



METHODIST MISSION AND ECUMENICAL NEWSLETTER - September 2021

By the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to **guide our feet into the way of peace.** (Luke 1: 78-79)

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR WORLD PEACE: a call to prayer for all people of good will

“Where people are praying for peace the cause of peace is strengthened by their very act of prayer, for they are themselves becoming immersed in the spirit of peace.”

So wrote George Macleod, founder of the Iona Community. He was one of a number of faith leaders who in 1974 signed ‘A Call to Prayer for World Peace’. Started as a Christian initiative it soon became an interfaith activity, and now welcomes everyone, of all faith traditions or none. A guiding principle of the Week is found in the words “The peace of the world must be prayed for by the faiths of the world”.

Interfaith partnership does not in itself imply agreement. Rather the Week invites all people to join in praying for peace together, with whatever different opinions we may have on our shared earth under one sky.

The Week of Prayer for World Peace takes place from the second to third Sunday in October each year. This year the Week will be observed between 10th and 17th October. A leaflet has been produced by the New Zealand organising committee with prayers, readings and affirmations from many faiths to use each day. On Facebook, the NZ daily prayers are posted on <https://www.facebook.com/WPWPNZ2014> and a copy of the leaflet of prayers can be obtained from MME by emailing Tony at mm-e@methodist.org.nz



Eight touchstones for reflection in the 2021 observance are: uniting rather than dividing people; education for a culture of peace; the ongoing pandemic situation; a world free of nuclear weapons; environmental impact of conflict; effect of conflict on children; sanctuary; and, peace making.

Religious communities and interfaith groups throughout New Zealand are encouraged to celebrate the Week both in their own observances and together with people of different faiths.

We are the children of many traditions - inheritors of both shared wisdom and tragic misunderstanding. In that which we share, may we see the common prayer of humanity; where we differ, let us wonder at human freedom; together let us know the uniqueness that is God.

Many of Aotearoa New Zealand’s faith communities and interfaith groups are engaged across many different areas: offering support, education, consciousness raising, advocacy, and opportunities to connect and contribute to a peaceful, inclusive and just society. Some initiatives are focussed on particular groups (e.g. newcomers and youth) while others are aimed at more general community building. Some examples include teaching English, foodbanks, organising shared meals and other community connection events, youth programmes (often sports focussed), tree planting projects, walking groups, interfaith choirs and sports programmes.



Hawkes Bay Interfaith Network



Waikato Interfaith Choir

At the World Council of Churches 10th Assembly (2013) in Busan, Korea, the theme set for the ecumenical movement in this period until the next Assembly is “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”. Then General Secretary Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit shared the following in his report, in relation to this call in an interfaith context:

“The threats to life show us the imperative we have to develop the quality of inter-religious relations even more, as we share the capacity to speak and work together to promote justice and peace for all. The experience of life is something we all share; by embracing common values and by finding ways of moving forward in conversation and conviction we hold the potential to increase the work on our common goals and at the same time reduce the impact of extremists’ violent actions. ...

“As we embark on a pilgrimage of justice and peace, we need to work with all people of good will who share our vision and commitment. We see that our sisters and brothers of other religious traditions have much to offer. Our pilgrimage must include an invitation to walk along side us, to contribute gifts and insights, to reflect the common value of life for all, should continue to strengthen our relations with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and other peoples of faith.”

NEIGHBOURS NOT STRANGERS: a Methodist approach to interfaith relationships

Methodist Mission and Ecumenical published a book *Neighbours not Strangers* in 2008, written by then Secretary for MME, Rev John Roberts. In his concluding chapter, he summarised his survey of Methodist reflections and perspectives for an on-going encounter with other religious traditions. John wrote:

John Wesley Having considered the views of nine Methodist scholars on John Wesley and interreligious relationships, I suggest John Wesley would encourage us:

- to see that God is not only the God of Christians, but also of people of other religions;
- to acknowledge that God’s grace is universal in scope and may be found at work in other religions;
- to affirm pluralism – to be open not only to the diversity within the Christian tradition, but also to acknowledge that God is at work in other religions;
- to express our faith in a liberating and accommodating way that shows an openness to people of other religions without any expectation that they should join us or we them;
- to demonstrate acceptance and conviction – to be accepting of other people’s religious convictions while remaining committed to our own Christian faith;
- to see that the fruits of the Spirit are not confined to Christians, but are also exemplified by many people belonging to other religions, and that this is the work of God’s grace;
- to hold to the view that how people live out their spiritual journey is more important than what they believe;

- to see interreligious dialogue as not only a way of gaining a better understanding of other people's religion, but as a way to gain a better understanding of our own faith, and so of becoming better Christians;
- not to promote Christianity by putting down other people's religious traditions;
- not to pass judgement on the ultimate fate of people of other religions.

20th century scholars

What can we learn from those 20th century evangelists, missionaries, preachers and scholars in the Wesleyan tradition who have explored the interreligious scene? Having looked at five of them in some depth I suggest they would encourage us to:

- see the hand of God at work in other religions and so affirm their positive values;
- show respect for all other religions – our task as Christians is not to destroy them but to acquire a sympathetic understanding of other people's beliefs and to build on this as we relate to them;
- recognise that God will act lovingly and justly towards people of other religions according to the way they relate to other people;
- see dialogue as an encounter between people that embraces a broad vision of justice, rather than something narrow and parochial;
- take the language of 'grace' more seriously so that we listen to each other with reverence, respect and humility;
- focus on what religion means to us as experience, without argument, making a case, or talking in an abstract way;
- embrace a new understanding of mission as participation in the life and history of another community that enables us to see God has been at work there long before we arrived and still is;
- a conviction that while God has something special to offer all people in Jesus Christ, God is also present outside Christianity in other religions;
- be willing to learn from other faiths and not in an abstract way but through an encounter between persons in a spirit of grace and with love;
- take the Christian doctrine of grace seriously so that we move away from an exclusivist Christian stance towards one that is more inclusive.

21st century developments

As we engage in interreligious dialogue in the 21st century what can we learn from those who have a strong Wesleyan background and are still active in exploring the interreligious scene? Having considered the views of four Methodist scholars at some depth I suggest they would encourage us to:

- a pastoral approach to communicating interreligious concerns to members of the Christian church, including meeting people where they are, engaging with their prejudices and stereotypes, and moving to a critique of inherited attitudes that prevent Christians from relating more positively with people of different religious traditions;
- a reconsideration of the position of biblical writers including an alternative inclusive salvation history and an inclusive Christology that will lead to a new openness and generosity towards those of other religions;
- recognise that interreligious dialogue is not a theoretical matter that begins with religious systems, but is a practical matter that begins with people meeting each other at the level of friendship that will lead to common action and the addressing of injustice;
- recognise that dialogue is also a challenging encounter requiring serious study, analysis, discernment,



the capacity to get to the heart of the matters that divide people, and encouragement of self-criticism as well as criticism of each other;

- embrace a Christology of creative transformation that opens us to God's gift of new possibility in our relationships with people of other religions, paving the way for mutual challenge of the dialogue partners and enabling them to enrich their lives and clarify their faith as they learn from each other;
- rescuing the word mission from its long association with imperialism and colonialism such that we no longer think in terms of the missionaries and the missionised, so we can stand alongside people of other religious traditions who have their own understanding of mission, in such a way that we can all witness to our own religions and traditions;
- recognise that sexism is present in all religions and make sure that interreligious dialogue is not a male domain – women's perspectives must be heard and allowed to make a difference in the dialogue process;
- develop a spirituality capable of enabling us to participate at depth in the new religiously plural context in which we live.

CELEBRATING PHILIP POTTER: Methodist ecumenical leader

Recently the World Council of Churches celebrated the 100th anniversary of the birth (on 19 August 1921) of Rev Philip Potter, World Council of Churches general secretary from 1973 to 1984 (the first from the 'Global South'). He was a pivotal figure in the ecumenical movement from the very beginnings of the WCC at its 1st Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948 when he was the spokesperson for youth. A special webinar celebration was held by WCC, and a recording can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDgxM8jEgko>

Philip Potter was born on the Caribbean island of Dominica. After initially working in a lawyer's chambers and for the attorney general of Dominica, he trained for the Methodist ministry in Jamaica and later in Britain. He represented the Jamaican Student Christian Movement at the second World Conference of Christian Youth in Oslo 1947, a turning point in his life which propelled him into the international ecumenical movement.



He worked in the WCC youth department from 1954 to 1960, and as director of the WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism from 1967 to 1972.

Potter also had worked as a Methodist missionary in Haiti and for the Methodist Missionary Society in London. Throughout his life, Potter was committed to supporting youth in the ecumenical movement, and served as chair of the World Student Christian Federation from 1960 to 1968.

A 2013 WCC publication, "At Home with God and in the World; A Philip Potter Reader" **[is available for free download](#)** There is also a special free virtual issue of the WCC journals *The Ecumenical Review* and *International Review of Mission*: **["Philip Potter: Prophet of God's Oikoumene"](#)**

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