



“Depart from evil,  
and do good; seek  
peace, and pursue it.”  
Psalm 34:14

## MISSION PARTNER NEWS

### “Rising hope during rising tides”



Vice President of Fiji Council of Churches,  
Major Uruaia Dravikula accepting the peace  
candle from Julia Edwards

Having marched to the accompaniment of the Salvation Army band through the main streets of Suva on a hot, sunny Easter Sunday afternoon, young people from a dozen different denominations gathered at Ratu Sukuna Park for Fiji’s fourth annual Ecumenical Youth Concert.

Organised jointly by the Fiji Council of Churches (FCC) and the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECEA), the theme of this year’s concert was *Resurrection: Rising hopes during rising tides*. The Revd James Bhagwan gave the opening address on climate change: “People need to make peace not only with God and one another, but there is also a

need to be at peace with our planet, our common home and the environment,” he said.

During the initial welcome, Methodist mission partner Julia Edwards was called up to the stage to present a peace candle to the Vice President of the Fiji Council of Churches, Major Uruaia Dravikula of the Salvation Army. Julia offered the candle on behalf of Stirling Methodist Church, the Methodist Church in Britain and concerned people in the UK. As she handed the candle over, she said, “We are all one: one planet, one in unity and one in hope.”

The peace candle was a gift from the Stirling Methodist Church, given in solidarity with the people of Fiji and the Pacific in response to the impacts of climate change in the region and the considerable suffering that Severe Tropical Cyclone Winston caused last year. The Revd Walter Attwood of Stirling Methodist Church gave Julia the peace candle on a cold, dark evening in February. “When you go back to Fiji,” he said to her, “take this candle to your church. Light it and pray for peace – not just peace among people but peace with the planet, peace with plants, peace with animals, birds and fish, peace with the air, the land and oceans.”

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## Disarming hearts

Despite being young and relatively small (only 23 years old and with a membership of around 5,000), the Colombian Methodist Church has been actively involved in the country's peace negotiations over the past 6 years.

The Church's Presiding Bishop, Juan Alberto Cardona Gomez, recently visited the Methodist Church in Britain. During his week-long stay, he spent time in the Coventry and Nuneaton Circuit, which recently formed a partnership with the Colombian Methodist Church.

Many of the Colombian Methodist Church's members are from the indigenous Zenú people. Bishop Cardona spoke about how this

people group has been affected by the civil war. He described how he has been working with representatives from the historic protestant churches in the country, including the Baptist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church, the Lutherans and the Mennonites and CLAI (the Latin American Council of Churches). These Churches, many of whom represent areas most affected by the civil war, worked with Juan Manuel Santos' government and las FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) to ensure that the treaty represented the interests of these communities.

Later, in London, during a talk with the Council for Christian Approaches to Defence and Disarmament (CCADD), Bishop

Cardona spoke on some of the current challenges of the peace negotiations, one of which is the disarmament process, currently focused on getting the FARC rebels to hand in their long range weaponry. "The process is not just about disarming weapons," he said. "The Church is going to be working on disarming hearts, in terms of helping forgiveness take place between victims and perpetrators."

*ABOVE: (Left to right) Yuleida Alvarez, Bishop Juan Alberto Cardona Gomez, the Revd Mark Rowland (minister at Coventry Central Hall) and Sandra Lopez. The Revd Mark Rowland is wearing the woven cross and neck band Yuleida gave him. (Photo by Tom Quenet)*

### Upper Myanmar leprosy project

Leprosy has a grim history in Myanmar. Many of the early missionaries gave sufferers what help they could, often gathering around them communities of affected families.

Such was the case in Mandalay, where a group began to gather around the missionary's house from 1892. By 1990, around 600 families affected by leprosy lived there. But the government decided Mandalay was not the place for them and they were removed to some empty land over 30 miles away. Each household was given a plot 60' x 40' on which to build a house.

This is now the village of Nanthamyen. The relocated villagers still receive care from Mandalay Methodist District, which provides home care and an ulcer clinic, some scholarships for fees to the local primary and secondary schools, plus IT classes and other vocational training. There is also an excellent micro-finance scheme started and run by the minister. Sixty families currently have loans and each is part of a support group that ensures loan repayments are made and learning, experience and expertise shared.



These days, people living with HIV/Aids suffer in much the same way as those with leprosy did when Nanthamyen began. Again, the Church is on hand to help. HIV work here is mainly focused around the drop-in centre the Church runs in Yangon. Through this and by inviting people in, the Church works to raise the profile of people living with HIV/Aids and challenge the stigma that still persists. The drop-in tries to support people in a variety of small ways, but the task is considerable in a country where only a small proportion can afford the drugs that might help them. The Church also works with the few other organisations and NGOs that are active in this field in Myanmar.

### Zimbabwe Fellowship launches in Portsmouth

The Methodist Church Zimbabwe Fellowship UK (MCZF-UK) has just launched a new branch in Portsmouth.

The launch took place on Sunday 9 April at Copnor Methodist Church, where the new branch is based. Around 100 people attended the launch service, which was bilingual and hosted in English and the Zimbabwean language of Shona. Guest speakers included Alison Judd, World President of World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women, and members of MCZF-UK's branches in Southampton, Birmingham, Bristol, Surrey and Reading.

MCZF-UK exists to unite Zimbabwean Methodists in

the UK. It has 30 branches. The new Portsmouth branch grew out of the Southampton branch.

"It was a privilege to host the launch event and will be a privilege to host the Portsmouth branch and work together with them," said the Revd John Mills, the minister at Copnor Methodist Church.





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Alternately, send a cheque to: the Methodist Church World Mission Fund, Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR. Please make cheques payable to "Methodist Church World Mission Fund".



On 8 May, the Revd Van Lal Mal Sawma from the Methodist Church, Upper Myanmar, graduated from Emory University, USA, with a Master's degree in Theology. A Scholarship and Leadership Training (SALT) grant from the World Church Fund made Van's studies possible. "Thank you so much for your financial support," he says. "I could not have done my studies without it. Your generosity has inspired me to help others and give back to the community. I thank you more than I can say."

## PRAYER



*Lord, we thank you for peace.  
Peace that results from the  
absence from war,  
peace that results from  
perseverance and forgiveness,  
peace that stems from purpose,  
peace that buds from  
interconnectivity and partnership,  
and above all, for shalom;  
Peace that brings wholeness,  
finding its beginning and end in  
you. Amen.*