



THE WORLD FEDERATION OF METHODIST AND UNITING CHURCH WOMEN

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The TREE —of LIFE

Mary's Challenge

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President's letter

Still Standing in God's Grace

As we come to the end of the year, we can all look back on moments that should have defeated us. Maybe it was a disagreement with someone, the loss of a loved one, personal illness, or the sickness of someone dear – things that could have taken you down. But look, you are still standing.

Our sisters in Jamaica, Haiti, Brazil, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Nigeria, and other nations endured terrible hurricanes and heavy storms that destroyed homes and churches and, tragically, claimed lives. Yet, some were saved and protected from these disasters and are still standing on firm ground. That is the goodness of God.

Because of a praying loved one somewhere, you are still here, standing. Some of you lost family members at a young age and wondered if you could go on. You thought you had seen your best days, but God breathed new life into you. He lifted you out of the pit, put a new song in your heart, and here you are today, still standing. May God set your feet upon a solid foundation, like a rock, providing security and stability in the times ahead.

When you go through difficult situations, sisters, it is an opportunity to see the goodness of God shine in the darkness of your circumstances. You will see Him lift you

up, restore you, promote you, and heal you. When you have a history with God, you are not discouraged by every difficulty. You do not fall apart because of disappointment. You know that God brought you through darkness in the past, and He will bring you through now and in the future.

Rejoice today because you are still standing and moving toward a place of total victory and healing.

MERRY CHRISTMAS! May the joy of Christ's birth fill your heart, and may your home be filled with His love and peace always.

- Sipiwe Chisvo, World President



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Editor's word:

Mary's Challenge

Mary, the mother of Jesus, bore a name deeply rooted in the story of Israel, a story marked by suffering, resilience, and hope. Her Hebrew name, Miriam, recalls not only Moses' sister, who witnessed God deliver His people from Egypt, but also the generations of Israelites who carried memories of exile, oppression, hope and divine rescue. Even the possible meanings of her name, "bitter," "rebellious," or "wished-for child", mirror the lived experience of the Jewish people, whose history was shaped by both hardship and longing. Egypt itself, once a land of bondage yet repeatedly a place of refuge for Israel, embodied this tension. Matthew later shows that Jesus' own life would echo Israel's story when the Holy Family fled to Egypt, fulfilling the words, "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1).

We know that this very young woman was visited by an angel and told that she would bear "the Son of the Most-High" (Luke 1:32). Scripture does not tell us exactly how much she understood in that moment. She believed God's word, yet the unfolding reality of who Jesus truly is – Lord, Messiah, Savior deepened throughout her life. Luke tells us that Mary "treasured" and "pondered" things in her heart (2:19, 2:51). This reveals her contemplative spirit: she may not have grasped every mystery, but she received, remembered, and reflected on all that God was doing.

And it is this same Mary who, upon visiting Elizabeth, bursts into a song that reveals an astonishing spiritual insight. The *Magnificat* is not the speech of a powerless girl, but the proclamation of a prophet. Echoing Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2, Mary sings: "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Her hymn celebrates the God who overturns human power structures, who brings down rulers, lifts up the lowly, feeds the hungry, and sends the rich away empty. This vision is breathtaking on its own, but even more extraordinary when seen against the backdrop of her world. In the Roman Empire, Caesar was hailed as "lord," "savior," and the bringer of "peace". Rome used these titles to proclaim that salvation came through imperial rule. Yet in an obscure Judean village, a young woman, likely no older than fourteen, quietly challenged that entire system. While Rome exalted Caesar as savior, Mary was carrying the true Savior in her womb. While the empire proclaimed Caesar as lord, Mary glorified the

Lord who would topple every earthly throne. While historically, the Roman Empire was in the *Pax Romana* period (the "Roman peace"), peace was about to be revealed in reality.

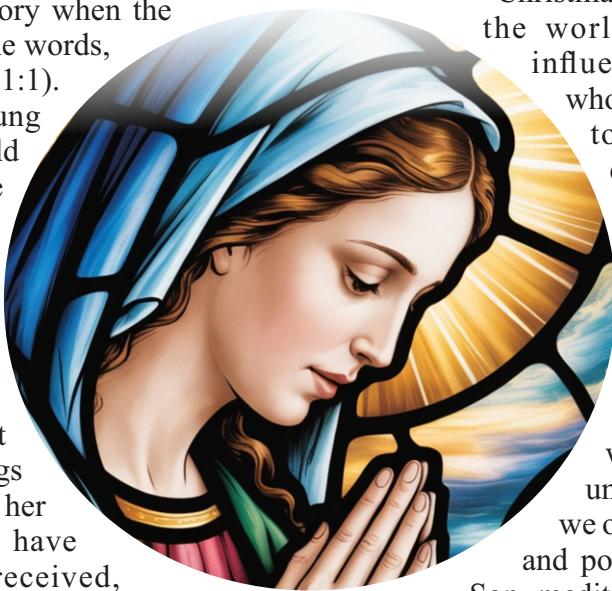
Her *Magnificat* becomes not only a personal song of gratitude, but a prophetic declaration that God was bringing a kingdom unlike anything the world had ever known.

In this way, Mary's song becomes a prophecy of her own life. Everything she proclaimed – God lifting the humble, reversing injustice, redeeming His people – unfolded in the life and ministry of the Son she raised. As she pondered the shepherds' words, the signs and wonders, and even the confusing moments (such as finding the young Jesus in the temple), Mary was watching her own prophetic hymn come true.

Christmas reminds us that God enters the world not through power or influence, but through people whose hearts are humble enough to receive His will. Mary embraced this truth. When the angel spoke to her, she answered with the simple yet world-shaping words: "Let it be to me according to Your word." Through her quiet surrender, God accomplished His greatest work. She may not have understood everything, just as we often do not, but she treasured and pondered the mysteries of her Son, meditating on what she heard and saw.

This is Mary's challenge to you and me today: not only to obey, but to continue to treasure and ponder the mysteries of Christ, so that He may be revealed to us in a new and magnificent way this Christmas.

- Ligia Istrate, Tree of Life Editor



Expecting a Miracle



My name is Connie Duncan, and my life is a story shaped by God's timing and His miracles.

I was born in 1951 in Tullahoma, Tennessee, the third child in a home marked by deep poverty and neglect. When our mother left us alone, my brother Gene (only five years old) tried his best to care for my sister Joyce (15 months old) and me (a newborn). He attempted to cook oatmeal the way he had seen our mother do, but the hot water spilled and burned his arm, leaving scars he carried for life. Another time, desperate to feed us, he searched through the trash and found nothing but banana peels.

After repeated reports from a concerned aunt, the Tennessee Department of Welfare placed us in foster care. I was placed with a young couple in Columbia, Tennessee. Under their care, I began to gain weight, learn to sit up and crawl, and eventually took my first steps. Their love and patience helped repair the damage caused in my earliest months of life. Just a few days after my first birthday, a doctor and his wife from Jackson, Tennessee, came to see me. The connection was immediate. They adopted me and raised me in a loving Christian home. I grew up knowing I had biological siblings somewhere,

and I longed for the miracle of reunion.

Nearly forty years later, in June 1990, that miracle happened. One evening, while casually reading the local newspaper, my eyes fell on a letter to the editor. In it were the names of three children, my siblings and me, listed exactly as they had been when we were taken into care. The shock was overwhelming. After decades of wondering, I finally had a trace, a clue, a place to start. I learned that my brother and sister had been adopted by a minister and his wife in East Tennessee. Miraculously, none of us had had our names changed, making it possible to identify one another so many years later.

More information quickly followed. I shared the story with a coworker and friend, Mickey. Mickey then shared it with her best friend, Donnie, while visiting Donnie's parents. Donnie's father immediately recognized the names in this extraordinary story. He retrieved the local newspaper, read the letter to the editor, and asked to meet me. Soon after, I was introduced to relatives from my biological family. Stories, photographs, and history that had been hidden from me began to unfold. Over time, I learned more about my mother (who had already passed away), my family background, and additional brothers and sisters I had never known existed—there were ten of us in total!

Many times, I wondered whether my mother ever thought of us after we were taken. But one of our sisters was named Joyce Marie, the middle name of both the little girls she left behind: Wilma Joyce (the 15-month-old) and me, Connie Marie. This was another miracle, a quiet answer from God: she did remember us, and she thought about us every day.

Never forget that God knows our heart's desires before we do. He tells us in Matthew 7:7-8: "Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps asking receives; he who keeps seeking finds; and to him who keeps knocking, the door will be opened."

Looking back, every moment of discovery: every name, every phone call, every connection, came exactly when it needed to. Not one step was forced or rushed. The story unfolded in God's own way, in His perfect timing.

And that, truly, is the miracle of my life.

- Connie Duncan, Johnston Methodist Church,
USA

The House of Christmas, *GK Chesterton* (1874–1936)

There fared a mother driven forth
Out of an inn to roam;
In the place where she was homeless
All men are at home.

The crazy stable close at hand,
With shaking timber and shifting sand,
Grew a stronger thing to abide and
stand
Than the square stones of Rome.

For men are homesick in their homes,
And strangers under the sun,
And they lay on their heads in a
foreign land
Whenever the day is done.
Here we have battle and blazing eyes,
And chance and honour and high
surprise,
But our homes are under miraculous
skies
Where the yule tale was begun.

A Child in a foul stable,
Where the beasts feed and foam;
Only where He was homeless
Are you and I at home;

We have hands that fashion and heads
that know,
But our hearts we lost - how long ago!
In a place no chart nor ship can show
Under the sky's dome.

This world is wild as an old wives' tale,
And strange the plain things are,
The earth is enough and the air is
enough
For our wonder and our war;
But our rest is as far as the fire-drake
swings
And our peace is put in impossible
things
Where clashed and thundered
unthinkable wings
Round an incredible star.

To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering
star,
To the things that cannot be and that
are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.



News

Butterfly Movement Service

The Butterfly Movement Service was held at Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission, London on 25th November 2025 by Methodist Women in Britain (MWiB) as part of the global 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women. The service highlighted the sobering reality that every ten minutes in 2023 a woman was killed worldwide, and that one in three women experiences violence in their lifetime.

The service was opened by Rev. Dr. Claire Potter, Minister at Wesley's Chapel, followed by a Statement of Intent from Rev. Leonora Wassell, Co-Chair of MWiB, affirming MWiB's commitment to stand with all those affected by gender-based violence. The Call to Worship invited the congregation to gather in gratitude, justice, and hope, and the opening hymn, "Beauty for Brokenness," set a powerful tone of compassion and transformation.

At the heart of the service were deeply moving survivor stories and creative reflections, including Tecla's Story, a poem by Rev. Mmasape Thathane-Tyolweni, Mary's Story read by Barbara Easton (WFUMCW Area President), Amina's Story read by Ruth Dawson

(MWiB Media Officer), and a musical reflection, "After the Fall" by Rosie Clements. A powerful Lament was led by Rev. Charity Tozivepi-Nzegwu, creating a sacred space for grief, truth-telling, and hope. Representatives from key survivor support organizations addressed the congregation, including Deacon Jenny Parnell, and Bekah Legg, underlining the importance of safeguarding, advocacy, and practical support.

The Bible readings, Isaiah 43:1–3 and Mark 5:25–34, emphasizing God's presence with those who suffer and the restoration of dignity, were read by Carolyn Godfrey, former Vice President of the Methodist Conference of Britain. The sermon, delivered by Rev. Michaela Youngson, Assistant Secretary of Conference, challenged the Church to be a place of sanctuary, courage, justice, and transformation.

Prayers of thanksgiving were led by Karen Allen from the Connexional Safeguarding Team, and prayers of intercession by Olive Ruvimbo Ruzvidzo, Co-Chair of MWiB. The service concluded with a vote of thanks and blessing, followed by fellowship and refreshments provided by the London District MWiB. Sincere thanks were expressed to Wesley's Chapel & Leysian Mission for hosting.

This powerful service affirmed that no one should live in fear because of their gender, and renewed the Church's commitment to speak out, challenge injustice, and stand alongside survivors, locally and globally. We were delighted to welcome people from across the Connexion as well as those joining us via live-stream.

- Leonora Wassell, Co-Chair, Methodist Women in Britain



Growing in Grace

Conference; Ms. Evelyn Sim, President of the General Conference Methodist Women of the Methodist Church in Malaysia; Mrs. Mary Devadason, East Asia Area President; and Mrs. Vinsala Jesudass, President of the Tamil Annual Conference Methodist Women.

Past presidents and all those who had served on the Executive Committee over the past 50 years were honored with special gifts. Together, they also cut the 50th Anniversary cake. The current Executive members graced the occasion, wearing matching sarees, adding to the unity and festive spirit of the celebration.

The celebration was followed by a Grand Gala Dinner, featuring about ten different types of sumptuous, finger-licking dishes, along with ice cream and masala tea. Around 350 women and pastors joined to make the event truly empowering.

After dinner, there was a time of stage performances, where the women showcased their talents through singing, dancing, acting, comedy sketches, news reading, and more.

As Methodist Women, we celebrate 50 years of God's faithfulness and favor. For this, we are eternally grateful to the Almighty. Our motto, "To Know Christ and To Make Him Known," has guided us through the past half-century, during which many lives have been



September, 2025 at the Port Dickson Methodist Centre.

It was a joyous time of celebration, for the Lord has made us grow in grace over the past 50 years. We truly praise God!

The celebration began with a Thanksgiving Worship Service, which included songs of praise, Scripture reading, and a special song presentation by the executive committee members. The highlight of the day was the message delivered by our Bishop, Dr. T. Jeyakumar, based on Hebrews 12:1-2: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith: who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The 50th Thanksgiving Celebration was declared open by Bishop Dr. T. Jeyakumar. Joining him were Rev. Dr. Dennis Raj, President of the Tamil Annual



touched and transformed by His power.

We praise God for the countless acts of goodness and mercy showered upon us unconditionally. Thank You, Lord, for Your grace!

With Love and Blessings,

- Mary Devadason, East Asia Area President

ANNOUNCEMENT

We are excited to share that preparations for the
15th World Assembly of the
World Federation of Methodist & Uniting Church Women
are well underway!

25th - 30th August 2026
Due Drop Events Centre
Auckland, New Zealand

- **Registration is NOW open!!**
- Early bird registration at **USD 1,100** until **12th March 2026**.
After this date, the fee will be **USD 1,250**.
- **Registration includes lunches and dinners at the venue.**
- **Spaces are limited and will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.**

Begin planning and watch for the registration link on our website and Facebook page.
This Assembly promises to be a time of worship, prayer, fellowship, and renewal
as we gather from around the world.

May the Lord guide us as we prepare for this blessed event.

With love and blessings,

*- Sipiwe Chisvo,
World President*



WORLD EXECUTIVE 2022 – 2026 CONTACT DETAILS

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



www.wfmucw.org



Editor: Ligia Istrate

ligiaistrate@gmail.com

Cover design, interior
design:
Cristian Istrate

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