

Beckly Social Science Lecture — Monday, June 29, 2026

Together Towards Life in a World of Division

Address by Roland Fernandes, general secretary of the general boards of Global Ministries and Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church

Friends in Christ,

Thank you for this opportunity to be in conversation with you today. It is truly an honour, and I come to you with deep respect and affection.

Amid the demands and challenges we each carry, I often find myself reflecting on the evolving nature of our work and its relevance in this moment. From that place, I am continually reminded of how deeply our two churches are connected.

As United Methodists and British Methodists, we stand within a shared Wesleyan expression working together in God's mission. My prayers are often focused on where that mission is taking us: from climate justice to migration, from global poverty to humanitarian crisis. Underlying this is our deep commitment to peace and justice, well-articulated in the Justice-Seeking Report of the British Methodist Church. Seeking peace and justice is at the core of who we are. These missional realities bind us and call us to demonstrate a faithful and coordinated response.

As our partnership deepens in mission, we must also consider the wider global and political contexts in which that partnership now exists.

For today's conversation, I want to acknowledge and speak to our current context, one that is rapidly shifting and significantly influenced by some of the current political leaders in the United States. While much could be said about this, I will focus my reflections on what is most relevant to our context today.

John Wesley said, "The world is my parish." As I see it, Wesley means it is our obligation, as church leaders, to relate our mission work to our current realities, and to speak and act on them accordingly.

As I come to you from across the Atlantic, I am deeply aware of what that obligation means at this particular moment in history. It is not lost on me that there is something significant—perhaps even ironic—about an American standing before you to speak about partnership when the trajectory of the United States is headed in the opposite direction.

Yet together we share a great deal: notably, a Wesleyan tradition that gives this gathering its very identity. We are living in a time in which relationships, including those being reshaped by those from across the Atlantic, are experiencing tension and uncertainty in ways that we simply cannot ignore.

In moments like this, I find myself turning to Scripture. I am drawn to that moment in the Book of Esther when Mordecai asks Esther whether she has come into her position "for such a time as

this.” As I have said many times over the past six years that I have served as general secretary for Global Ministries, this is also our question, not just as individuals, but also as churches, as partners, and as a worldwide Methodist family. Together, now, we have been asked to answer: “Have we come to our position, our current place, for such a time as this?”

With confidence I believe the answer is, “Yes.”

Yes, we have been called by God for a time such as this. Each and every one of us.

As I reflect on this centenary Beckly Lecture, I recognize that we stand within a rich Methodist tradition of bringing together faith and social holiness. For a hundred years, Beckly lectures have brought voices into conversation with the realities of their time—economists, theologians, public leaders, and those formed by lived experience—each wrestling with what it means to live out the gospel in the world as it is.

What is striking is not only the range of concerns addressed in previous Beckly lectures—poverty, dignity, health, justice, creation—but also the persistence of those concerns. The same cries—for justice, for dignity, for peace, for right relationship—continue to echo across the past hundred years.

And in that echo, we hear clear direction: our faith must confront real-world injustice, not just ideas; we must listen and respond to marginalized voices and lived experience; the church has a public responsibility for justice and the common good.

I find myself recalling and suggesting a simple but profound articulation adopted last year by the United Methodist Council of Bishops as part of the vision for The United Methodist Church.

Love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously.

These are not slogans.

They are a summons.

They are a way of asking, in very practical and theological terms:

What does faithfulness look like now?

The first part of an answer to that question is that faithfulness requires humble introspection—especially about the history that has shaped us.

We live in a world where relationships are often shaped by self-interest, where alliances can feel conditional, and where trust is fragile...even non-existent, at times.

Relationships, however, especially those that grow into partnerships, must be grounded in values, beginning with humility and truthfulness.

There is much in the history of Christianity—and particularly in its Western expressions—for which we can give thanks. At the same time, there is also much that calls for reflection and frank honesty.

The spread of Christianity has at times been intertwined with systems of power that diminished cultures, displaced peoples, and misrepresented the very gospel we proclaim. Regrettably, some national and global leaders continue to promote these systems of power and dominance today, misusing and misrepresenting the gospel.

Notably, the words of a few but influential U.S. political leaders stand in direct contradiction to the theology of mission to which we, as people of faith, are called. Their divisive rhetoric and actions are antithetical to Christian values and beliefs.

For those who may speak with pride about "Western civilization"—its Christian heritage, its culture, its history of sacrifice and achievement—it seems the intent, in a geopolitical context, is to anchor and protect a longstanding and arguably worthy Euro-American view of partnership. For example, this was presumably the intent meant by the United States Secretary of State when he spoke of transatlantic unity in February of this year at the Munich Security Conference. Coincidentally, this was around the same time that I received the invitation to speak today and began to give thought to my remarks. It seemed to be a good starting point.

There are many religious, scientific, artistic, and political achievements in the history of the West that we should honor and perpetuate, with gratitude. But there is also much in the history of the West that calls for lamentation, repentance, and reparation. The Methodist Church in Britain is doing a lot of work on this.

The same expansion that carried Christianity to the furthest corners of the earth also carried the slave ships. It carried the plantation system. It carried the doctrine of terra nullius—the legal fiction that indigenous lands were empty and available for seizure. It carried the mission schools that took children from their families and told them that their languages, their traditions, their names, their very identities were inferior and had to be erased.

Western civilization cannot be separated from Western colonialism. The world carries with it the legacy of Western imperialism, and we cannot move forward together in partnership without being honest about that. If I may, let me ground this not only in history, but also briefly in my own lived experience.

I was born in Kolkata, India. For many decades now, my wife, who is also from India, and I have made our home in the United States. I have been blessed with an experience that offers perspective for seeing, in a broader context, the political divisions—especially trans-Atlantic ones—in which we now find ourselves seemingly entrapped. Calcutta, now Kolkata, served as the capital of the British Empire in India for almost 140 years and was considered in the 19th century, according to many historians, perhaps the second most important city in the Empire after London. Growing up in Kolkata, I was able to study and see the impact of colonialism from various lenses.

I have served in various roles and countries for my work on behalf of the church: first for the Methodist Church in India; then working in mission for Global Ministries in the Philippines, followed by other Global Ministries roles in the United States—first New York City and then in Atlanta, Georgia—where we moved our agency headquarters in 2016.

This diverse journey has played an important role in shaping my perspective, and allows me to hear more clearly tension or dissonance in the remarks and policy ideas espoused by some of today's political leaders. For me, despite what we may gladly cherish about it, Western civilization is a contested concept, especially when it is winnowed to narrowly framed nostalgia.

And it is precisely here that our theology must guide us—*lest history be allowed to run unchecked, defining our future mission more than God does.*

I want to focus and call our attention here to the World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism document, "Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes." This was issued in 2012, but it remains relevant today as we continue to navigate our changing landscapes in mission and evangelism.

The WCC's landmark document says it plainly: "We regret that mission activity linked with colonisation has often denigrated cultures and failed to recognise the wisdom of local communities." That is a carefully diplomatic sentence for something that was, at its worst, cultural genocide dressed in ecclesiastical robes.

We must ask the uncomfortable question: How much of what we called "mission" brought death rather than life? How much of mission served human empires and not the kingdom of God? And this is perhaps not just a question of the past but remains with us as historical patterns like patriarchy and dependency persist.

We are called to begin mission partnership from a different standpoint—out of a practice of Christian humility, not a sense of cultural superiority. The Theology of Mission statement that guides Global Ministries begins not with civilization, but with God. As our foundational statement affirms: "God's Mission reclaims the life of all creatures and redeems all creation for God's intended purpose. Holy Scriptures bear witness to mission that begins with God, belongs to God, and will be fulfilled by God at the end of time."

Not our mission. Not a Western mission. Not a civilizational mission. Not a conceptualization of how we want the world to look. But God's mission—*Missio Dei*. That distinction is not trivial—it is everything.

And when we view our present moment through this theological lens, certain narratives become deeply troubling.

When we engage in mission partnership in the spirit of the *Missio Dei*, we follow the gospel, the good news. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of life—"I came that they may have life and have it in all its fullness." It is a gospel of the God who hears the cry of the oppressed, who confronts every Pharaoh and every empire with the demand: let my people go.

Our theology of mission describes Jesus as one who "poured himself out in servanthood for all humanity and emptied himself of divine privilege, assuming the trials and risks of human limitation. Jesus identified in compassion with all humanity and lived in radical faithfulness to the will of God."

That is the Christ we seek to follow. Not the Christ of empire, but the Christ of the kenosis, the self-emptying, the servant who washed feet. And the church that follows this Christ is called to a corresponding posture.

The United Methodist Church, through Global Ministries, is committed to a mission theology that listens before it speaks, that accompanies before it leads, that asks "what is God already doing here?" before it arrives with its own programs. Our Theology of Mission statement is clear: there are "no places where God's grace has not always been present, only places where God in Christ is not recognized, served or heeded." Let me say here that even as I make several references to the Global Ministries Theology of Mission statement today, it does not imply that our actions as an agency have historically always reflected our theology. Actions speak louder than words and many times, our actions have strayed far from these words.

WCC's Together Towards Life puts it this way: "We understand that our task is not to bring God along but to witness to the God who is already there." That is the mission we are called to. Not the mission of imperial Christianity—but the mission of a God who was in the margins long before we arrived there.

These larger themes form the theological framework through which I will explore a few specific areas of practical application today. A key emphasis of my work as general secretary has been to focus our support on the strategic priorities of our mission partners. We support the priorities of local leaders in communities of color in the U.S., in African and Filipino UMC episcopal areas, and in autonomous Methodist churches because we believe that these leaders are best equipped to know how God is moving in their local settings. It is not Global Ministries' job to dictate to these local leaders how they should join in God's mission; it is our job to support and walk with them as they engage in God's mission in ways that they have discerned themselves.

For some, and again I refer us to the language of some of our current U.S. political leaders, it is easy to demonize the other with false beliefs: that mass migration threatens civilization, that climate policy threatens prosperity, that diversity threatens cultural cohesion. The *Other* is a danger, they say.

This kind of demonization—grounded in a psychology of threat—is not the psychology of the gospel. It is the psychology of empire—*which has always justified its exclusions and its violence in the language of civilizational survival and continues to do so today.*

The WCC document reminds us that "the marginalized in society are the main partners in God's mission." They are not threats. Not problems to be managed. They are partners. Co-bearers of the image of God. Vessels of the Holy Spirit. Agents of God's mission.

Global Ministries' mission theology affirms that the church is called "to cross every boundary to call for true human dignity among all peoples, especially among those regarded as the least of God's children, while making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

When I look at the attacks in the United States on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs; when I reflect on the challenges faced by migrants and asylum seekers, many of whom are leaving very difficult circumstances often caused by U.S. regional policies; when I see the

massive reductions in aid programs and their unfolding consequences; and when I sense that some communities—people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and individuals with disabilities—may feel less included in public life, I experience a deep sense of sadness. And these concerns lead me to feel a personal and faith-informed responsibility to speak. Needless to say, speaking itself is not enough but that is what I am doing today.

The intentional dismantling and, I would say, destruction of policies related to diversity, equity, and inclusion by the current U.S. administration have been stunning and shocking. Programs have been eliminated, jobs cut, promotions denied, solely on the basis of race and gender. These actions are antithetical to the teachings of the gospel. The United Methodist Church and we at Global Ministries have not been silent on these matters. “But are we doing enough?” is always the question. We affirm—as a matter of biblical conviction—that diversity is a gift of God, not a threat to be managed, and that God’s care extends to all people.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the heart of Scripture beginning with Genesis 1, “God created humanity in God’s own image, in the divine image God created them...” (CEB). Every person created bears the image of God and has inherent worth and dignity. No person or group is superior or inferior to another. When Christ invites us to the table, all are included on the guest list, and all receive their portion.

Think, too, of Pentecost. The Spirit did not erase languages—the Spirit honored them. Every person heard the Gospel in their own tongue. Together Towards Life draws precisely this lesson: “The enforcement of uniformity discredits the uniqueness of each individual created in the image and likeness of God. Whereas Babel attempted to enforce uniformity, the preaching of the disciples on the day of Pentecost resulted in a unity in which personal particularities and community identities were not lost but respected.”

That is the vision we must hold and act from. Not uniformity. Not the erasure of difference in the name of a single civilization. But the Pentecostal communion of difference—where every voice is heard, every identity is honored, and the body of Christ is recognized as the most diverse community on earth.

Our Wesleyan heritage speaks directly to this. Our Theology of Mission affirms that “the Wesleyan expectation of ‘perfection in love’ draws redeemed individuals into appropriate, active, transforming relationships of wholeness and unity with God, all people and creation.”

Perfection in love is not uniformity. It is the fullness of relationship—across difference, across boundary, across all that divides. Therefore, our call to mission partnership is a call to *care for and include others*, not a call to fear or exclusion.

When we allocate scholarships to expand educational access for those without it, when we reinforce the dignity and rights of migrants, when we offer disaster preparedness trainings to marginalized communities to support their resiliency, we act out of our belief that all people have inherent worth and all people have a place in God’s mission of redemption. And when every person is honored in this way, the fruit is not division—but peace.

What is called “peace” today is too often pursued through coercion, intimidation, force, the misuse of power, and the proliferation of weapons. Ceasefires are imposed by overwhelming military power; stability is claimed after cities are destroyed; order is declared once dissent has been silenced. In such a world, peace is often confused with control, and reconciliation is replaced by victory.

Peace cannot be born from violence without inheriting its wounds. One of the definitions of peace that has always appealed to me is that ‘peace is the absence of fear’. As Nelson Mandela prophetically said and as you have also noted, peacebuilding is “the creation of an environment where all can flourish”.

When individual or collective fear grips so much of the world today, lasting peace cannot be achieved by simply stopping violence or imposing order through force. Lasting peace can only be achieved by transforming relationships, structures, and cultures to foster justice, equity, and harmony.

The work for peace and justice is a part of God’s call to mission partnership. Global Ministries’ Theology of Mission asserts, “Active faith participates in the perfecting and fulfilling grace of God, which claims and implements the promises of God ... to reconcile division in the households of faith and among the peoples and nations of the earth as all of creation groans for redemption.”

The biblical phrase “groaning for redemption” colorfully demonstrates what is at stake in our work for peace and justice. How many people around the world are groaning or crying right now because of war and conflict? ‘Reconciliation among households of faith’ seems almost impossible.

WCC’s Together Towards Life reassures us, “The good news of God’s reign is about the promise of the actualization of a just and inclusive world.” God’s reign is a reign of peace, achieved not through domination but through justice and inclusion. And we know how hard peacebuilding is because it is about resolving conflicts...some of which have existed for decades and even centuries.

In response to the devastating impacts of the budget cuts implemented by the current U.S. administration last year, Global Ministries and Higher Education and Ministry launched an initiative named “This Moment Matters” which was focused on five areas of response— Health, Education, Food Security, Migration and Peace. These areas are a part of our existing work but we have increased our focus on them. Over \$32 million in grants have been made in these five areas over the past year and “This Moment Matters” is also our current fundraising focus, to further increase the impact. I am aware that this is a drop in the ocean based on how much funding has been cut by the U.S. Administration (\$32 billion from U.S.AID alone) but it is still an important Christian witness in these challenging times.

Our increasing focus on peace and justice work as an agency is being implemented through working along with and through partners. It is no doubt a daunting task in these times. Let me mention two of our current efforts on this work.

Among our efforts, I am especially grateful for our partnership with you in Jerusalem. For the last fourteen years, through our Methodist Liaison Office—along with the World Methodist Council—the British Methodist Church and The United Methodist Church have stood alongside communities in Palestine and Israel and amplified Christian voices within the worldwide Methodist community in the pursuit of peace and justice. A lot has been said in this conference about the work of Methodist Liaison Office and I do not need to add much more here.

In the West Bank, thousands of Palestinians are displaced year by year, the result of Israeli military operations and attacks by Israeli settlers. There has been a marked rise in violent attacks by Israeli settlers, frequently carried out with the support of, or without intervention from, the Israeli Defence Forces. These actions, alongside recent legislative changes, contribute to the ongoing de facto annexation of the West Bank.

Despite these limitations, we must make every effort to stand alongside those living under occupation, those working non-violently for its end, and all who seek a future shaped by justice, dignity, and peace. This is a *ministry of presence, accompaniment, and perseverance*. The impact of this ministry cannot always be easily measured but the work remains essential.

The United Methodist Church also remains deeply committed to advocacy for peace on the Korean Peninsula, marked by our continuing prayers for reconciliation between the North and the South, and, eventually, genuine reunification of the Peninsula. That work, which includes attention to peace and human rights across the broader region, has long stood as a formal commitment of The United Methodist Church.

Crucial to this work has been our membership and participation in the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reunification, and Development on the Korean Peninsula, known as the EFK, with which the British Methodist Church has also been engaged. As some of you know, the EFK was formed 20 years ago, building on the partnership between the World Council of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, and The United Methodist Church. It was inspired by the spirit of the Tozanso Process in 1984 and the Gilon Consultation in 1986. The Gilon Consultation marks its 40th anniversary this year, but true lasting peace on the peninsula is still far from a reality.

Now, if we can think further about my reference earlier to “groaning for redemption,” let us bear in mind our concerns are not only human—they are also ecological.

In that context, some of our leaders in the public sphere, despite the evidence, such as increasing record-breaking heat waves in Europe, continue to dismiss concern for the ecological crisis as the work of a “climate cult.” Climate consciousness is described as a kind of irrational fear, something to be moved beyond on the road to civilizational renewal.

I want to say, clearly and without apology: caring for creation is not a cult. It is a covenant.

From the very opening of Scripture, we are placed in the garden as stewards—not owners, not exploiters, but keepers of a living world that belongs to God. The Hebrew word *avad*—to serve the earth—is the same root as the word for worship. To tend creation is to worship its Creator.

Global Ministries' Theology of Mission affirms that active faith participates in the perfecting and fulfilling grace of God, which "claims and implements the promises of God to deliver exploited persons and oppressed peoples, to restore the sanctity and integrity of God's creation."

WCC's Together Towards Life calls us "to move beyond a narrowly human-centered approach and to embrace forms of mission which express our reconciled relationship with all created life." That is not the language of a cult. That is the language of the gospel.

The ecological crisis is a mission crisis. It falls most heavily on the poorest communities on earth—on Pacific Island nations, (we heard about Samoa this morning), on sub-Saharan farmers, on Arctic Indigenous peoples, among many others. When seas rise, it is not the powerful who drown first. When harvests fail, it is not the wealthy who go hungry first.

We do not care for creation because we have joined a cult. We care for creation because we serve the God of Life.

Like the British Methodist Church, The United Methodist Church has formally committed to care of the environment. At the WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2022, it was uplifting to see that care of the environment emerged as the one issue on which all were agreed. In 2026, the WCC launched the "Ecumenical Decade for Climate Justice Action." As some of you know, ecumenical agreement does not happen easily!

Among the concrete actions Global Ministries has taken is our Yambasu Agriculture Initiative in Africa, named for the late Bishop John Yambasu of Sierra Leone. With an emphasis on building long-term sustainability in shared partnership with local United Methodist leadership, the Yambasu Initiative has, since its inception in 2020, enabled sustainable farming, food security, and economic empowerment in multiple vulnerable communities throughout Africa.

Another, newer, innovative initiative is integrating sustainable technology in disaster resilience, response, and recovery. We know disasters are increasing because of and exacerbated by climate change. But traditional technologies for providing basics like electricity and water in the aftermath of a disaster contribute to fossil fuel emissions that sow the seeds of future disasters. We can reduce our footprint by providing equipment like solar and battery storage to local disaster response leaders.

Through the Global Ministries Earthkeepers program, now in its 10th year, hundreds of faithful United Methodists have participated in trainings that have helped them understand and respond to God's call to care for all of creation. The projects that they have then implemented in their own communities are a public witness to the God of Life.

In the United States, this moment presents a significant period of reflection for many churches about what type of witness they are offering to the wider society. There are ongoing conversations, some promoted by political leaders, about the relationship between *Christianity and national identity*, as well as the role faith communities play in public and political life. These dynamics are being experienced with varying intensity across different contexts. Some of these conversations, we could say, are healthy, some most certainly are not. Christian Nationalism and White Christian Nationalism, in particular, is a significant issue. Within this landscape,

perspectives differ. Some churches are more comfortable engaging in the conversation, responding to political demands, while others are more cautious.

The United Methodist Church, following its own recent division, has clarified its commitment to a Wesleyan tradition that emphasizes inclusiveness, global connection, and social holiness. It continues to affirm and uphold this understanding of its mission and identity.

Coming back to the bigger picture, the challenges I have shared today are not confined to one nation. The United States does not hold a monopoly on the historical failures I have been describing. European colonial mission wrote some of the most painful chapters in this history as well. This is a shared history which we must acknowledge, so that we can together commit to a different future. I know the Methodist Church in Britain has done a lot of work with this.

We need each other. Not as an exercise in transatlantic nostalgia—but because the mission of the God of Life is larger than any one organization or agency, any one church, any one nation, any one tradition, any one civilization. Together we can do so much more than we can do alone.

Global Ministries' Theology of Mission is clear that mission is never the possession of one nation or tradition. It speaks of the church as those who, "*in all times and places*, unite as the living body of Christ to join God's mission of redemption, bearing witness to God's presence in the world." In all times and in all places. Not in Western times or Anglo-American places.

The WCC's Together Towards Life puts it this way: "Mission is the overflow of the infinite love of the Triune God." It overflows national borders. It overflows civilizational categories. It overflows our comfortable definitions of who belongs and who does not.

My earliest positive images of the church in India came from witnessing its deep commitment to justice, so that 'all' could experience the fullness of life that Jesus spoke about. The work of the church with the poor and marginalized was very inspiring to me.

What does it mean to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in the context of today's world - with the increase in nationalism, including Christian nationalism? I believe many of the reflections I have shared today speak directly to the new vision statement and my hope is that The United Methodist Church *will actually live into this vision*, demonstrating through its actions what love, service, and leadership means in a time of growing division and exclusion.

Friends—colleagues in the Wesleyan tradition—we live in a frightening and disorienting time. The old certainties, though far from perfect—political, ecclesiastical, civilizational—are breaking apart. *But in the light that emerges from these cracks we will find new insights.*

Instead of calling for the renewal of "the greatest civilization in human history," as some of our political leaders would now have it, we are called to something different—and much deeper.

We are called to the renewal of our covenant with the God of Life for a time such as this. With the God who made the earth and called it good. The God who was born into a refugee family in occupied territory. The God who chose the margins as the place of revelation. The God who, on the day of Pentecost, spoke in every language at once.

Global Ministries' theology of mission holds before us the ultimate horizon: "The church as faithful community moves full of hope toward the transformation of the world and the day when God's mission is fulfilled." Not the West's mission. Not any empire's mission. God's mission—tending toward the fullness of life for all creation. Equally important, the church moves forward full of 'hope' because it is, first and foremost, God's church.

WCC's Together Towards Life affirms that "The overall goal of this mission is understood to be 'that they may have life... in all its fullness' (John 10:10)." It goes on to clarify this goal by speaking of the "economy of life" — a phrase that *challenges us to evaluate every policy, every program, every alliance not by what it does for those already prosperous, but by what it does for those most vulnerable*. That is the economy the God of Life is building. And we are called to be its agents.

Bringing these reflections together, what is our call for "a time such as this"?

We are called to a mission that builds genuine partnership across the Atlantic and across the globe—not in the image of Western supremacy, but in the image of the servant Christ who washed feet.

We are called to repent of colonial mission honestly and courageously and asked how we can participate in healing rather than re-enacting the harm—because a theology of life must grapple with the deaths that were caused in the name of mission.

We are called to celebrate diversity as a Pentecostal gift, refusing the logic of civilizational uniformity and insisting that the body of Christ is most fully itself when it is most fully diverse.

We are called to accompany the marginalized as the primary partners of God's mission—not as objects of charity but as bearers of truth that the comfortable church cannot see from its position of privilege.

We are called to pursue peace through justice, believing that true peace is possible not through domination and intimidation but only when people live in right relationship with one another and all are free of fear.

We are called to care for creation as an act of worship because every tree and every river and every species is the handiwork of a loving God—and we will not call that concern a cult. It is covenant faithfulness.

We are called to witness to the God of Life in public ways without the need for Christianity to dominate debate in the public sphere.

As we seek to discern and answer this call, Global Ministries' Theology of Mission reminds us to remain always alert, for "the Spirit is *always moving* to sweep the church into a new mission age. With openness and gratitude, we await the leading of the Spirit in ways not yet seen as God continues to work God's purposes out in our own day in a new way."

That Spirit does not blow from West to East. That Spirit blows where it will—from the global south to the global north, from the margins to the centre, *from those whom power has forgotten, to those who have grown comfortable in power's shelter*.

The Spirit who hovered over the waters of chaos at creation is still at work. The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is still overturning the power of death. The Spirit who fell at Pentecost on people of every nation and language is still speaking—and she is speaking in voices that power has tried to silence.

As people of faith, that is what gives us hope. Hope is what makes a difference in responding to our call. Hope is a choice we make. 1 Peter 3:15 says, “But in your hearts revere Christ the Lord; Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

Our task is to listen. Our task is to speak. Our task is to walk—together—towards life. Even when the path feels uncertain.

If we are indeed here for such a time as this, then perhaps our calling is not to remove uncertainty, but to respond faithfully within it. And to join together as one—loving boldly, serving joyfully, and leading courageously.

Thanks be to God.

Roland Fernandes

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The Beckly Social Services Lecture is held annually as a fringe event of the Methodist Conference in Britain and is sponsored by the Joint Public Issues Team of The Methodist Church of Britain, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and the United Reformed Church. It is sponsored by the Beckly Trust, established in 1926 by John Henry Beckly, a lay Wesleyan Methodist. Its founding purpose is to explore the social implications of Christianity and the church's witness on social, industrial, economic and international questions. Over the past century, Beckly speakers have brought Christian faith into conversation with public issues such as poverty, human rights, religious freedom, peace, health, migration, racial justice, postcolonial critique, political leadership and care for creation.