

## ONE MISSION – BLAST OFF!

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**Saturday: One Mission – Closing Worship, September 3**  
**Bishop Ivan Abrahams, Rev. Dr. J.C. Park, Ms. Gillian Kingston**

Conference Video: <http://worldmethodistconference.com/wp-content/uploads/wmc2016-videos/Wmc16-satpm-abrahams-1.m4v>

*Ivan:* (John Wesley: A Life and Legacy [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BED1z\\_BAw8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BED1z_BAw8).) We are benefactors of a great legacy and heirs of a rich legacy to build upon!

During the past three days we have been on an exciting journey in which we had a veritable feast of Methodist understanding what it means to be “ONE.” The plenary speakers, as well as the group leaders, helped us explore what it means to:

- believe in ONE GOD,
- profess ONE FAITH,
- be ONE PEOPLE
- And engage in ONE MISSION.

*Gillian:* Diversity is a key asset of the World Methodist Council which represents 80 denominations, all with Wesleyan roots, but each with its own structure and governance. We are more than 82 million members from 134 countries. It has been said that the sun never sets on the Methodist Movement for we are found in every nook and cranny of God’s good earth.

*J.C.:* Diversity alone cannot serve as a conceptual anchor of an organization. Every well-ordered organization shares a uniting tenet, and this fact gives rise to the fundamental underlying principle of the 2016 Conference. The member churches are not ONE because they are UNIFORM but rather because they are UNITED.

Methodism does not require or even expect of its members UNIFORMITY in opinions or modes of public worship, but only a desire to do no harm, do good and love God with all our heart and to serve the best interest of God’s people.

In the World Methodist Council, we celebrate our DIVERSITY but also provide vehicles through which the charisms within the Methodist family can be shared in programs of unity and mission.

*Ivan:* In the sweep of Christian history, the Methodist Movement is a relative newcomer and is still being formed and transformed and will no doubt continue beyond our lifetime.

We have been reminded on many occasions that this is only the 21st World Methodist Conference. In actual fact, the Conference has come of age and where better to throw a 21st birthday bash than in Houston, a city which is a microcosm of the world with people from more than 135 nations living here speaking over 100 different languages and where almost a quarter of the population is under the age of 16.

*Gillian:* The fact that we are meeting here in Houston, the home of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) serves to emphasize our intent to marvel at the mystery and be struck with awe and wonder at the unfathomable love of God who created the universe with millions of stars each with its own galaxy.

When the Psalmist contemplated the works of creation, he felt compelled to declare; *“When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers the moon and the stars you set in place what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Yet you made them only a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor”.* (Ps 8:3-5 New Living Translation)

*J.C.:* From different cities around the world, we watched and listened to many countdowns leading to the launching of spacecraft into orbit around the earth, but none was more epic than July 16, 1967, when Neil Armstrong, Edwin Aldrin, and Michael Collins blasted off from Cape Kennedy in Florida on a journey to the moon.

I can still hear .....12, 11, 10, 9, ignition sequence start, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, zero...all engines are running.....we have a liftoff, liftoff on Apollo 11.

*Ivan:* With every launch we hear the climatic cry from this very city which is the nerve center, ground control for NASA, **“liftoff, we have a liftoff.”** The three of us on stage together with the Steering Committee and Council members want to shout out today, **“liftoff, we have a liftoff”** as we seek to lead the global Methodist family on a MISSION JOURNEY in ways that we have only dreamt of before.

*Gillian:* As a layperson called to give leadership on this journey let me share something about myself. I come from the Republic of Ireland. Both sides of my father's family have been Methodist for generations, so Methodism is in my DNA! There is a tradition of service in my family: one cousin is a Methodist minister, another is a priest in the Church of Ireland, a third is a church youth worker and a further two have been mission partners in Cote d'Ivoire. I am one of Mr. Wesley's preachers (a local preacher).

Some seven years ago, my church voted to appoint a Lay Leader to serve alongside the President. It was my privilege to be the first person so appointed.

The Methodist Church in Ireland is the smallest of the four mainstream Christian churches in Ireland, having a membership of some 22,800 and a community role of 45,200. That said, the church has produced people of significant leadership, particularly through the troubled period of 1969 to 1998, one of whom, the Revd Dr Harold Good, recipient of the World Methodist Peace Award 2007, has been with us at this Conference. The relationship of the Methodist Church in Ireland with the (Anglican) Church of Ireland has set a pattern for Methodist/Anglican relations in other parts of the world.

At Durban 2011, I was appointed to the Steering Committee to represent the European region; following the untimely death of Bishop Sarah Davis early in the quinquennium, I was invited to act as interim Vice President. Prior to that, I was the Programme Chair for the World Methodist Conference in Seoul, South Korea, in 2006. - hence my great pleasure in serving alongside the President, the Revd Professor Jong Chun Park. I have also served on the Methodist/Roman Catholic International Commission from 1986-2006

Two verses of Scripture inform my hopes and dreams for the people called Methodist;

The first is Jesus' prayer for his followers on the night before he died - *that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.* (John 17:23)

The second is the Apostle Peter's injunction to the early church: *in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.* (1 Peter 3:15-16)

As the people called Methodist, friends of all and enemies of none, we are called to work with all who name the name of Jesus Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel to God's world. The Council's dialogues with other Christian World Communions have constituted some of the best work it has done; the superb body of documentation accumulated needs more widely to be read and assimilated as we work together towards the Kingdom.

As John Wesley said in his Letter to a Roman Catholic (Dublin 1749), *Let us...endeavour to help each other on in whatever we are agreed leads to the kingdom. So far as we can, let us always rejoice to strengthen each other's hands in God.*

But, more than that, each of us needs to have a deep personal faith, we must each be able to articulate that faith and we each have a responsibility to be aware of the context in which we 'offer Christ' to others. This was vital for the early church; it remains vital for today.

Ireland is part of what is sometimes called the Celtic Fringe. The Celtic people lived across Europe from Galatia to Spain, gradually being driven west by the Romans. Scholars differ as to whether there ever was a Celtic church as such, but there certainly was a unique Christian blossoming of an earlier pagan culture in these regions. There are features of this which remain important to us, such as

- a sacramental view of life and creation; seeing God in God's world;
- an innate sense of hospitality; 'oft God comes in the stranger's guise';
- a thrust towards mission, seen in the journeying of saints like Columbanus to Europe in the seventh century and still evident in Irish missionaries of all Christian traditions.
- a strong Trinitarian theology perhaps most memorably put in the great hymn we know as The Breastplate of St Patrick

*I bind unto myself the name,  
The strong name of the Trinity,  
By invocation of the same,  
The Three in One and One in Three  
Of whom all nature hath creation,  
Eternal Father, Spirit, word,  
Praise to the Lord of my salvation:*

*Salvation is of Christ the Lord.*

...so that is where I am coming from, spiritually, theologically and by birth!

**J.C.:** As the President Elect and soon to be President of the World Methodist Council it is important that you know "When God calls, He gives grace." (John Wesley) We are ordinary but the grace of God transforms us to live the extraordinary journey of faith.

I was born in 1954 one year after the Korean War was over. Having been thrown by the divine providence into the devastated land, I have never stopped seeking to overcome the unjustifiable suffering entangled in the tragedy of fratricidal war.

Growing up in the Methodist family, the greatest thing in my entire life was that the crucified God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself encountered me at the age of 17. Since then I have joyfully committed my soul and my life to spreading the Gospel.

"I do believe and I now believe that Jesus died for me!" (Charles Wesley) Only the power of the Gospel can heal the wounded sin-sick souls in our world today. This is true not only among the long divided and conflict-ridden Korean peninsula but also in all over the places where the basic human rights are violated.

This is the time for us, people called Methodist, to be united to reclaim our Wesleyan heritage of doctrine, discipline, and the spirit of self-denial in order to combat the ineffectiveness of our churches and our seminaries. Discerning the signs and wonders of our time, let us rejoice that the Holy Spirit has already begun the long-delayed Third Great Awakening on the edges of global North as well as the margins of global South and East.

Please listen carefully those who have ears to hear: "He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'" (Revelation: 21:5) Amen!

**Ivan:** As we head out on a new trajectory for the next five years, I am of the firm conviction that the World Methodist Council is a privileged instrument, a gift of service which holds together Methodists throughout the world. It has a distinct convening role within the Wesleyan family to give voice and bear common witness as we respond to the issues of the day.

I marvel how often people ask me, “when did you become a Methodist” not “when did you become a Christian?” I usually respond that I was a Methodist while I was in my mother’s womb as I heard the Wesleyan hymns and felt my mother moving to the African beat. I heard readings from the Bible and the Methodist Book of Discipline while I suckled my mother’s breast because all her children went with her to every church meeting, women’s gatherings and choir practice. Methodism is part of my DNA and courses through my veins.

I was raised in a home on a diet of hymns, bible verses, and freedom songs. In the African worldview, there is no dichotomy between the secular and sacred. God is Lord of all creation.

From a very early age, my life was irreparably shaped on the anvil of the struggle for justice and peace. It provided the metaphors and cultural touchstones and the prism through which I see the world. I bring the African concept of Ubuntu to our mission understanding, “I am because we are, and we are because I am”. We are one human family grounded in respect and dignity under the reign of God.

My ministry has been weighted on the side of peace, justice, and reconciliation to build a better world and a more caring humanity. It is this Gospel imperative and a deep faith that drives me.

I have been deeply influenced by feminist theologian Letty Russell’s seminal work, “Table of the Round” where she cast a vision of an egalitarian church and society. There is place at the table for everyone. I am passionately committed to working towards making this a reality

It is a privilege to be part of this great Movement which is sufficient for every personal and social need to transform the world.

*Gillian:* To stay together as “the people called Methodist’ is not enough, we must move forward to serve the present age. The philosopher, Victor Hugo, once observed “Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come.”

As we enter this second half of this second decade of the new millennium, “our time has come”. We have never been religiously and socially timid or intellectually faint-hearted. Let us boldly reaffirm our commitment to the world that God so loves.

We are engaged in the *missio Dei* or “God’s mission”. From our Trinitarian understanding of the divine, we need to see the world as ONE household of God.

The experience of ONENESS with our fellow human beings will be incomplete without ONENESS with nature and all living things on this fragile planet we call home. Human beings are the pinnacle of God’s creation; we are endowed with the greatest gift and responsibility to care for our sisters, brothers, and creation in “world building” with God. (Genesis 1:28).

*J.C.:* As we read the signs of the time and engage in the CARE OF CREATION we will recover a vision for ourselves and the Church to once again become an outward-looking people, an embodiment of hope for the world that God so loves.

As Christians, we have a natural instinct to see the survival of our churches as our *raison d'etre*. The Gospels rather suggest that Jesus and his early followers were less passionate about maintaining institutions than TRANSFORMING people and inaugurating God’s dynamic reign of justice and peace. Our primary calling is to be “KINGDOM PEOPLE” following Jesus in the company of John Wesley and his band of preachers.

*Ivan:* God is the source of mission and our participation in the *missio Dei* must always be transformative. The Triune God sent both the Son and the Holy Spirit to create, sustain and redeem all creation. God is active in mission in the world to bring the world unto Godself, and we are called to be a co-worker in the mission of God.

Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ in her song of praise declared; “He has stretched out his mighty arm and scattered the proud with all their plans. He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones and lifted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty handed.”

*Gillian:* We must hear the cries of the poor and the groans of creation; we must disabuse ourselves of the idea that those on the margins of society are the recipients of mission. Rather, they are active agents in mission confronting the “powers and principalities of the world” which oppress and breed injustice.

*J.C.:* It is only through authentic living and faithful proclamation that we engage in mission. We participate in God’s Mission as we together with all people of goodwill confront systemic injustice and oppression and work

towards the fulfillment of God's Kingdom on earth. Wesleyans do this through "Works of Piety" (seeking inner peace with God through prayer, study of the scriptures, fasting and sharing in the sacraments) and "Works of Mercy (acts of compassion and working to eradicate injustice).

*Ivan:* Let me relate a Christian legend about an angel who questioned Jesus after the ascension. "Where have you been?" she enquired. Jesus answered; "I've been on earth." The angel asked; "For how long?" Jesus replied; "For thirty years." The angel then asked: "And so how did it go?" to which Jesus responded; "They crucified me." And the angel said, "Well, well, well so you must have caused a stir and had wide influence." Jesus said, "I had eleven friends." Then, looking very puzzled the angel asked, "What then will become of your work?" To which Jesus responded; "I left it in the hands of my friends." "What if they fail?" the angel enquired. And Jesus said, "I don't have any other plans."

*Together:* God's mission is in our hands. We are God's hands, feet, and voice.

*Gillian:* Nelson Mandela, world figure and recipient of the 2000 World Methodist Peace Award, once commented that; "We can change the world and make it a better place. It is in your hands to make a difference." (Screen one of Mandela images with the quote)

Methodism is a transforming discipleship movement; the local church is its primary unit of transformation. The local church is the mission frontier and must be a source of life and spiritual energy in the community it serves.

*J.C.:* John Wesley was firm in his conviction that "Religion must not go from the greatest to the least, or the power would appear to be of men". (Journal May 21, 1764, Works21:466) As we stand in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, we will more fully identify the contradictions in society, embrace hope and work towards the promising future that God holds out for all persons.

It is important for Christians to realize that they are not self-initiators of justice but are merely responding to God's justice. No matter how much one seeks to be for God's justice, human justice is only a pale reflection of God's justice.

As contemporary heirs of Mr. Wesley, we remind ourselves that our roots are firmly planted in the doctrine of sanctification, for this reason, "we were raised up, to spread Scriptural holiness throughout our land(s)" and to

share in the momentous task of being “co-creators”- agents of transformation.

*Ivan:* It is as we draw on our heritage and again link faith and works, pietism and social action, spirituality and political engagement that this groaning world in travail will be transformed into a new world of justice and peace where human security will become a reality.

*Gillian:* There have been seismic shifts in the global Christian landscape, these have been referred to by mission scholar, Dr. Lamin Sanneh as “The post-Western Christian awakening.” This should encourage Methodists to ask the compelling question: “How do we engage in “one mission” especially where the center of gravity of Christianity has moved to the global south and where Methodist around the globe faces different cultural, racial and economic contexts?”

*J.C.* The Rev. Dr. Wesley Ariarajah, a missiologist and Methodist minister from Sri Lanka argues that mission means different things for different people especially for those in Latin America, Asia and Africa where “Christian missions got mixed up with conquest (and) was affected by the unholy alliance of Evangelization, Colonization and Westernization” He encourages us to search for alternative mission paradigms and presents four thesis.

Thesis One; We need to move away from an understanding of mission that divides and recover the biblical message that God intends to bring the whole creation unto Godself.

Thesis Two; We need to move away from the traditional anthropology that has given rise to the doctrinal formulations that underpin the traditional concepts of mission and re-imagine the reason and goal of mission, discipleship to new values of the Reign of God.

Thesis Three; we need to move away from mission that targets other religious communities for conversion. This does not mean that all religions are the same, but other religions are not our enemies.

Thesis Four; Christian mission relates to the values that Jesus stood for; those that embrace the values of the Reign of God. Therefore, we can collaborate with all groups, including religious groups and those with no religious labels, in promoting the life-centered values of the Reign of God. (Lecture delivered at Drew University, New Jersey, Mission Impossible? Reimagining a credible Mission for Today see also Your God, My God, Our

God-Rethinking Christian Theology for Religious Plurality - WCC publications, 2012).

*Ivan:* Dr. Ariarajah's four theses resonate with the core values and vision of the World Methodist Council. The Council through its structures and understanding of mission is strategically placed to build bridges across the chasm in the world to; share the good news of Christ, call people to faithful discipleship, work alongside the poor and marginalized to transform society, strengthen the ecumenical movement, care for creation and build relationships with people of faith and no faith.

*Gillian:* We invite you to step out in faith and hope and love with Christ Jesus to engage in God's Mission. Marcel Proust once said; "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes."

(<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/m/marcelprou107111.html>)

The prophet Isaiah encourages us to watch for the new things that God is doing in our midst. I believe that there are signs everywhere that something new is trying to be born and the exciting thing is we can be part of it. (Isaiah 43:19)

*J.C.:* We are witnesses to the power of God and can testify that no situation is irredeemable when we are touched by Almighty God. Although the journey is difficult and sometimes it seems as if the road of life goes uphill, we live in the confidence and hope that justice and mercy can kiss. (Psalm 85:10) and that the lamb and the lion can learn to eat together. (Isaiah 11:6)

We are a people of hope. Jürgen Moltmann says that;

"Living without hope is like no longer living. Hell is hopelessness, and it is not for nothing that at the entrance to Dante's Hell there stand the words, "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here". (J. Moltmann; Theology of Hope, p.32 )

*Gillian:* There are wonderful markers in our past but we are eternal optimists, prisoners of hope who passionately believe that the glory days of Methodism don't lay behind us but rather in the future. As Mr. Wesley, declared "the best is yet to be". Therefore, let us work together to write a new chapter in the history of Methodism.

*Ivan:* We may not be able to take you on an epic journey to the moon but we can leave our imprint on society and make a difference in the world

like the lepers who at the siege of Samaria stood tall and the Syrian army thought they were under attack by giants and fled abandoning their tents, horses, and donkeys, leaving their camp. When the lepers took over the abandoned camp after eating and drinking said; "We have good news, and we should not keep it to ourselves." 2 Kings 7:9

*J.C.:* As we prepare to travel to our homes in different parts of the world let us not leave before hearing the words of Jesus to each one of us gathered here; "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Let us reconnect to our Wesleyan spiritual moorings and recalibrate our moral compasses as we prepare to write a new chapter in our missionary history.

*Gillian:* Honouring the South African women who marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria against the notorious pass laws in 1956, the American poet, June Jordan told the United Nations, "We are the ones we have been waiting for." In other words, change is in your hands, act now!

In Acts 22, Paul recounts his conversion to the Jews in Jerusalem and concludes by asking; "And now what are you waiting for, Get up be baptized and have your sins washed away." And now what are we waiting for.... We are on a new mission trajectory.

*Together:* Houston we have a liftoff; we have a liftoff to change the world! (Liftoff of Apollo 11 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UExTN3\\_UOIY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UExTN3_UOIY))