



THE WORLD FEDERATION OF METHODIST AND UNITING CHURCH WOMEN

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# *The* TREE — *of* LIFE



## Life as a gift

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# President's letter

Dear Sisters,

I wonder what special foods you enjoy at Easter time. In my home we eat hot cross buns on Good Friday, decorated boiled eggs, Fair Trade chocolate Easter eggs and roast lamb on Easter Sunday. Many in the UK will eat Simnel cake, a light fruit cake



with two layers of almond paste or marzipan. It is decorated with 11 spheres of marzipan to represent the disciples, minus Judas. During the period of Lent, many people will have gathered for a weekly simple meal of soup and bread, raising money for Christian Aid. This meal is often shared by Christians of different denominations and is a wonderful opportunity to get to know one another better as conversations are shared along with the food.

Jesus was often to be found sharing with others around the meal table. We can imagine how some of his conversations

were to be life-changing for his companions. At that first Easter, some meals were planned and full of tradition, like the one we know as the Last Supper. This was the meal that traditionally recalled the Passover when the Israelites escaped from Egypt and began their long journey to the promised land. That meal, too, included traditional foods like lamb and bitter herbs to remind the people of their God-directed heritage. Jesus used that meal to initiate a new tradition, one that speaks to us of new life in Christ and food for our own spiritual journey. But other meals that first Easter were far more spontaneous: the picnic on the beach, the unplanned meal at Emmaus. The appearance of Jesus at these meals came as a surprise blessing to his disciples. We can imagine the delight and joy they felt as they realised He was ALIVE!

I have recently attended the first of eight Area Seminars. It was in Yangon, Myanmar and women from Upper and Lower Myanmar had prepared a welcome for World Officers and women from India and Sri Lanka. You will be able to read more of that event in these pages. We shared many meals together, all generously organised by our hosts. The conversations around the tables brought us together in Christian fellowship and new friendships across cultural boundaries were formed. We thanked God for this bountiful provision for our physical and spiritual needs.

As you eat your next meal, you might like to sing this grace to the tune of Kum By Yah.

“For the food we eat, we thank you.

For the friends we meet, kind and true;

For the times we share, all day through,

O Lord, we thank you.”

Happy Easter!

- Alison Judd

# Life as a gift

The Bible speaks so much about Life and we know Christianity is totally based on this word: LIFE. In the earthly existence we all face trouble, sorrow, diseases, poverty, disappointments, hatred, persecutions in one way or another, but we are comforted that in the life after death there will be no more suffering because it is written that “He (Jesus) will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:4). We are also assured so many times about this life in the Bible through Apostle Paul who battled against all kind of heresies, including the ones that stated there is no life after death. So, many, many times in his letters, he assured different

communities that there is an eternal life, there is a resurrection of the dead. He says, there is no logic in suffering for Christ, as he and other Christians had suffered difficulties, persecution and torture, if there is no continuation after death. At the same time, he suggests that there is no logic in obeying rules, if life has an end. 1 Corinthians 15:19 sums up his thoughts regarding this: “And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.”

From the Bible we also know that Jesus is the Life: “Jesus said to him (to Thomas), “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”” (John 14:6) or “Through him (Jesus) all things were made; without him

nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.” (John 1:3-4) Through Him we can have life in its wholeness, it is the Shepherd's gift for His sheep: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10) We also learn that we do not have any bigger treasure than our life and our life is the best gift we can give, ; there is no higher love: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13) and Jesus is the One that gave this gift to humanity...

Besides the common life, the eternal life, Christ's life, life as a gift, the same amazing Book speaks about the “truly life” all people can have here, on



this Earth. The truly life according to the Bible is to have faith and to act according to your faith. It means to speak for the ones that cannot speak, to protect the ones that cannot protect themselves, to fight for the truth, to fight for your values, to fight for the life of others, to help, to comfort,

to be human with other humans, to be a woman or a man of God among the other beings created by the same God that created you. We are called to such a life as this. 1 Timothy 6:18-19 is a teaching for the rich, but we can all consider ourselves rich as we have God and as we have more than others: “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

What kind of life do you want to have?

*-Ligia Istrate*

# South-East Asia devotional

## Finding Meaning in a Meaningless World

“And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years,[a] but no one could heal her. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. “Who touched me?” Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you.” But Jesus said, “Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me.” Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”” (Luke 8:43-48)

The text in Luke speaks about an abandoned woman. Her health condition was deteriorating. Her finances had depleted. It had been more than a decade since someone

held her hand or hugged her. She was never invited to any family occasions or to friends' celebrations. After all, who would want to touch her, if it would have made them unclean? The twelve-year hemorrhage had taken its toll on her.

The Bible does not name her, because that's what she was - a nameless and a faceless woman.

Just like her, many of us, too, are at the end of our road. We have not found solutions to the crisis at home, we have not found a bridge to build our broken relationships, we are unable to get back on our feet while we are bombarded with financial losses and we don't seem to have answers to the sickness in our body. We have tried everything, and we have turned to everyone. Where do we go from here?

This woman turned to Jesus. She pushed through the teeming crowd to reach Him. Fearing that she would be noticed by the others, knowing that as she passed through the jostling crowd, she would have made the people unclean, she crawled amidst them, hoping to

go unnoticed. She reached out and touched the hem of His garment.

And she was healed. Jesus stopped and turned to her saying, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace” (vs. 48). Jesus commends her for her faith. He blesses her with peace and the Greek word used is *eiréné*, which means a wholesome peace. But most importantly to a woman, who had been ignored and cast aside by society for twelve years, Jesus gives her a new identity. He calls this nameless woman - “daughter”. I believe that more than the miracle she received that unforgettable day, she received something greater : her new identity.

Have you too been overlooked? Do you feel unwanted? Or maybe unloved? Just as He called that woman, Jesus calls you and me - “daughter”. We have an identity, we are daughters of the God Most High.

- Lynette Johnson

*He calls this nameless woman - “daughter”.*

*I believe that more than the miracle she received that unforgettable day, she received something greater : her new identity.*



# News



## News from South-East Asia



The Closing Ceremony

### South-East Asia Seminar 2018

**Theme: "I have called you by name; You are Mine"**  
- (Isaiah 43:1)

The South-East Asia seminar was held in Myanmar from 29th January to 5th February; it began in Yangon, but it finished with a trip in Upper Myanmar. The Weaving Together Program took place on the first two days, with delegates from Myanmar, Sri Lanka and India, together with President Alison Judd Secretary Mataiva Robertson and President Emerita Ann Connan, the HKMS scholar of

the area and the Tree of Life Editor as a special guest. In the afternoon of 30th January, the opening session of the South-East Asia seminar was held. Every day there were prayer, bible studies, worship, business sessions, workshops and cultural shows. On 2nd February all the women made a trip to Twanté in the outskirts of Yangon, across the river, where they had fellowship and visited a fish pond that belongs to a young Methodist lady that is involved in the church and women's ministry. After travelling all night, the Federation's women arrived in Pyin Oo Lwin, Upper

Myanmar, where they enjoyed the beautiful landscapes and met other ladies from the Methodist Church of Pyin Oo Lwin. Sunday, 4th February after the ladies attended the church, they left for Mandalay, where they met another community. That same night they travelled back to Yangon, where they have arrived on 5th in the morning, ready to go back to their homes. All the women expressed their thanksgiving to MuMu Than, the President of the South-East Area and to the organizing committee for doing an extraordinary job!

*-Ligia Istrate*

## Keynote address to the Opening ceremony,

**Tuesday 30th January, by the World President (excerpts)**  
**“I have called you by name; You are Mine” (Isaiah 43:1)**

How do you feel about your name? Does it depend how it is used? I remember when I was a child, my mother would use my name with a different sound to it depending on her mood and how I was behaving. 'Alison, it's time you were out of bed!' 'Alison, don't be so silly!' 'Good girl, Alison!'

If God was to speak your name today how would it sound?

In Old Testament times, on several occasions the voice of God speaks the name of someone to attract their attention. The story of Samuel is a favourite. God had to speak his name three times before the child recognised it as God's voice and responded, 'Speak Lord, your servant hears'. As an aside, have you ever noticed that when God is trying to attract your attention, the call comes three times? Or in three forms? I know there have been times when I have ignored God's voice but when it comes the third time... well it's best to listen!

We too, at our baptism, are 'given' to God, becoming part of God's worldwide family. At baptism we are 'given' a name. But even before our birth we belonged to God, fully known by our Creator. 'I have called you by name; you are mine.' God says through the prophet Isaiah. This sentence is preceded by another: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed

you'. God in Christ has indeed redeemed us, bought us with a price through His sacrifice on the cross. He has indeed bought us, we belong to Him.

Jesus himself calls us by name. As He spoke the name of Mary of Magdala in the garden of the tomb and revealed himself to her after his resurrection from the dead. As He spoke the name of Peter on the beach after the resurrection picnic of bread and fish and gave him a fresh start as His apostle and church leader. As He spoke the name of Saul on the road to Damascus and turned his life around. As He spoke to Helen Kim in the 1930s and gave her a vision of a world-wide movement of Methodist women working together for peace and justice. As He spoke to many women down through the ages, calling them into service for the kingdom. God has spoken to you and to me, calling us.

Let us respond with courage to God's call, knowing that we belong to the One who has overcome the sin of the world, the One who has a plan for our lives, the One who has bought us through the sacrifice of his own Son, the One who knows us completely and yet who forgives our failings and still wants to use us in the kingdom work of bringing justice and peace and fullness of life to all God's children. 'All God's children' includes those of other faiths, tribes, nationalities, ages, sexuality and colour. Each one was known by God before birth. God is their creator too.

I think that in each of the nations we represent, including my own, there are things going on that we would prefer not to think about. There is acute poverty in countries that also have great

riches. There is discrimination on the basis of gender and caste, and race, and faith. There are people who have been driven from their homes and children who have seen family members raped or slaughtered in front of their eyes. What is our response to such injustice? What is our responsibility as Christian women, called by name by the God of all creation? At Houston we sang, 'Who will speak if we don't?' Are we afraid to speak out? As women of the Federation we are called to 'Know Christ and to make Him known.'

Our role may be to speak out about the need for improvements in treatment of women in the home or the workplace; to speak out about the health issues surrounding water and sanitation; to speak out about the injustice of extreme poverty and hunger in countries whose leaders enjoy great wealth; to speak out about the unjust treatment of other human beings on the sole basis of their faith or race or tribe or caste. Let us take every opportunity to tell each other the good news of what God is doing in our midst and be encouraged. Let us also encourage each other to see how we can proclaim good news to those in our communities through our worship, our relationships and our engagement in social action. Let us do so without fear as we hear God's voice saying to each of us, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.'

*-Alison Judd*

## Ministries going on in South-East Asia together with challenges

### Ministries

### Challenges and motifs of prayer

Work to help people with sexually transmitted diseases, volunteering for Int'l Land Mine Ban INGO, work with different denominational and inter-denominational women's groups, music ministry, SDGs implementation. (Margarette MuMu Than, President of South-East Asia Area)	Hate speeches and hate crimes occurring in Myanmar, violence against women and children, splits among denominations.
Work for unity between the countries. (Sarojini Nagendran, President Emerita of South-East Asia)	The disengagement of Pakistan; everyone hoped for a better relation as someone wanted to come to the seminar, but no one showed up.
Work with women that are hurt and broken that have nowhere to turn to, women that have no-one with whom to share their stories and to listen, women that face domestic violence. (Evelyn Mercylin, Vice-President of South East Asia)	More awareness of women and children regarding domestic violence and more Church involvement in this problem; issues between the churches
Work with small children to raise faithful adults. (San Dar Aung, President of Myanmar Unit 1. All the volunteers and also women pastors were disciple by her and other women!)	The influence of the conference, leaders, church constitution.
Women's groups that are involved in society, trying to fulfil the needs of more than 20 churches; the "hairdressing ministry" through which women have their hair arranged and dyed and meantime they hear the Gospel. (Lily Chen, President of Myanmar Unit 2)	Myanmar's government, language difficulties in different areas of Myanmar, the lack of support for the women that are involved in the ministries (they need money for transportation and for organizing conferences and seminars).
Children's programs and the leprosy ministry in the Nant Tha Myaing, near Mandalay, where women donate clothes, blankets, money for the children of the lepers to be educated and offer a Christmas program and different courses for them to learn for example hairdressing and sewing. (Irene Khin San Myint, President of Myanmar Unit 3)	No young people want to work with people with leprosy, they are afraid they will catch the disease. The leprosy sufferers also need a clinic, as they are not admitted in the hospital.
Discipleship for women: seminars and one day rallies in three different languages, when they pray, have Bible teaching and workshops (about environment, health, breast cancer, mosquito diseases, etc.), Women's Sunday (women's leading service). They also help a women's mental hospital and an elderly home. (Rajini Jegasothy, Unit President, Methodist Women's Fellowship, Sri Lanka)	to mobilize people to be involved, especially young women.
Work with women and children involved in prostitution: they offer financial support to a rescue home and they visit the girls, they try to support them in schools and teach them different jobs, without revealing their true identity. (Susan Thomas, President of Church of South India Women's Fellowship)	The hardship of being involved in rescuing children and women from prostitution: the governmental requirements, the fact that many of them do not speak the language (they are foreign girls), they do not have ID or any papers.

## News about the HKMS of South-East Asia for year 2017

**Rebekah Eve Daniel** (India) has participated in different programs and conferences such as the School of Law, Christ University Conference 2017 on the Rights of Food with the paper "Analyses of the Legal Implications of Genetically Modified Food"; Ideathon for a Social Entrepreneurship with a team of two members; World Women's Studies Conference 2017 with the paper "The Feminist Approach to International Relations: A Critical Analysis of the Realist State and Global Justice"; Youth in Asia Training for Religious Amity (YATRA) and after this another meeting of the YATRA course of 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017 in order to build a network and develop an action plan; movements opposing injustice and celebrating freedom as a member of the Student Outpost and an internship at Alternative Law Forum which thought her to use her legal studies for activism. She has also published the article "Agricultural Land Acquisition under the Land Acquisition Act 2013: A Legal Analysis" in the Property and Law Journal.

**Tharika Rajapakse** (Sri Lanka) after returning from Houston, has spoken about the experience of the 13th World Assembly to her congregation and her circuit. Receiving the HKM scholarship has also blessed her with the opportunity to become the youngest Women's Fellowship Secretary of her church and she has organized many fundraising events to build up the funds for the Fellowship. She has also attended various programs conducted by the All Island Women's Fellowship. Meantime Tharika worked as a Sunday school teacher, as treasurer and as a member of a group that provided sanitation facilities for homeless teenagers due to natural disasters. In 2017, Tharika got married and moved to Dubai with her husband.

## An interview with Rhoda Linton



While I was at the South East Asia seminar I met Rhoda Linton, a lovely American lady, who first came to Myanmar as a missionary in 1959 for three years, then came back when it was time for her retirement in 2003 and from 2008 continues to come back every year.

She told me about the story of different women's NGO's that try to work together in order to help women in Myanmar: Triangle Women's Support Group led by Khin Lay that supports women, men and children, with the vision to have a safe, just, peaceful, gender equal, democratic society; Strong Flowers led by Dr. Thet Su Htwe that offers sexuality education services, with the vision to create gender equality and a safe environment; Myanmar Women's Self Defence Center led by Evelyn Yu Yu Swe.

Rhoda's involvement grew in 2015 when local NGO's wanted to do something regarding women's condition. Even though no one wants to talk about domestic violence, rape and other atrocities, these things happen. The first idea was to teach about sexuality and so, knowing their own bodies and reaching knowledge about men's body, women would gain confidence and value. But still, the problem of violence remained, so Rhoda proposed to expand the sexuality teaching, together with a self-defence programme. In order to implement these ideas, they have asked women from five villages of their interest. They received a satisfactory answer, but when the start day came, and they arrived in the gathering place, a lot of men were waiting and just four or five women. Men in the

village were curious to see what it is all about and if they should let women participate or not, but Rhoda and her women's group find in this situation an opportunity to work with men also. They started to teach, and the men were very receptive, so two groups were formed: one by men and one by women. The program was run in the village for six months: women gained confidence and men learnt that women's bodies are the same as men's (structurally) and women are not less human beings than men. The taboo subject of domestic violence was also brought into discussion and people admitted that it is happening in their own families, so Rhoda's group started to work on the people's mind set in order to change things. A first victory and reward appeared when a young handsome man from this first group screamed out loud: "Oh, teacher, thank you so much for this information which we never heard before. I'm so ashamed of me, because a girl told me in the University: "I'm equal with you (a man)" and I responded: "Let's fight!"...Now I see that we are equal"

Quickly, the movement expanded, from 10 women that were involved at the beginning, to 200 women groups now. Their wonderful achievements include: the "Women's Desire" campaign (see photo), a sexuality research (2011), "Whistle for help" campaign in which whistles were given away to women in order to use them when they are harassed, especially on transportation (the good thing was that a lot of men were involved in this campaign also), and "One billion rising", a campaign that promoted safety for women and rose against violence.

The desire of these precious women is to proceed with the "Open space project", where all the NGO's and groups can meet in the same building, where they can enrol in different courses, which will be offered by all to all, so everyone can teach, and everyone can learn something new.

*-Ligia Istrate*

## Announcement:

The World Officers met on Skype recently and one topic covered was the need to ensure all women have access to the Tree of Life newsletter, such an important source of communication for the Federation.

We realise that in some Units, many women do not have access to the internet and so are not getting to see it unless their Unit prints and distributes it each quarter. We want to help make this possible, and we are asking Unit Presidents to ensure an appropriate number of copies are printed locally for distribution. The cost of this printing and postage can be claimed from the Federation Budget if needed. You may wish to check the amount with the World Treasurer first.

Of course, we expect Area Presidents to continue to forward the Tree of Life electronically to the Unit leaders, and the Unit leaders to forward electronically to members where possible.

Thank you,

-Alison Judd

## The Bridge ~ a poem by Joy Cowley

*“There are times in life  
when we are called to be bridges,  
not a great monument spanning a distance  
and carrying loads of heavy traffic  
but a simple bridge  
to help one person from here to there  
over some difficulty  
such as pain, fear, grief, loneliness,  
a bridge which opens the way  
for ongoing journey.*

*When I become a bridge for another,  
I bring upon myself a blessing, for I escape  
from the small prison of self  
and exist for a wider world,  
breaking out to be a larger being*

*who can enter another's pain  
and rejoice in another's triumph.*

*I know of only one greater blessing  
in this life, and that is  
to allow someone else  
to be a bridge for me.”*

### Photo gallery of South-East Asia Seminar 2018



Weaving Together Program (In the middle- our president, Alison Judd, on her right, MuMu Than, the East-Asia President)



Four Helen Kim Memorial scholars (from left to right: former South East-Asia HKMS, former South Pacific HKMS and our World Secretary, present South East-Asia HKMS, present Europe Continental HKMS and our Tree of Life Editor)



Thursday in Black – at the Seminar

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## AREA SEMINARS

DATE	AREA	HOST VENUE	WEAVING TOGETHER PROGRAMME
30 <sup>th</sup> January – 5 <sup>th</sup> February 2018	SOUTH ASIA	YANGON, MYANMAR	29 <sup>th</sup> & 30 <sup>th</sup> January 2018
7 <sup>th</sup> – 10 <sup>th</sup> June 2018	JOINT EUROPE CONTINENTAL & BRITAIN AND IRELAND	BELFAST, IRELAND	5 <sup>th</sup> – 7 <sup>th</sup> June 2018
2 <sup>nd</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup> July 2018	SOUTH PACIFIC	NADI, FIJI	30 <sup>th</sup> June – 2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2018
10 <sup>th</sup> – 14 <sup>th</sup> September 2018	WEST AFRICA	ACCRA, GHANA	9 <sup>th</sup> & 10 <sup>th</sup> September 2018
TBC	NORTH AMERICA AND MCCA	TBC	TBC
27 <sup>th</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> March 2019	EAST ASIA	HONG KONG	25 <sup>th</sup> – 27 <sup>th</sup> March 2019
11 <sup>th</sup> – 14 <sup>th</sup> April 2019	LATIN AMERICA	BRAZIL	11 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> April 2019
28 <sup>th</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> November 2019	SOUTH & EAST AFRICA	KENYA	26 <sup>th</sup> – 27 <sup>th</sup> November 2019



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