only in herself, but in the Lord who enables her. “Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established.” (Proverbs 16:3)

A Christian woman is empowered because God is her Father, her confidence is rooted in Him, and He directs her path. She is created to be loving, kind, capable, strong and able to accomplish great things through faith in Him. To be empowered by Jesus means to find strength, identity, and purpose in Him. It is not based on superiority or self-sufficiency, but on God's design, in which women are created in His image with dignity and purpose. Jesus Himself demonstrated this by valuing women, teaching them, speaking with them publicly, and breaking the cultural barriers of His time.

Through faith and the presence of God, women are strengthened in difficult moments and reflect the character of Christ. Knowing Jesus as the Bread of Life, they find provision for their daily needs and are sent to carry out meaningful work.

The world often speaks of empowerment as self-sufficiency, but God reveals empowerment through dependence on Him. When we recognize our weakness, the Holy Spirit manifests His power within us. Amen.

- *Ivonne Pereira Diaz*, World Vice-President.

“Give to Gain”: International Women's Day



On the occasion of International Women's Day, I had the honor of delivering a presentation at United Methodist Women's gatherings in Harare, Zimbabwe, a presentation that was transmitted via social media platforms too.

The presentation emphasized that meaningful and sustainable progress in society comes through intentional investment in people, particularly women and girls. In my remarks, I highlighted that when communities provide opportunities, education, leadership spaces, and protection for women, the result is a collective gain for families, communities, and nations. Investing in women strengthens social cohesion, enhances economic resilience, and promotes inclusive development.

The presentation also underscored the vital role of faith-based organizations, government institutions, and civil society in working together to advance gender justice and uphold human dignity. Participants were encouraged to support initiatives that empower women economically, expand leadership opportunities, and address social barriers that limit women's full participation in development.

Drawing on both faith values and development principles, the message called for practical action—encouraging individuals and institutions to commit their time, resources, and advocacy toward building more just and equitable communities.

The presentation concluded with a reminder that “Give to Gain” is not merely a slogan, but a guiding principle for transformation: when society invests in women, everyone benefits.

- *Patricia Mapani*, South-East Africa Area President

Shelter Home: A Mission of Love, Laughter, and Life



What began as a personal act of compassion has grown into a life-changing mission for many vulnerable children. The story of Shelter Home traces its origins to a childless Methodist couple, Felvia Shanthi and Solomon, both professors at



Today, Shelter Home stands as a testimony to how compassion can transform lives. From one child to more than 85, the journey reflects the power of love in action. Through dedication, faith, and tireless service, Felvia Shanthi and Solomon continue to give these children what every child deserves—love, laughter, and the opportunity to live a full and meaningful life.

The impact of Shelter Home is reflected in the achievements of its children. More than 25 have completed their undergraduate and postgraduate studies and are now working in various sectors. In addition, eight children who grew up in Shelter Home are married and are now settled with families of their own, living happily and contributing positively to society. These milestones stand as powerful testimonies of God's faithfulness and the transformation of these children from vulnerability to stability and hope.

On March 15, 2026, the first girl raised in Shelter Home got married, marking a very special and emotional moment in the history of the Home.

In His perfect timing, after eight years of marriage, God also blessed Felvia Shanthi and Solomon with two biological children. Their daughter works as a coordinator for “Invisible Girl Child Project”, an organization dedicated to rescuing and supporting girls across India. Their son completed a master's degree in international development in Australia and now works with a social organization in Melbourne. Together, as one family, they continue to serve God faithfully.

(published for *Tree of Life* with the information and approval from Dr. Felvia Shanthi)

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Madras Theological Seminary in India, whose desire to adopt a child led them to a small HIV-positive boy who had tragically lost five members of his family to AIDS. Moved by his suffering and abandonment, they opened not only their home but also their hearts. What started as a single act of love soon evolved into a lifelong commitment to serve children affected by HIV/AIDS.

Over the years, Felvia Shanthi and Solomon have been instrumental in transforming the lives of more than 85 HIV-positive children. Many of these children come from backgrounds marked by the loss of parents and siblings, stigma, poverty, and rejection. In a society where HIV-positive children often face discrimination and social exclusion, Shelter Home has become a sanctuary of hope and dignity.

At Shelter Home, the children receive comprehensive care that addresses both their physical and emotional needs. Life-saving antiretroviral medicines are provided regularly to ensure their health and well-being. Alongside medical care, the children are given nutritious food, safe shelter, clothing, and access to quality education. The home functions not merely as an institution, but as a family where every child is nurtured with love, patience, and understanding.

Beyond meeting basic needs, the vision of Shelter Home is to restore childhood itself. The founders believe that HIV-positive children deserve the same joy, freedom, and opportunities as any other child. Through education, play, social interaction, and emotional support, the children are encouraged to grow with confidence and hope. The ultimate goal is to empower them to become independent individuals who can reintegrate into society with dignity.

Equally important is the nurturing of spiritual and emotional strength. The children are encouraged to experience the love of God and to understand that their lives carry purpose and meaning. In an environment of acceptance and faith, they learn that their identity is not defined by illness, but by their potential and the unique gifts they possess.



Nominations for World Officers 2026-2031

You are reminded that nominations for World Officers are being sought. We are looking for women with a sense of divine call, proven ability, relevant experience, passion and a vision for the future of our movement. They must be members of a Unit of the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women.

Your Area President has the forms and all the information.

Nominees are encouraged to provide no more than one page of CV and no more than 1000 words of personal statement plus a (head and shoulders) photograph, to accompany the signed Nomination form.

The deadline for sending completed Nomination forms and accompanying documents to the Unit President is 20th April 2026. The Unit President endorses the nomination by signing the form and sends it with the other documents to the Nominations Committee.

The deadline for all completed forms and accompanying documents to be sent to the Nominations Committee is 4th May 2026.

These documents will be shared with voting delegates prior to the election in Auckland.

Those nominees whose names are put forward for selection at the Assembly Business Meeting will be expected to give a five-minute presentation to the voting delegates who may ask questions before voting takes place.

Newly elected World Officers will take up their roles immediately following the Joint Executive Committee meeting on Sunday 30th August 2026 (the day following the closing worship and commissioning service). This should be born in mind when making travel arrangements and flights should be booked for later that day.

- *Alison Judd*, President Emerita, on behalf of the Nominations Committee.



WORLD FEDERATION OF
METHODIST & UNITING
CHURCH WOMEN

15TH WORLD ASSEMBLY

25th to 29th August 2026
Due Drop Centre, Auckland,
New Zealand

REGISTER NOW: wfmucw.org



“Arise and Shine for the
glory of God is upon you”

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