

# Monthly Update

April 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

How quickly things can change! Who would have thought just a short thirty days ago that there would be people in our country who were under quarantine? We are, and now it numbers in the millions! This Monthly Update contains information dealing with the Coronavirus that seems to be at the center of the apparent crisis in our country. One of the things that has resulted is postponement of the 2020 General Conference (GC2020) that was to have been held starting May 5<sup>th</sup> possibly on into 2021. It is best for all of us.

One thing I observe is the contrast between how the H1N1 (Swine Flu) in 2009-2010 was handled by the media and its effect on the public; for statistics, please review this brief “Corona Virus comparison with H1N1 Virus (Swine Flu)” in the “Of Interest” section of this Update. We are not politically active, but one cannot help but notice differences. Also included is a page on prayer, specifically Psalm 91, with suggestions as to how you might include it in your prayer life. On that sheet are examples of how it played out in different combat situations. It has been called the “Soldier’s Psalm” because it has been prayed by countless thousands of servicemen for over a hundred years. These are just a few of the testimonies as to the protective power enjoyed by some who either memorized the psalm or carried a copy with them into battle, then read it regularly. It is only appropriate that we get involved in the spiritual battle and would pray at this time of emergency in the history of our church, our families and our country.

I ask that each of us commit to pray this on a daily basis, as you can. I ask people to, either as a family or individually, open your Bible, get on your knees (if you are able), and pray it aloud to our Heavenly Father. He is still in the “miracle business” and hears our prayers. This would be good for all of us to do. If I might share how I do this, after reading it aloud, I pray for a “Psalm 91 hedge of protection around our country against the effects of this virus and against the spirit of fear and panic”; also I pray for President Trump, “A hedge of protection around him against all physical and spiritual attacks, and for You to guide him in the decisions he needs to make.” (All as I am on my knees. By way of information, I have prayed for all of our presidents since 1992.) We can pray for those who transport much-needed food across our country, “first responders” and health personnel. To reiterate, we in Concerned Methodists do not engage in political activism, rarely discuss politics, nor worry about who belongs to what political party. By way of information, I belong to neither, choosing to be “Independent” in affiliation.

Reading these testimonies from both World War I and World War II will encourage you in this prayer. I think it would be comforting for us at this time of national concern.

We need to do our part and pray – not only for this “pandemic” but also for the situation that we face in our United Methodist Church.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris,  
Executive Director

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## April 2020 Update

### **Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church**

“Let us remember, it is in our crisis time that the 'still voice' of the Lord speaks to our troubled hearts and if we listen, it saves us.” [Well spoken] – The Rev. George K. Weagba of Liberia on the postponement of General Conference.

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#### **The Good Stuff**

+ **Coronavirus**. In three short months, just like He did with the plagues of Egypt, God has taken away everything we worship. God said, “You want to worship athletes, I will shut down the stadiums. You want to worship musicians, I will shut down Civic Centers. You want to worship actors, I will shut down theaters. You want to worship money, I will shut down the economy + collapse the stock market. You don’t want to go to church and worship Me, I will make it where you can’t go to church.” Maybe we don’t need a vaccine; maybe we need to take this time of isolation from the distractions of the world and have a personal revival where we focus on the ONLY thing in the world that really matters. Jesus.

“If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

– Posted on Facebook; Mar 23, 2020.

#### + ***Small churches undaunted by virus challenges.***

DALLAS (UM News) – Whether it’s making an online preaching debut or changing a food pantry delivery to drive-thru, small United Methodist churches and their pastors are scrambling along with everyone else because of coronavirus-related restrictions. One pastor has turned to low-watt FM radio to reach church members without internet.

– Sam Hodges; United Methodist News Service (UMNS) Weekly Digest; Mar. 20, 2020.

+ **Coronavirus – spiritual warfare**. “The virus we cannot see.” That’s how the Coronavirus was described at Monday’s White House press briefing by Ambassador Debbie Birx, scientist and physician who is an expert in infectious disease and vaccine research. That’s why she has been appointed to the position of Coronavirus Response Coordinator. She understands how these types of unseen things work. We have an invisible enemy, however, that goes far beyond what can be seen under a microscope. President Donald Trump also said, “We have an invisible enemy.” Although he holds the most powerful position in the world, this unseen world operates far above him. This spiritual reality is in Ephesians 6:12:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

We have an unseen enemy who means to destroy us. There is no doubt about it. But God is sovereign, and He loves us with an immensity we cannot possibly understand. What Satan means for evil, God means for good. And let’s just be clear. Everything Satan does is saturated in evil. Whatever is allowed into this world, we can be assured God intends to use it for good – including this global pandemic known as the Coronavirus, or COVID-19.

What if He plans to wake up the church ushering in revival?

I cannot think of a better time for the church to go into the prayer closet and put Ephesians 6:10-11 into action:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

I don’t mean, necessarily, the type of armor that will protect you from the virus. There is enough instruction out there about that. This is spiritual armor – for those who have surrendered to the lordship of Christ.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel ... (Ephesians 6:13-19).

What if we would allow this pandemic to be used to change us? What if the slowing down caused us listen, to heed the still small voice, to bring us to our knees, to humble [ourselves], and pray and seek [His] face and turn from [our] wicked ways (2 Chronicles 7:14)? Would He then, “hear from heaven and forgive [our] sin and heal [our] land?”

– American Family Association, P O Drawer 2440. Tupelo, MS 38803

+ ***Coronavirus charity, “no rent” by landlord.***

JONESBORO, Ark. – As more and more restaurants make the difficult decision to close or change the way they do business, one Jonesboro property owner wants to make it a bit easier for them. Young Investment Company announced Tuesday night on social media it would “not expect its restaurant tenants to pay April rent.” Instead of paying rent, Clay Young urged owners to “pay your employees and take care of your family. We will get through this together.”

“This is a new experience for everyone,” said Karl Lowe, co-owner and executive chef at Roots. More people staying home means less money in the restaurants’ pockets, and that of their employees. Restaurant owners appreciate landlord’s advice to ‘pay employees’ instead of rent. The company’s downtown Jonesboro properties house several of the area’s favorite restaurants including Eleanor’s Pizzeria, Roots, Main Street Coffee, The Parsonage, and City Wok.

“This past weekend, we saw a 60 percent cut in attendance in what we were bringing in revenue.”

– Posted by Young Investment Company, L.L.C on Tuesday, March 17; as reported by Region 8 KAIT News; March 18.

+ ***Coming from China virus, good can happen – Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban.***

DALLAS – Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban said he and his team will do their part to help the community during the coronavirus pandemic. Cuban promised to pay all hourly workers at the American Airlines Center for games missed while the NBA’s season is suspended. He also promised to pay day care expenses for some health care workers. “We just finished a program with the Mavs and Luka Doncic, Dwight Powell and some of our players where we’re going to pay for health care... um day care for health care workers. So people can go to work knowing their kids are taken care of. And those day care workers, we’re going to work with different organizations that can check them out and all that. But that’s going to be new jobs as well. So people who may not have had jobs before now will not only be able to get jobs but we’ll have them working with day care organizations so health care workers can go to work knowing their kids are okay,”

– Cuban said in an interview; Fox TV, Ch 4; CNN; Mar 21, 2020.

+ ***Project provides water to mountain homes.***

SNEEDVILLE, Tenn. – The United Methodist Jubilee Water Project builds about three wells each year in Hancock County, where many residents don’t have access to clean, safe water. The project, a mission of the Holston Conference, also helps with indoor plumbing. “The need for water here is amazing. People living up in the ‘hollers’ even today lack access to clean, fresh water,” said Lisa Nichols, director of the project.

[Note: It seems hard to believe that there is such a fundamental need here in our own country – but there is. –

AOM]

– Christie R. House; UM News Weekly Digest; Mar. 20, 2020.

+ ***American Help Arrives in Italy – Samaritan’s Purse.*** The coronavirus pandemic continues to grow throughout Italy – especially in Northern Italy. The numbers show 41,035 cases, an increase of 5,322. With a 14% increase in 1 day, we still have a growing threat. There have also been 3,405 deaths. The good news is that there have been 4,440 recoveries (up 10%). Part of the challenge is there are 15,757 in hospitals (up 9%) including 2,498 in intensive care units (up 10%). It is the shortage of hospital beds – and especially ICU beds – that make the fight against the virus in Northern Italy extremely difficult. In this challenging environment, Samaritan’s Purse, flew into Northern Italy from the United States this week.

+ ***Youth make blankets for kids in foster care.***

PERRY, Ga. – Youth at Perry United Methodist Church spent a recent evening cutting, tying and worshipping. Above all, they shared the love of Christ as they made 20 blankets to give to children who will be entering the foster care system.

– Kara Witherow, South Georgia Conference; UM News Weekly Digest; Mar. 20, 2020.

### **Of Interest.**

+ ***Corona Virus comparison with H1N1 Virus (Swine Flu).***

President Trump. Corona Virus statistics, March 25<sup>th</sup>: US cases–55,000; US deaths–700; panic level–fear, hoarding, etc.

President Obama. H1N1 Virus: US Cases – 60.8 million; 274,304 people required hospitalization for virus, according to the CDC (another source I had seen cited “over 300,000”); US Deaths – 12,469; panic level – relatively calm. (A liberal news source cited “Swine flu sickened 57 million Americans” from NBC News February 12, 2010).

In monitoring this situation, it does seem that there has been unequal treatment in the way these two situations have been handled and publicized with preferential treatment being given in one case versus the other. Sandy Rios, a talk-show host on American Family Radio Network, is also suspicious of the figures as are others; she made the point that with a lot of these statistics being hyped by the news media, there have been very few names being released and people identified.

+ ***We Need to Test Everybody.*** In a small town in Northern Italy, Vo Euganeo, they tested all 3,300 residents and then asked everyone to stay home. They experienced a 90% drop in cases. What can we learn about stopping the spread here?

+ ***World War II vet offers perspective on pandemic.***

DALLAS – As a 94-year-old World War II veteran, John Gould has seen his share of hard times. The faithful United Methodist shared with Dallas Morning News columnist Sharon Grigsby his advice for coping with the coronavirus: “Take it easy, pray for each other and look after your neighbors, even if you don’t know them that well – especially those who are lonely or really fragile.”

– Dallas Morning News; UM News Weekly Digest; Mar. 20, 2020

### **A Way Forward.**

[Note: Since we are giving coverage of the Corona Virus and include the “Psalm 91” prayer page at the end, our coverage of GC2020 will be summarized in this Update; additionally, with so much uncertainty at this point. – AOM]

+ ***Church leaders postpone 2020 General Conference.***

MINNEAPOLIS (UM News) — With the global impact of the coronavirus, General Conference organizers decided they have no choice but to postpone the denomination's legislative assembly. The venue that was scheduled to host is canceling large events through the first five days of the big meeting.

The Council of Bishops executive committee requested postponement March 13 in response to the life-threatening virus and increasing travel restrictions that might prevent nearly half of the delegates from reaching

the U.S. About 43% of the 2020 General Conference's 862 delegates come from Africa, Europe or the Philippines.

Bishop Bruce R. Ough, who leads the Minnesota and Dakotas conferences, is a member of the bishops' executive committee and also has urged churches in his area to suspend in-person worship. "I believe the safety of the delegates and the fairness of the conference's legislative processes are paramount," Ough said. "The Dakotas-Minnesota Area has worked very hard to extend extraordinary hospitality to the General Conference delegates and guests. If the Conference is postponed, there would, of course, be disappointment. However, this disappointment would not dampen the area's openness to working with the Commission on the General Conference to reschedule the event in Minneapolis."

"We also want to do all that is within our power to ensure that all delegates are fully able to participate in the many important decisions we are currently facing as a church," they said. Under The United Methodist Church's constitution, General Conference is to meet every four years "at such time and in such place" as determined by General Conference itself or "by its duly authorized committees."

The General Conference commission, which is elected at General Conference, is that duly authorized committee. Only the full commission is able to set a new date or decide on an alternate plan. "This news is not unexpected based on the current guidance from health officials and we expect to move forward with new plans as quickly as possible," said Kim Simpson, chair of the Commission.

The 10-day international legislative meeting resembles a session of the U.S. Congress with elements of a United Nations general assembly. Multiple interpreters work with hundreds of delegates throughout the gathering to translate proceedings. During the first week of General Conference, delegates meet simultaneously in different legislative committees – 14 were planned for this year. The delegates then come together to vote in plenary during the second week. All votes are by secret ballot, using secure voting devices of limited range. Many delegates come from countries where internet connections are unreliable, if available at all. The logistics of General Conference involve obtaining hundreds of visas and reserving hotel rooms, flights and the venue needed for more than 1,000 people.

General Conference organizers and the bishops acknowledge the legislative assembly scheduled this year comes at a particularly sensitive time for the church. United Methodists have submitted multiple proposals to resolve the denomination's longtime debate over homosexuality by splitting the denomination. General Conference also faces other critical decisions such as setting the four-year budget and electing numerous leaders including the members of the Judicial Council, the denomination's top court. – Heather Hahn; UM News Weekly Digest; Mar. 20, 2020

+ ***In GC2020 delay, leaders see needed pause.*** With COVID-19 upending General Conference plans, proposals to split the denomination are on hold. However, the work of the church goes on – perhaps needed more than ever. That's the assessment of a number of church leaders following the announcement that public health concerns require postponement of the denomination's top lawmaking assembly that was scheduled for May. New dates are still to be determined.

"I hope the delegates can use this time to completely forget about General Conference for a while, to be honest. That is certainly my plan!" said the Rev. Andy Bryan, Missouri Conference delegate and lead pastor of Manchester United Methodist Church in Missouri. "I hope we use this time to do ministry, share the love of God and continue to be the church that God is calling us to be," he added. Bryan and other delegates who spoke with UM News agreed the postponement was necessary, given the global health emergency and related travel restrictions. However, they also spoke of the need to prayerfully use this slowdown in church decision-making.

"The postponement of the General Conference for me is one of disappointment and blessing," said the Rev. George K. Weagba, a veteran GC delegate and vice president at the United Methodist University of Liberia. The disappointment, he said, is that it delays decisions about staying or leaving the denomination, and worries that could lead to paralysis of ministry...he also sees...that God has something better in mind for the people called Methodist. "Let us remember," he said, "it is in our crisis time that the 'still voice' of the Lord speaks to our troubled hearts and if we listen, it saves us."

The Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai, a Michigan Conference delegate, shared that sentiment. She found it instructive that the General Conference takes its theme from Psalm 46, which describes God as a refuge when the world falls apart. “We’re told at the end of the psalm, ‘Be still and know that I am God,’” she said. “That is what I hope delegates would do.” She is top executive of the Connectional Table that coordinates the ministries of general church agencies. She noted the denomination has long committed to advancing global health and ministering with people in economic distress. “This is precisely the time when the vibrant witness of our Christ-centered and mission-focused connectional church is most urgently needed and vitally important,” she and leaders of the denomination’s 13 general agencies said in a statement.

United Methodist leaders have been preparing for possible separation to resolve the denomination’s dispute over same-sex marriage and LGBTQ ordination. In the past three weeks, three different groups of United Methodists have met to discuss plans for what a separate future might look like. Now church leaders across the theological spectrum see more immediate concerns, and the spread of COVID-19 puts large gatherings out of the question.

As of March 20, Johns Hopkins University – which is tracking cases – reported that the coronavirus had infected more than 246,000 people and killed more than 10,000 worldwide. The United States has more than 14,000 cases, with a death toll topping 200. With the virus imperiling lives and the quarantines putting people out of work, Bigham-Tsai said, the church has a crucial role to play. In many parts of the global church, people are under lockdown. The Rev. Lilibeth Balagan, the delegation head for the Northeast Philippines Conference, said even visits to the market in her area require permission from authorities. She supports the strong measures as well as the General Conference postponement. But she called on the church to “help the most vulnerable.”

Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, who is the incoming Council of Bishops president, said the pause in church proceedings can help with priorities. “This is a time to care for one another even at a distance,” said Harvey, who also leads the Louisiana Conference. “Neighboring has never been more important.” Harvey is among the Council of Bishops executive committee that on March 13 asked General Conference organizers to postpone the international meeting. The Minneapolis Convention Center, which was scheduled to hold the gathering, then announced that it was canceling events through May 10 – taking the decision out of organizers’ hands. The shutdown covers the first five days of the denomination’s 10-day meeting, which was set to draw 862 delegates, 66 bishops and others from four continents. The convention center’s move also means that church leaders will not have to pay penalties for breach of contract.

The Commission on the General Conference is meeting by teleconference March 21 to discuss next steps. Still, there is no question that the postponement creates even more uncertainty. Jay Brim, a Rio Texas Conference lay delegate and lawyer who also serves as conference chancellor, said he worries about the effect on churches and church members already contemplating leaving the denomination and planning to decide soon after the May meeting. “The primary concern I have is that there are a lot of people who are going to say, ‘I’m not willing to wait any longer.’” He also wonders whether the virus will prevent other church gatherings from going on as planned. United Methodists in the Philippines, Côte d’Ivoire and Germany already have postponed 19 annual conferences indefinitely.

Judicial Council President Oswald Tweh announced March 20<sup>th</sup> it was postponing its April 29-May 2 meeting in Minneapolis due to the ongoing coronavirus threat. “Timely notice will be given of the new date,” he said.

The Rev. Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan, a California-Nevada Conference delegate and president of Claremont School of Theology, is concerned that United Methodist seminaries will be delayed in their hope for an inclusive denomination.

He also warned that the rescheduling of General Conference could delay needed Ministerial Education Fund contributions to the United Methodist seminaries. General Conference approves the 4-year budget for the general church.

Meanwhile, Bethany Amey is planning to use Zoom and FaceTime to stay in touch with fellow members of the Greater New Jersey Conference delegation, which she chairs. “It’s even more important now for our group to be connected to one another, in whatever form that takes,” she said.

Bishop Kenneth Carter, Council of Bishops president and leader of the Florida Conference, said the denomination continues to face a time in the wilderness. “The wilderness is a time when things are stripped back to their basics,” he said. “The rabbis called it the school of the soul, and I think it’s a time when the church rediscovers what we are.”

In facing the unknown, church members can take comfort that Jesus already has spent his own soul-testing time in the wilderness – a time that the novelist Jim Crace called “Quarantine.”

Bryan, the Missouri Conference delegate, sees the potential in this time of social distance that church members will rediscover what binds them together. “I pray that this pandemic helps us to realize that our theological differences are not as significant as they may have seemed,” he said. “Maybe we will figure out after this that we really are all one in Christ Jesus, like Scripture tells us we are.” – Heather Hahn and Sam Hodges United Methodist news; March 20, 2020.

**Abortion, Assisted Suicide, Euthanasia & Other Life Issues. *Abortion industry's response to COVID-19.***

In response to the COVID-19 virus pandemic, hospitals, and other primary care facilities are rightly focused on this medical emergency. Federal and state governments have called for all elective surgeries to be rescheduled in order to ensure care for those in immediate need and to free up vital resources to treat those impacted by COVID-19. The abortion industry is ignoring this call and instead is working to ensure there is no interruption in the destruction of unborn babies. The pro-abortion American College of Gynecologists and Obstetricians even issued the following outrageous statement:

*To the extent that hospital systems or ambulatory surgical facilities are categorizing procedures that can be delayed during the COVID-19 pandemic, abortion should not be categorized as such a procedure.*

The vast majority of abortions are elective procedures; despite calls for all elective procedures to be postponed, abortion clinics are conducting business as usual. As hospitals struggle to provide care, find supplies to protect doctors, nurses, patients, and other hospital personnel, abortion clinics are endangering staff and patients in those same communities.

– Carol Tobias, President, National Right to Life Committee, Inc., Washington, DC

**(UM) General Board of Global Ministries. *Mission agency elects new top executive.***

ATLANTA – A longtime staff executive for the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries has been elected to lead the mission agency of the denomination beginning this fall. Roland Fernandes, a layman originally from India, was elected by the agency’s directors on March 20. He will succeed Thomas Kemper, who has chosen not to stand for reelection to the position he has held for a decade. – By Elliott Wright; March 20, 2020.

**Homosexuality. *“It’s Not Gay to Straight. It’s Lost to Saved”:* God Radically Transformed Her**

Emily Thomes was 15 when she started dating a girl who lived down the street from her. Shortly after, she came home with a hickey that her dad spotted. Without hesitation, she told her father, “I love her. It’s a girl...and this is how it is.” She serial dated women for years, fully justifying her actions by twisting Christianity into a religion that fit her lifestyle. Like many in today’s culture, she used a “liberal” version of the Gospel that said, “God being love meant God was nice and God was chill with what you were cool with.” Her mantra was “judge not.” She...believed that if you were really a Christian, you were on her side, and if not, you were a legalist who needed to reread what God was really all about. At the age of 22, God completely changed her “backward thinking” and misconceptions about His character. Emily then went straight to her Bible to read God’s Word with fresh eyes. “That day it’s like my eyes were really opened. I was amazed at the grace He’d shown me,” says Emily. For the first time, she realized she had it all wrong. Along with the drunkards and other sinners, she saw that those who engaged in homosexuality were also on the list of those who wouldn’t enter the kingdom of God. Thankfully, the following verse offered hope for her redemption – along with all those who would repent of their sinful nature, by the blood of Jesus Christ.

“People say to me all the time, ‘I was born this way.’ I say ‘okay yeah me too,’” says Emily of her romantic affections toward women. “You’re not born with right affections. That’s why Jesus had to come. You feeling a desire to sin just proves you need grace like me. It’s not gay to straight, it’s lost to saved. God calls us not to heterosexuality but to holiness. Even though the world would paint a totally different story about what sexuality is and isn’t, God’s word is clear, and He can save, and He does...and He will.” – Kelsey Straeter, as told by Emily Thomes; May 10, 2019.

**(UM) Men. *Latest issue of UMMen magazine available.***

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The theme of the Spring 2020 issue of UMMen, the magazine of United Methodist Men, is “What Are We Fighting For?” In the midst of debates on the future direction of the denomination, the issue previews the major proposals coming to General Conference, but also contains tips on men's ministry, as the need to reach out to men and youth will continue no matter what is decided. – Gil Hanke, GCUMM; UM News Weekly Digest; Mar. 20, 2020

**(UM) Women/Women’s Issues.**

**+ *Changes planned for 2 UMW spring events.***

NEW YORK – In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, United Methodist Women announced changes for two major program events scheduled for April through May. The organization plans to reschedule four of its five quadrennial jurisdiction events and is exploring online distance-learning resources for those registered for its national Mission U training events for conference study leaders. – UM News Weekly Digest; Mar. 20, 2020

## Global Outlook

Always do what is right – not what is easy. ~ As quoted by Pennsylvania representative Stephanie Borowitz, who had prayed “in the name of Jesus” before the Pennsylvania state assembly

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**Nigeria. *Solar lamps help clergy, students in Nigeria.***

KARIM MAUNDI, Nigeria (UM News) – The four conferences of the Nigeria Episcopal Area received hundreds of solar systems in February to be used in United Methodist churches, homes and schools. The solar products were provided by the United Methodist German Mission Board, which has a partnership with the episcopal area.

– Ramson Danjuma and Daniel Garba; UM News Weekly Digest; Mar. 20, 2020.

**Sierra Leone. *Ebola offers lessons in fighting coronavirus.***

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone (UM News) – While Sierra Leone does not have any confirmed coronavirus cases yet, the government and United Methodist leaders and hospitals are taking precautionary measures in the wake of the country's years-long battle with Ebola.

– Phileas Jusu; UM News Weekly Digest; Mar. 20, 2020

**Venezuela. *Partners in relief for Venezuelan migrants.***

The exodus of people from Venezuela has now exceeded 4.6 million. The United Methodist Committee on Relief has partnered with Methodist churches in Peru, Colombia and Brazil to help meet the needs of arriving Venezuelan migrants. Many migrants they encounter are women – often pregnant – along with children and families separated from loved ones.

– Christie R. House; UM News Weekly Digest; Mar. 20, 2020.

**+ *Living the legacy in India.***

LUCKNOW, India – Educating girls was not a very popular idea in India in 1870, so when Isabella Thoburn opened a simple classroom for six girls in a mud-walled room, she posted a guard at the door with a big club.



Today, Isabella Thoburn College remains a premier school for young women in India and is supported by United Methodist Women members' mission giving. – Paul Jeffrey; UM News Weekly Digest; Mar. 20, 2020.

**Philippines. *Coronavirus disrupts 17 Filipino annual conference sessions.***

MANILA, Philippines – Seventeen annual conference sessions in the Philippines have been postponed indefinitely due to the threat of the coronavirus. Half the country is on lockdown after a strict home quarantine was placed on the main island of Luzon on Monday to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, which started to spread around the world in January. The move was an expansion of a lockdown of Metropolitan Manila that went into effect over the weekend, placing bans on public gatherings and movement in and out of the city. According to the Philippines Department of Health, there have been 187 cases of the coronavirus in country as of Tuesday, with 14 deaths.

Due to the community quarantine imposed through April 14, five Manila Episcopal Area annual conference sessions have been postponed indefinitely – Middle Philippines, South Nueva Ecija, Palawan, South West Philippines and Philippines. Some 2020 annual conferences in the episcopal area were held before the imposed quarantine, while another is scheduled for further out and will be decided on later. Bishop Ciriaco Q. Francisco of the Manila Area said that the postponements are in compliance with the declaration of health emergency from the World Health Organization and the call of Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte. “I postponed all annual conferences in the Manila Episcopal Area within the lockdown period. Public gathering is hereby discouraged to avoid physical contact with people and observe social distancing within 1 meter,” he said.

– By Gladys P. Mangiduyos, UM News; March 17, 2020

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I love our sense of humor. With “quarantines” + mothers now homeschooling their kids, some of the pictures I’ve seen: Forest Gump: “And just like that, nobody ever asked a stay-at-home mom what she does all day ever again.”

An “Uncle Sam” poster with Donald Trump’s face, “I want YOU to wash your hands.”

Neil Diamond singing “Sweet Caroline” with updated words: “Hands...washing hands...Reaching out. Don’t touch me.”

Homeschool day 1: “Wondering how I can get this kid transferred out of my class.”

Now that school is closed, my kids will be taking: AP chores, Honors yard work, Dishwashing 101, Honors laundry

I asked a Walmart worker where I could find the nuts. He said, “They’re in the toilet paper aisle.”

If you see me talking to myself, don’t interfere. I’m have a “Parent-teacher” conference!

Four St. Bernard dogs: rather than a little keg around each of their necks, they each have a roll of toilet paper.

A picture of a mom sitting at a computer doing her work – and three kids, gagged and tied, hands & feet, on the floor.

In the Post Office, 3 people came in wearing masks. We panicked! They said, “This is a robbery!” We all calmed down.

Saw my neighbor scraping the “My Kid is a Terrific Student” sticker off her car. Guess homeschooling didn’t go so well.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This information is taken from a book I had edited entitled *Hometown Heroes*, in honor of our men and women in military service. I think it might be comforting to us at this time of national concern. One thing I would advise people – you – to do is to open your Bible, get down on your knees (if you are able), and to pray this out loud to our Heavenly Father. He is still in the “miracle business” – and He does hear our prayers.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris

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**Psalm 91**

Psalm 91 has been called the “Soldier’s Psalm”: it offers comfort in the midst of stressful situations. Assuredly, combat is a time of danger and stress. Appropriately, Psalm 91 is here for you to consider and pray.

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“Those who live in the shelter of the Most High  
will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

This I declare about the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.

For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from  
deadly disease. He will cover you with his feathers.  
He will shelter you with his wings.

His faithful promises are your armor and protection.  
Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night,  
nor the arrow that flies in the day.

Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness,  
nor the disaster that strikes at midday.

Though a thousand fall at your side, though ten thousand are dying around you, these evils will not touch you.  
Just open your eyes, and see how the wicked are punished.

If you make the Lord your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague  
will come near your home.  
For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go.

They will hold you up with their hands  
so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.  
You will trample upon lions and cobras;  
you will crush fierce lions and serpents under your feet!

The Lord says, ‘I will rescue those who love me.  
I will protect those who trust in my name.  
When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble.  
I will rescue and honor them.  
I will reward them with a long life and give them my salvation.’”

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**Psalm 91 in Action\***

Psalm 91 has been called the “Soldier’s Psalm” because it has been prayed by countless thousands of servicemen for almost a hundred years. There are testimonies as to the protective power enjoyed by some who either memorized the psalm or carried a copy with them into battle, then read it regularly.

While I was in Fairbanks, Alaska, I met and spoke with a husky soldier who was in uniform and returning to his duty station in Iraq. I asked if I could pray with him. After he assented, I laid my hand on his right shoulder, we both bowed our heads, and I prayed. After I’d finished, I reached into a bag, got out a “Psalm 91 Bandana” – a scarf in desert camouflage with the words from Psalm 91 written on it that could also protect him from the sun, and gave it to him.

Here are just a few of the testimonies that go with Psalm 91 protection:

### **The Miracle of Prayer**

F. W. Rawlinson, the noted engineer and one of England’s greatest scientists, narrates an account of a British regiment under the command of Colonel Whittlesey who served in World War I for more than five years without losing a man. This unparalleled record was made possible by means of the active cooperation of the officers and men, all of whom memorized and repeated regularly the words of the 91<sup>st</sup> Psalm, which has been called the “Psalm of Protection.”

By constant reiteration and repetition of the truths contained in Psalm 91, the men in Colonel Whittlesey’s regiment acquired the feeling of being watched over by an Overshadowing Presence. By repetition, faith, and expectancy, these truths sank down into their subconscious mind, bringing about an inner conviction of Divine protection at all times. This is one of the miracles of Psalm 91 prayer.<sup>1</sup>

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### **The Chaplain at Dunkirk**

During World War II in May 1940, a large military force of Allied troops was trapped on the beach at Dunkirk by the German Army. Many of the British Army soldiers, armed only with their rifles, were lying on the sand, exposed, pinned down by Nazi planes and heavy artillery. The troops were trapped with their backs to the English Channel and no place to run for protection. A British chaplain told of lying face down in the shell-torn beach sand at Dunkirk for what seemed an eternity. Nazi planes dropped their bombs causing shrapnel to kick up sand all around him while other planes repeatedly strafed his position with their machine guns blazing. The chaplain suddenly realized that even with the bullets raining around him, he hadn’t been hit. He stood and stared in amazement at the outline of his own shape in the sand – the only smooth, undisturbed part of that bullet-riddled beach. His heavenly shield must have fit the exact shape of his body.<sup>2</sup>

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### **The Four Hundred**

At Dunkirk the Nazis had thousands of British soldiers – three hundred and fifty thousand – trapped at the edge of the water. They couldn’t get the men off the beaches fast enough to get them back to safety in England. They were like sitting ducks when Nazi planes pelted those long stretches of white sand covered with soldiers, but the miracle of what happened still stands out in history today.

On one of those same beaches at Dunkirk, C.B. Morelock, the famous war correspondent, reported what he called an unexplainable and miraculous occurrence: he lay with four hundred men who were pinned down on the beach without any place to take cover. And yet, although the men were repeatedly and systematically attacked by machine-guns and bombed by sixty enemy aircraft, not one single man was hit. Every man in the group left the beach without a scratch. Morelock stated, “I have personally been told by the Navy men, that the men not only recited Psalm 91, but they shouted it aloud at the top of their lungs!” One soldier was reported to have stood up and shouted Psalm 91, daring the planes. Saying our trust out loud releases faith.

Such a remarkable shield of protection was provided at Dunkirk that Margaret Lee Runbeck wrote in her book *The*

*Great Answer:*<sup>2</sup>

Dunkirk should be written about in Bible language. Someday, I have no doubt, it will be so written, for the race will look back on Dunkirk as it looks back on the Red Sea. That horde of tortured men who

escaped will be remembered when people are in dire need, as the children of Israel are remembered. Like the Red Sea, Dunkirk will be both adored and disbelieved. It will be explained away by scientific fact, as the skeptical have explained away all miracles in the sufficiently past tens. But it cannot be discredited yet, because too many people lived through it. Too many letters tell about it, [as do] too many columns of words. But not one millionth of it has been told, nor ever will be. It happened quickly, rolling up like a nightmare, breaking over us in delirium. For still we do not understand.

It began on the 26<sup>th</sup> of May; it ended with a Thanksgiving on the ninth of June...No word had leaked out of the full extremity that was threatening three hundred and fifty thousand men stranded on the Continent. But people knew in their hearts this was rock bottom. And of course the men at the top were beside themselves. They knew human effort alone wasn't going to be enough. So the whole nation began to pray...Then gloriously, so great was the escape that even Winston Churchill called Dunkirk "The Miracle of Deliverance."

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### **Dunkirk – Unyielding**

When first pushed back onto the beaches of Dunkirk, leaders of the British soldiers who were trapped on that beach had sent a message back to their countrymen with just three words, "But if not..." Instantly the people in England understood the hearts of those soldiers – even though they were facing almost sure destruction, they would not compromise with, nor surrender to, the Nazis. Those words were taken from Daniel 3:16-18:<sup>3</sup>

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image you have set up.

The people of England sprang into action with the leaders calling on every person who had a boat to be available for service. Thousands of boats of all types made many trips across the English Channel to ferry the 350,000 men stranded on the Continent to safety. The Nazi Luftwaffe (Air Force) still dominated the skies above the Channel, but the rescue effort was shielded by a miracle fog and a cloud cover for those days that hid their rescue efforts from the air.

All the men were safely evacuated – and they lived "to fight another day" – and to ultimately win – World War II.

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### Sources:

1. From a card given to me prior to Operation Desert Storm. – AOM
2. As published in *Voices from the Edge of Eternity*, compiled by John Myers (Northridge, California: Voice Publications, 1968). As published by The Little Church by the Sea, Inc.
3. *The Bible*, Daniel 3:16-18.

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### **Please pray. – AOM**