

Monthly Update

July 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As I'd written last year, "Things are really getting interesting!" They still are. I am glad that we have a foundation that is the solid Rock of our Lord Jesus Christ; we can have inner peace despite what is going on around us. This is a reality. The first time I had experienced this was six years after I had become a Christian; during Operation Desert Storm I experienced peace ("perfect peace") during combat operations. Having inner peace can keep our minds clear to do what we need to such as pray and take what actions we can to help bring our country back to peace and common sense.

Speaking of praying, during World War II there was an advisor to Winston Churchill who organized a group of people who dropped what they were doing every day at the prescribed hour for one minute to pray for the safety of England, its people and peace. In our country there is a group of people who are organizing the same type of thing: every evening at 8:00 P.M. CST (9:00 P.M. Eastern Standard Time/EST), spend **one minute** praying for the safety of the United States, our troops, our citizens, and for a return to a Godly nation. On your cell phone, you can set an alarm to alert you when it is time to pray. Our prayers are the most powerful thing we have. I am reminded of a quote I had read from World War II, "Praise the Lord – and pass the ammunition." I think this puts the two into the proper balance: praying then doing all you possibly can.

We are including a history of the role of some pastors in our winning independence from England; by their focusing on principles from the Bible, they recognized important freedoms that should have been enjoyed by everybody as a creation of God.

With a bit of sadness, we need to pass on that one of the founders of Concerned Methodists passed away. Martin was a true friend, a valued officer and member of the Board of Directors, and astute contributor to our ministry. He was a quiet, soft-spoken person who had a depth of experience matched by few people I have known. In a future issue of The Monthly Update I may share his story that has been included in a book *Hometown Heroes* – with some experiences from combat. I learned that, as soft-spoken as Marty was, if he "suggested" something, I needed to listen – and follow his advice.

We in Concerned Methodists are using time gained by delay of GC2020 of the United Methodist Church to GC2021 next year to finalize our strategy for that crucial event.

We wish you a safe, memorable July 4th. As we celebrate this day, cherish all that our nation is – that with all of the criticism we experience, it is still the freest, most prosperous nation on the face of the earth. If our critics see our country as evil, I invite them to live for two years in any other country – then compare it with ours. Then before we would let them back into the United States, they must give their reasons.

In His service,

Allen O. Morris
Executive Director

+ + + +

July 2020 Update

Bits and Pieces from across the United Methodist Church

Liberty, once lost, is lost forever. – John Adams

* * * * *

The Good Stuff

+ This is how to obtain the fear of the Lord, the most necessary virtue: 1) receive the Word of God; 2) hide his commandments within you, 3) incline your ear to wisdom, 4) apply your heart to understanding, 5) cry out for knowledge and discernment; 6) seek it as you would for silver or hidden treasures. [Note: This issue had confused me. – AOM]

– As referenced in Proverbs 2:1-5, as quoted in *The Evidence Bible*, p. 842

+ *Reclaiming more food to fill pandemic gaps.*

BIG ISLAND, Va. Few have a better perspective of the dynamics of food insecurity and food waste – before and during the coronavirus pandemic – than the staff at the Society of St. Andrew. The United Methodist-supported ministry is working to meet increased demand while also adapting to social distancing guidelines.

– Linda Bloom reports, as reported in the UM News Weekly Digest; May 22, 2020.

+ **Today is a day I'll not soon forget.** [Note: This is reprinted pretty much as it was written by the farmer. – AOM]

As I was combining today, I was unloading into the auger cart and I saw a vehicle go by a couple times slowly and then pull over and stop. I had a minor repair to make and the vehicle stayed... I was a little concerned until I happened to catch 3 little sets of eyes looking out windows. I went over and they rolled down the window and I asked if they needed anything and the lady explained their grandchildren were visiting from Florida and had never seen “farmer stuff” up close. There were 2 boys and a little girl. I'd assume they were between the ages of 6 and 9. The two boys were all giddy but the little girl, while sweet and excited was pretty quiet. I also happen to notice that she kept turning away from me and there was a scar or a birthmark or something on her face...And I felt really bad trying to figure out what it was because I was feeling like I'm staring at her..

The grandmother and her husband thanked me for stopping and saying hi and said they would get going because they knew farmers were busy this time of the year... And I said be careful and have a good trip...

It was then that one of the boys said are you going to be going soon cuz we would like to see what that machine does... the grandmother quickly quieted them and I said would it be okay if I took them for a ride...She then said No we're sure your way too busy for that and I said no I'm by myself for now I've got time so she asked the two boys if they wanted to go and of course they did but the little girl stayed back. I asked her again if she wanted to go and she said no thank you and so the boys and I went and got in the combine and we made one round and came back... While in the combine I said why didn't your sister want to come... they said she's shy. I then, because of curiosity, asked them about her face... And they told me it was a birthmark and that she gets picked on about it a lot.

After their ride I walked them back over to their grandparent's car and I said to the little girl, “How come you didn't want to go for a ride?” And she said well the boys always say that that kind of stuff is just for boys not for girls... I laughed and said, “You know, there are girl farmers AND I even had a young girl in that cab just yesterday. Would you like a ride?” She looked at her Grandma and she said go ahead if you want. I then asked the grandmother if she had a smartphone and knew how to video... She laughed and said I have grandchildren of course I know how to video... So I told her have your phone ready and when you see me turn on the yellow flashing lights video the combine.

The little girl and I got in the cab and I turned the machine around and went back into the field at the end of it and came back facing her grandparent's vehicle. I then said to her...here.. you can turn the steering wheel... she first looked at me like I was on crack cocaine... But I finally convinced her and I told her not everybody gets to do this but people that are part of the special face Club definitely get to...but its a secret reason why you get to drive so you can't tell anyone. We even pinky swore on it...The smile she had made this old tired grumpy mans heart

soft and there must have been some Bean dust in the cab because my allergies started acting up just a little bit... So I let her “steer” and turned on the yellow lights on the way back so her Grandma could video tape her “driving by”. We got out of the combine and she still had a huge smile on her face and ran over to her grandma and was a little Chatterbox did you see me did you see me I got to drive I got to drive... Her brothers were obviously a little miffed... And ask her why she got to drive... I was afraid she was going to tell them why... But with all the sass of a little brunette girl with her hair in a pony she looked at them both matter-of-factly and said, “Because girls CAN farm.” My allergies started acting up a little bit again as she came back running over to me and gave me a huge hug and told me thank you... The grandfather came over and patted me on the shoulder shook my hand said I don't know what you said to her...but that's the biggest smile we've seen on her this vacation so far... the boys shook my hand and thanked me and got back into the vehicle and drove away...

Leaving me to my thoughts. And all I could think of was if one of the combines hadn't broke down yesterday, I wouldn't have been in that field this morning, and I wouldn't have been by myself and we would have been really pushed wherever we were at to keep up with everything...and it proved to me once again everything happens for a reason...All three of their faces were on my mind the rest of the day but mostly hers... not because of her birthmark, because of her genuine smile in the confidence that she showed when she got to get out of that combine and “brag” a little to the boys.

My gramps told me long ago to always be patient with children and people you come in contact with. I remember the countless times that he would let me “drive” the tractor... and the exhilaration and happiness that I felt during that time... And I swore that I was going to make other people feel that way when I got older... and I've definitely failed at that numerous times. but I'm trying..But, I'm kind of thinking maybe that's what I did today or maybe that little girl made me feel like that little boy with his Gramps all those years ago.

30 minutes out of 24 hours... I need to do that more often....Today was a good day... and one I shall not soon forget.

[Note: In defense of “girls” being able to do farm work, a family in my hometown was the Kubeckas, who had 11 boys in my generation, all very capable. Their families have produced an assortment of boys and girls, all of which are very capable. Once one of the guys had a health problem and sent his kids (two girls and a boy) to get their tractors and machinery out of the field and into the sheds. I thought I would go out and “help” them; the two girls and boy had it all taken care of. – AOM]

– Credited source: Jeff Ditzenberger

Of Interest. [Note: In honor of July 4th, Independence Day, I wanted to offer a bit of history from our heritage. – AOM]

+ ***Pastors in Politics during American Revolution: Hugh Williamson & other preachers.***

Backfired – A Nation founded for Religious Tolerance No Longer Tolerates the Religion of Its Founders

In Congress, July 4, 1776. “The most important thing is to bring people to Christ; the second most important thing is to preserve the freedom to do the most important thing!”

This was the attitude of many pastors and seminary-trained founders who served in America's early government.

- Rev. John Witherspoon (1723-1794) was a Scottish Presbyterian pastor and President of Princeton who was a delegate to the Continental Congress where he signed the Declaration of Independence.

- Rev. John Peter Muhlenberg (1746-1807) was a Lutheran pastor in Virginia who became a major general during the Revolutionary War, a U.S. Congressman and a U.S. Senator.

- Rev. Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg (1750-1801) was a Lutheran pastor in New York who was elected a U.S. Congressman and was the First Speaker of the House, signing the Bill of Rights.

- Rev. Abiel Foster (1735-1806) served as pastor in Canterbury, New Hampshire, a delegate to the Continental Congress, the New Hampshire Legislature and a U.S. Congressman.

- Rev. Benjamin Contee (1755-1815) was an Episcopal pastor in Maryland who served as an officer in the Revolutionary War, a delegate to the Confederation Congress, and a U.S. Congressman.

- Rev. Abraham Baldwin (1754-1807) served as a minister at Yale, a chaplain in the Revolutionary War, a delegate from Georgia to the Continental Congress, a U.S. Congressman and a U.S. Senator. He is the founding president of the University of Georgia.

- Rev. Paine Wingate (1739-1838) was a pastor in Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, who served as a delegate to the Continental Congress, a U.S. Congressman and a U.S. Senator.
- Rev. Joseph Montgomery (1733-1794) was a Presbyterian pastor in New Castle, Delaware. Married to a sister of Dr. Benjamin Rush, he served as a chaplain in the Revolutionary War with Colonel Smallwood's Maryland Regiment. He was elected a delegate from Pennsylvania to the Continental Congress, a judge, and a representative in the State Assembly.
- Rev. James Manning (1738-1791) was a Baptist pastor in Rhode Island who was the first President of Brown University where, during the Revolutionary War, he allowed General Rochambeau's French troops to camp on the campus grounds. He was elected a delegate to Congress.
- John Joachim Zubly (1724-1781) was a Presbyterian pastor in Georgia who was a delegate to the Continental Congress.
- Signer of the Constitution Hugh Williamson, born December 5, 1735, was a licensed Presbyterian preacher.

When Evangelist George Whitefield began preaching the Great Awakening Revival in Philadelphia in 1739, he inspired the idea that the city should have a school for blacks and poor orphan children. A short-lived Charity School was formed, teaching writing, arithmetic, and the general principles of Christianity, but the school struggled for lack of funds. In 1749, Ben Franklin convinced the board of trustees of the newly founded Academy of Philadelphia to purchase the school. The trustees maintained the school's vision, and expanded it to include a secondary school for boys in 1751. In 1754, the school expanded again to become the College of Philadelphia, with Rev. William Smith as its president. It was renamed again in 1779 as the University of Pennsylvania. 21 members of the Continental Congress graduated from there. 9 of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were either trustees or alumni from there.

A statue of Evangelist George Whitefield is located in University of Pennsylvania's Dormitory Quadrangle.

A person who taught at the Academy of Philadelphia was Charles Thomson, who became the Secretary of Continental Congress and signed the Declaration of Independence. He designed the Great Seal of the United States and signed Congress' authorization for Robert Aitken to print the first English Language Bible in America. Upon retiring from Congress, he spent 19 years compiling the "Thomson Bible" (printed in 1808), containing the 1st American translation of the Greek Septuagint.

Hugh Williamson, at age 24, decided to go into the ministry as a Presbyterian preacher. John Neal recorded of Hugh Williamson in the Trinity College Historical Society Papers: "In 1759, (Williamson) went to Connecticut, where he pursued his theological studies and was licensed to preach. After returning from Connecticut, he was admitted to membership in the Presbytery of Philadelphia (the oldest in America) ... (and there) preached nearly two years."

Williamson visited and prayed for the sick, and gave sermons, until a chronic chest weakness convinced him he had to pursue a career that did not involve public speaking. He was also disaffected by the theological debates that grew out of the Great Awakening Revival -- between the "Old Lights" and the "New Lights." "Old Lights" were older church leaders who were rigid in orthodox teachings, emphasizing the letter of the law; while "New Lights" were zealous younger church leaders who emphasized evangelism and the Holy Spirit.

In 1760, he joined the faculty at his alma mater, the College of Philadelphia, where he was professor of mathematics. After four years, he traveled to Europe to study medicine; he received his medical degree from the prestigious University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. After graduation, Dr. Hugh Williamson practiced medicine in Philadelphia.

He took it upon himself to raise money to start the Newark Academy, the seventh-oldest private school in the nation, founded by Rev. Alexander MacWhorter, an advisor to George Washington. To raise funds for the academy, Williamson sailed to England, but not before stopping off in Boston, where he witnessed the Boston Tea Party, December 16, 1773. When he reached London, the Privy Council -- the formal advisors to the King -- summoned him to testify on the rebellious actions in America. When the Privy Council began to discuss how to punish Boston for the Tea Party, Dr. Hugh Williamson warned them that continuing their high taxes would provoke the colonies into rebellion. He argued further that Americans should be entitled to full rights as

Englishmen. At that time, there was an American statesman in London who heard his patriotic answers to the Privy Council, Ben Franklin, a founder of the school Williamson had graduated from and taught at.

Returning to America in 1777, Dr. Williamson distinguished himself during the Revolutionary War as a Surgeon General caring for wounded North Carolina troops. In 1780, he was attached to the command of Brigadier General Isaac Gregory, who adopted the tactics of South Carolina's Francis Marion, nicknamed "Swamp Fox" -- who would launch surprise attacks on British forces then quickly retreat into inhospitable terrain. General Gregory stationed his troops in the Great Dismal Swamp: over 100,000 acres of dangerous [swamp] between southeast Virginia & northeast North Carolina. Dr. Williamson's insistence on sanitation, diet and preventive medicine kept the troops virtually disease free during their six months there.

After the War, in 1782, North Carolina elected Dr. Williamson as a representative to Congress. North Carolina's 1776 Constitution that was in effect at the time stated in ARTICLE 32: "That no person, who shall deny the being of God or the truth of the Protestant religion, or the Divine authority either of the Old or New Testaments, or who shall hold religious principles incompatible with the freedom and safety of the State, shall be capable of holding any office or place of trust or profit in the civil department within this State." ("Protestant" was changed to "Christian" in 1835, then changed in 1868 to belief in "Almighty God.") While in Congress, Dr. Williamson helped write the Northwest Territory laws. He was part of the committee that proposed a clause, (though it was later omitted), for: "... reserving the central section of every township for the maintenance of public schools and the section immediately to the northward for the support of religion."

From May 25 to September 17, 1787, he was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia where he helped write the U.S. Constitution, lodging at the same residence as James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. He signed the Constitution, and helped convince North Carolina to ratify it. Thomas Jefferson related of his reputation at the Constitutional Convention: "He was a useful member, of an acute mind, attentive to business, and of an high degree of erudition."

He later became wealthy through investments and land speculations, and wrote extensively for medical and literary societies, winning international acclaim. He participated with Ben Franklin in conducting electrical experiments. In 1811, he wrote a respected book, *Observations of the Climate in Different Parts of America*, in which he refuted "higher criticism" of Scripture and gave scientific explanation for the credibility of stories in the Bible, such as Noah's flood and the events of Moses' exodus.

Dying May 22, 1819, he is buried at Trinity Church, in New York City. "The most important thing is to bring people to Christ; -the second most important thing is to preserve the freedom to do the most important thing!" Church leaders not involved in preserving the freedom to preach the Gospel are effectively admitting they really do not believe preaching the Gospel is that important.

Speaking on early pastors involved in politics, President Calvin Coolidge stated at the 150th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Philadelphia, July 5, 1926:

"The principles ... which went into the Declaration of Independence ... are found in ... the sermons ... of the early colonial clergy who were earnestly undertaking to instruct their congregations in the great mystery of how to live.

They preached equality because they believed in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. They justified freedom by the text that we are all created in the divine image ...

Placing every man on a plane where he acknowledged no superiors, where no one possessed any right to rule over him, he must inevitably choose his own rulers through a system of self-government ...

In order that they might have freedom to express these thoughts and opportunity to put them into action, whole congregations WITH THEIR PASTORS migrated to the Colonies."

– From "The Black Robed Regiment" by William J. Federer, American Minute; Dec 5, 2019. Permission granted.

(UM) General Board of Church and Society (GBCS). Advocating for more aid. [Note: While members of the GBCS lobby the government for more money; the board should offer up some of its own money it has stashed. – AOM]

While the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act included many important provisions to help people affected by COVID-19, more is needed, say advocacy groups. The Washington Interreligious Staff Community,

representing about 70 national religious organizations and denominations, is among those asking Congress to boost the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program maximum benefits by 15%; increase the minimum monthly SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30 and suspend all administrative SNAP rule changes during a time of economic distress and long-term recovery. John Hill, who oversees the advocacy work of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, said the SNAP request “is similar to what happened during the Great Recession.” Religious groups also are advocating for a minimum of \$12 billion in U.S. aid for the international COVID-19 response. “With faith-based and NGO partners helping to facilitate food, water and medical distributions, the U.S. government and its thousands of partners are critical in preventing a windfall of other calamities,” the Washington Interreligious Staff Community said in its letter to Congress.

The SNAP expansion was included as part of the HEROES Act passed May 15 by the House of Representatives, along with other forms of emergency assistance, but not the international assistance.

– As reported in UM News Weekly Digest – May, 22 2020

Homosexuality. *Desert Southwest’s claim to property upheld.* An Arizona judge has ruled that property used by a breakaway congregation rightfully belongs to The United Methodist Church. Judge Krista R. Carman of Yavapai County Superior Court ordered that the Desert Southwest Conference “is entitled to take possession” of the property being used by Camp Verde Community Church. The order in effect required the now independent congregation, which withdrew from The United Methodist Church in 2017, to find a new location. The case upholds the trust clause in the Book of Discipline, the denomination’s policy book. The clause, which dates to 1797, states that local church properties are held “in trust” for the denomination – even if the congregation’s name is on the title. “The history of the local church in Camp Verde demonstrates that it has held all real property in trust for the UMC,” Carman wrote. Because the congregation had not followed the trust clause, she concluded, its transfer of the property to the name of Camp Verde Community Church was void. The judge issued her order Dec. 26, 2019, and the parties agreed to a settlement on Feb. 12. However, it has taken until now for transfers of the church campus, parsonage and other property to take place, said Marilee Clarke, the conference chancellor. While grateful for the decision, Bishop Robert T. Hoshibata – who leads the Desert Southwest Conference – said the case brings “a sense of deep sadness.” Pastor Rick Carling of Camp Verde Community Church preferred not to comment on the situation. He was a licensed local pastor in The United Methodist Church before the congregation’s departure. The Camp Verde church, located in a rural community about 90 miles north of Phoenix, is more than 140 years old; it had an average worship attendance of 116 people as of 2017, the last data available from the United Methodist General Council on Finance and Administration. Camp Verde Community Church has a temporary location at a Christian school. However, to slow the spread of COVID-19, the church has held services online. On April 19, it held a drive-in service at a local hotel parking lot.

Hoshibata attributed the congregation’s departure in large part to differences with the conference over ministry with LGBTQ individuals. The Desert Southwest Conference has long urged ending denominational bans on same-sex weddings and “self-avowed practicing Christians.” In 2019, the conference ordained an openly gay deacon. Hoshibata said a group in the Camp Verde church “was upset because of the way the annual conference was moving in terms of being open and accepting.” After those who departed the denomination seized what the conference saw as United Methodist assets, the conference filed a lawsuit in July 2017. Hoshibata said the conference has not closed the door at starting a new United Methodist witness, such as a Bible study, at some point in Camp Verde. For now, he said funds from the sale of the church property would support new church starts and the revitalization of other Desert Southwest congregations. “The value of the trust clause is that we are called to hold things for the wider United Methodist community,” Hoshibata said.

[Note: This is a long-standing injustice that needs to be corrected. Originally, the “Trust Clause” was put into the Book of Discipline in the 1700s to prevent a renegade Circuit Rider from taking a frontier church out of the Methodist connection to form his own separate church with a variant doctrine. Now, what you have is a Godly congregation striving to remain true to Biblical morality who wanted to separate from a conference that supports egregiously immoral conduct. Hoshibata used the rhetoric of “returning church property” to the conference reflects blatant injustice, although it does fit into the frame of judicial precedent at this point in time. The local people are the ones who have bought, paid for, and maintained the property – yet the “Trust Clause” mandates that it must all

be given to the conference. Unfortunately, we have been involved in cases literally from coast to coast and know what the law is. We hope that GC2021 will rectify this. – AOM]

– By Heather Hahn; April 20, 2020, as reported in the UM News Weekly Digest/Apr 24, 2020.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). UMCOR COVID-19 Relief Fund provides grant to help churches and partners assist vulnerable populations dealing with food security and other needs related to the pandemic. This assistance is occurring around the world, including Europe, where markets and shops have reopened but prices have increased, and restrictions on movement continue in some areas. –

By Linda Bloom, UMNS, May 19, 2020.

* * * * *

Continuous effort – NOT strength or intelligence – is the key to unlocking our potential. ~ Winston Churchill

Global Outlook

Our forefathers knew how important life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were to the future of our great country.

And I thank God for the men and women who sacrificed all to make sure those three things remain precious.

~ Kristan Hawkins, President, Students for Life of America

* * * * *

Albania. The United Methodist-related Miss Stone Center in Strumica, North Macedonia, still regularly assists about 200 people through its meals and home care ministry programs, reports Martin Konev, project manager. However, it is difficult and costly to purchase the disposable containers for the Meals on Wheels program needed in order to comply with hygiene regulations. Albania has regional differences with regard to freedom of movement, based on infection rates. In the “green” areas, such as Elbasan, Pogradec and Librazhd, small groups of the United Methodist congregations may meet again. Many Albanians – just recovering from the consequences of last November’s earthquakes – have now lost their jobs and income as a result of the coronavirus crisis. United Methodists are offering signs of hope and love by handing out food parcels.

– By Linda Bloom, UMNS, May 19, 2020.

Romania. Leaders of the United Methodist church in Cluj, Romania, are supporting five young women who have aged out of their orphanage, along with three young single mothers. In addition, about 30 Roma families in villages around Cluj-Napoca are receiving food and hygiene packages from the church – a relief action that is to continue in the coming weeks.

– By Linda Bloom, UMNS, May 19, 2020.

Congo, Kenya Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe. *African churches ease pandemic’s hunger.*

[Note: This is a worldwide problem, especially in India, and has exacerbated persecution of Christians. – AOM]

UM congregations in Africa are rallying together to offer support to church members and communities facing the double whammy of hunger and the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to sweeping lockdowns across the continent. David Beasley, executive director of the United Nations’ World Food Program, told the United Nations Security Council on April 21 that, while the world is dealing with the global pandemic, it also is on the brink of a hunger pandemic.

According to the 2020 World Food Program Global Report on Food Crises, 135 million people around the world face crisis levels of hunger or worse, and due to the coronavirus, an additional 130 million “could be pushed to the brink of starvation by the end of 2020,” he said. “If we can’t reach these people with the life-saving assistance they need, our analysis shows that 300,000 people could starve to death every single day over a three-month period. This does not even include the increase of starvation due to COVID.” The United Methodist Church in Africa is continuing to reach out to those facing food insecurity. In Congo, that includes pastors. With no church

gatherings during the confinement, pastors are facing starvation, said Jean Tshomba, disaster management coordinator in East Congo.

According to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there have been more than 88,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 on the continent and more than 2,800 deaths. Tshomba said pastors are supported by worship services and other church activities. “Our churches have been closed for more than a month because of the coronavirus pandemic and pastors have been going through very difficult times,” he said. Congo was one of the 10 countries that faced the worst food crises in 2019, according to the World Food Program report. United Methodist Men in the East Congo Episcopal Area has turned to agriculture to help feed pastors, especially those in urban churches. Mwinyi Taluhumbu, president of the group, said more than 15,000 pounds of corn flour from the fields cultivated by the men were distributed. “At the end of 2019, we cultivated a two-hectare cornfield ... We were planning to sell the corn flour to finance other activities of the organization but decided to assist pastors during this period of confinement,” he said. “We are delighted that the products of our fields have nourished the servants of God during lockdown when they are not working. As a church, we must support the government’s call to use agriculture to fight famine.”

The support brought relief to the Rev. Paul Ndjeka Shango, a pastor at Tokolote Moto-Moto United Methodist Church in the Kindu North District. “We are going through difficult times. We live by the grace of God,” he said, adding that the assistance enabled him to provide food for his family. “The help we receive from the faithful and especially the assistance from the United Methodist Men helped us to stay in the house for a long time,” he said.

The superintendent of the Kindu North District also received food. The Rev. Mahamudi Ngereza said pastors in urban areas are much more exposed to famine. “Pastors in rural areas are a little more sheltered because they generally live on agricultural activities,” he said.

In the South Mozambique Conference, the Rev. Joao Sambo of Malanga 2 United Methodist Church in the Maputo East District, said his congregation has been donating foodstuffs to vulnerable members of the community in rural parts of Maputo. “We are mobilizing our members to assist those facing hunger during this pandemic,” said Sambo, who also is the director of Lusophone content for UM News. “Mozambique is not under lockdown, we are in quarantine, only moving from our homes when it is necessary,” he said. “The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in loss of income as those who rely on part-time jobs cannot go out to seek a source of livelihood,” he said.

The East Africa Episcopal Area is “encouraging Christians to reach out to one another in as many ways as possible during this pandemic,” said Bishop Daniel Wandabula. “We are providing food such as corn flour and beans to the needy in Uganda and Kenya and also giving soap for handwashing to those who cannot afford it,” he said.

The Rev. Wilton Odongo, Nairobi District superintendent, said despite Kenya being under lockdown, congregations have been supporting those who need assistance. United Methodist churches such as Highrise, Kayole St. John’s, Riruta and Huruma Tent of Prayers have provided food to the hungry. “Refugee families who are United Methodists were really grateful for the support. They were in dire need of food,” Odongo said.

Even before the coronavirus, many in Zimbabwe were facing acute food shortages caused by persistent droughts, natural disasters and economic turmoil. In December, the United Nations’ World Food Program estimated that nearly 8 million people – half the population – were facing food insecurity in the country. Zimbabwe has been under lockdown for seven weeks and is currently at level two, where travel movements are restricted, public and religious gatherings are banned, and the informal sector that sustains the majority of the population remains closed. International students attending Africa University in Mutare, Zimbabwe, who were unable to return home when schools and colleges closed on March 24, are helping the vulnerable in the communities surrounding the institution. “We sacrificed one meal (lunch) and asked the university to convert the cost into cash, which we used to buy foodstuffs for 12 families,” said Fiston Okito, vice president of the student representatives council. About 100 students decided to forgo their lunch and others donated cash toward the cause. Each of the identified families received groceries worth about \$50. “We are at this institution on scholarship because of donations, and we also decided to become donors,” Okito said. “We asked pastors and AU staff to identify those needing assistance and when we arrived at the homes of the beneficiaries, we discovered they were really facing challenges.”

The Munyaradzi family, members of Nottingham United Methodist Church in the United Kingdom Mission Area, reached out to elderly members of Seke South church in Chitungwiza, Zimbabwe. “We identified three elderly members to provide with basic groceries during this difficult period,” said the Rev. Agbeth Mutanho. “We, the able-bodied, are feeling the impact of the pandemic and the lockdown and we realized the aged needed all the support we could provide.”

In South Africa, young adult members of Pinetown United Methodist Church in the Ikhwezi District identified a pocket of need in Clermont Township of Durban. About eight young adults opened their hearts and wallets to the most needy by donating food packages. “It’s been about two months now since we under lockdown and our people are starving,” said Ntokozo Zimasa, chair of the service delivery project. Clermont Township is one of the informal settlements in Durban where most people in this community rely on temporary jobs. “It is very hard in these days in our homes. We can’t even look for jobs,” said Sindile Magagu, one of the beneficiaries. “We can’t even support adequately our children at this time that schools are closed. It is much easier when schools are open because they eat hot meals every day during lunchtime at school from the government feeding scheme,” said the 35-year-old single mother of three. Sharon Mguzulwa, the young adult organization’s national president, said she is thankful that the group has been able to lend a hand to the less fortunate. “I am so impressed (with) how the young people of my church do things,” she said. “They are so kind and united in doing God’s works.” She said the members collected money from their own pockets and bought and packed the food parcels in their homes. The donations included cornmeal, sugar, milk, rice, baked beans, tinned fish, onions, butternut squash soup and salt. “Our food hampers are ... served out of love,” said Othimna Mkwalo, a youth fellowship member of the Pinetown pastoral charge. “We prepared 20 hampers for 20 beneficiaries and before handling them, we had to share the word of God for hope and just to remind them that God is with us even in this hard time,” Mkwalo said. Mguzulwa said the national lockdown has left thousands of people unemployed, which places thousands of children at risk of not receiving food on a daily basis. Faith Mahlope, an 84-year-old grandmother who lives with six of her grandchildren, said her family has been struggling since the lockdown. “Other family members in my household now rely on my pension grant, which makes thing very hard for me and my family. I appreciate the young people of The United Methodist Church for the generosity and for allowing God to use them during this hard time,” she said.

– By Eveline Chikwanah and Chadrack Tambwe Londe, UMNS; May 20, 2020. Chikwanah is a communicator of the Zimbabwe East Conference; Londe is a communicator for the East Congo Conference. Nandipha Mkwalo, a communicator for the South Africa Conference, contributed to this report. As reported in the UM News Weekly Digest; May 22, 2020.

* * * * *

Let’s be very clear on this: “A people that values its privileges above its principles soon loses both” (Dwight D. Eisenhower). Historically, we know that God judged those nations who continually tolerated sin; wrong choices had devastating consequences. Arnold Toynbee, who wrote *A Study of History*, said: “Of the 22 civilizations that have appeared in history, 19 of them collapsed when they reached the moral state America is in today.”

Brace yourself...this is a quote from the 1960s.