

Africa Methodist Council: A Counter of John Wesley's 1786 Fear and a Fulfilment of his 1739 "The World is My Parish" Statement

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Abstract

John Wesley was the founder and anchor of the Methodist movement. As he grew older, he realised the implication his death would have on the movement. In 1786, he documented his envisioned fears, "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without power" (Wesley 1786,1). Contrary to his fears, his 1739 statement, "The World is My Parish" (Wesley 1739,42), was fulfilled as Methodism arrived in Africa four years after his death as a religion with the power to transform society. This paper presents the birth and developments of the Africa Methodist Council as a counter to Wesley's 1786 fear and a confirmation of his 1739 statement "The World is my Parish." The numerical and philanthropical growth of Methodism in Africa is evidence of its visibility and power to transform the African society, true to the 1739 conviction and contrary to the 1786 fear. This paper uses a qualitative research methodology to present the development of the AMC. Furthermore, the paper is informative and utilises Wesley's fears and his vision of Methodism in the world to discuss the birth and development of the Africa Methodist Council. The paper concludes by buttressing the view that Methodism in Africa fulfils Wesley's statement of the world as his parish. It also affirms the power of Methodism to transform society.

Keywords: Africa Methodist Council; John Wesley; 1786; 1739; the World My Parish

UNISA 

Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae

Volume 51 | Number 1 | 2025 | #17294 | 16 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/17294>

ISSN 2412-4265 (Online), ISSN 1017-0499 (Print)

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Introduction

This paper uses the statements John Wesley wrote in 1739 and 1786 to discuss the birth and developments of the AMC. The two statements will not be used in the order of the years they were written but in a reverse format for the reasons that will be explained in this paper.

After his failed mission in Georgia, Wesley returned to England in 1737 but was no longer welcome in the Anglican pulpits. However, the spirit of reviving the world was firing in his life. Having no place to preach from, Wesley began to use his father's grave as his pulpit (Amanambu 2020, 149). On 11 June 1739, he penned the famous axion, "I have now no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. ... I look upon all the world as my parish. ... This is the work I know God has called me to do, and I am sure that His blessing attends it" (Wesley 1739,42). As he grew older, he realised the possible implications of his death on the movement he dominated. In 1786, Wesley documented his envisioned fears: "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without power" (Wesley 1786,1). While the later statement stands as a testimony of Wesley's fear for the future of Methodism after his death, his 1739 statement propelled the growth of Methodism beyond Europe and North America. For example, Kumalo (2009,12) confirms that the Methodist movement arrived in Africa with laypeople four years after Wesley's death. Kumalo confirms that:

The first stream consists of the arrival of the first group of Methodists from Great Britain. These were five Methodist soldiers who came with the British troops in 1795 and settled in the Cape. Upon settling, they hired a room for two hours a week where they held prayer meetings; these were nothing more than class meetings. Their room became known as the first Methodist Chapel in South Africa (Kumalo 2009,12).

The different strands of Methodism that moved to Africa demonstrate the impact of Wesley's statement, "I look upon all the world as my parish" (Wesley 1739,42). By 2024, Methodists from Africa found themselves in European and American churches that turned out to be mission frontiers of Methodists from Africa (Sims 2016,56). Although migration to the Western world is defined by different factors such as asylum-seeking, economic refugeeing, greener pastures, and/or "reverse missionary" work, African migrants, already grounded in their custom of Methodism, took on the Western Methodist Church's tradition to the countries in which they were refugeeing, thereby making these churches their new places of faith away from their countries of domicile.

This paper aims to explore the developments of the AMC using Wesley's 1786 fear and his 1739 conviction of the world as his parish. In using these two statements in a reverse format, the paper argues that the AMC is a continental movement seeking to Africanise Methodism and foster unity among African Methodists. The paper argues that although Wesley feared the existence of a powerless religion in Europe or America, the AMC is a possible fulfilment of his "The World Is My Parish" statement that presents

Methodism as a religion embodying the hope of transformation in Africa even after his death.

The paper will discuss the methodology employed, the author's motivation, the movement's developments, its aim, objectives, composition, and the AMC's programmes. Given that the task of the paper is to share the developments of the AMC, the author will use qualitative research methodology to allay Wesley's fears with his "The World My Parish" statement as the springboard for the development of the AMC. The paper will analyse MMC's reports and presentations to different fora to buttress the assumption that the development of Methodism in Africa and the AMC, particularly, is a counter to Wesley's 1786 fear and a fulfilment of his "The World My Parish" axiom. The paper argues that the "World My Parish" of 1739 is a conviction that the AMC represents Wesley's hope of a religion with the power to transform African society.

Methodology

The qualitative method selected for this study is the descriptive analysis, which utilises qualitative data and is described descriptively (Vickie and Clinton 2012,255). This method was selected because the descriptive approach provides straightforward descriptions of experiences and perceptions, particularly in areas where little is known about the topic under investigation (Sandelowski 2010,78). In this paper, the descriptive analysis recognises that no scholarly research was conducted on the AMC. The subjective nature of the AMC and the different experiences of the Methodist Church leaders who participated in the development of the movement are worth describing and documenting for both the members of the movement and the ecumenical fraternity to appreciate the stages that AMC went through to be established.

Motivation of the Study

Two motivations drove this paper. The first is the lack of published literature on AMC's development. The second motivation was both personal and professional. The first impetus of the author to carry out this research speaks to the contradictions of the new trends of Christianity in Africa versus the non-availability of scholarly literature on the AMC. Research on demographics has shown that the centre of gravity in the world of Christianity has shifted south to Africa, Asia, and Latin America with the largest Christian communities being found in Africa and Latin America (Haustein 2022). According to Zurlo (2017), by 2019, Africa had more Christians than any other continent. It has 667 million adherents, making Africa the new centre of Christianity. In the same period, the Methodist church had 80 million members drawn from 138 countries (World Methodist Council 2019). By 2024, the AMC was the only continental denominational body with full-time personnel. However, there was no scholarly literature focusing on its birth and development.

Demographical research has revealed the continual growth of Christianity in Africa. Given the continent's socioeconomic challenges and the philanthropical record of the Methodist Church since its inception, many people "will join" the denomination as both a philanthropic platform through its social amenities like schools, hospitals, and clinics and for their spiritual lives since Methodism's purpose is to spread scriptural holiness. The World Economic Forum (2019) predicted that by 2025, there will be over 760 million Christians in Africa surpassing earlier estimates of 630 to 700 million. Tagwirei (2024,1) also predicted that the WEF statistics mean that Christians will constitute 49% of the continent's population. From these statistics, it would be unfair not to document the development of Methodism in Africa so that the AMC can also take it upon itself to calculate the Methodist community from the broader statistics of the continental numbers.

This second motivation has two parts. The first part speaks on the role of the author as an academic, while the second part speaks to the author as the General Secretary of the AMC. The author published intensively on the history and theology of Methodism in general and the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe between 2016 and 2024. His research for his PhD and master's degrees focused on Methodism. He has also published two books, 17 peer-reviewed articles, and four chapters in books in this field. However, when the author was appointed the General Secretary of the AMC in March 2023, the first challenge was to be an administrator of an organisation without literature known to those who are both part of the movement and those who follow it. This challenge was exacerbated by the fact that although Wesley never set foot in Africa, he imagined Methodism in Africa through his statement, "The World is My Parish." The movement reached the continent four years after his death and yet the motherboard of Methodism in Africa is not known in scholarly circles. This paper thus explores the developments of the AMC as a continental movement seeking to Africanise Methodism and foster unity among African Methodists.

The World is My Parish

In 1739, Wesley was excluded from Anglican pulpits in London because his doctrine of justification by faith offended many people (Marsh 2015, 204). Although he wished to preach in consecrated buildings under Anglican oversight, the biblical necessity of preaching the gospel caused him to take unorthodox steps of open-air preaching (Brown-Lawson 1994,30). In a letter to James Hervey, in March 1739, Wesley defended his itinerancy by saying,

God in Scripture commands me...to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, and confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another's parish...I have now no parish of my own...Whom, then, shall I hear, God or man? If it be just to obey man rather than God, you can judge. A dispensation of the gospel is committed to me, and woe is me if I preach not the gospel (Wesley 1739).

He also recorded the statement in his 11 June 1739 journal entry, saying:

I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to; and sure I am that His blessing attends it. Great encouragement have I, therefore, to be faithful in fulfilling the work He hath given me to do. His servant I am, and, as such, am employed according to the plain direction of His Word, ‘As I have the opportunity, to doing good unto all men’; and His providence concurs with his Word; which as disengaged me from all things else, that I might singly attend on this very thing, ‘and go about doing good. (Wesley 1739, 42–43).

This journal entry shows that Wesley’s mission was not controlled by preaching in the prestigious Anglican pulpits, but he was keen for the gospel to reach every soul that needed salvation. This statement can be argued to be the engine that propelled the growth and development of Methodism in different parts of the world after his death. Although Wesley was unsure of the movement’s future, it grew and became stronger.

“Dead Sect Without Power or A Movement with Life?” John Wesley’s Dilemma

Although John Wesley had managed to galvanise the Methodist movement into a formidable structure that turned around the history of Britain during his life and after his death, his last days were more challenging than he expected. As Wesley grew older, he discovered several factors that would lead to the possible crumbling of the movement after his death. Initially, he thought Charles, his young brother, would continue with the movement. Unfortunately, Charles died in 1788, dealing a blow to the future of Methodism. Another challenge was the tension that had already started with Francis Asbury, who had shown that he could go his own way in America. Although Asbury’s propensity to call Wesley irreverently “our old daddy” signalled his familial love for Wesley’s legacy, it also showed that he was no longer dependent on the British patriarch’s leadership (Heitzenrater 2013,245). Everyone, including Wesley himself, had anticipated that tensions within the movement during his lifetime might escalate to the breaking point at his death. Wesley realised that he was the centre of the union and after his death, many of the preachers (ministers) would leave the Methodist movement and take ordination in the Church of England or independent congregations (Heitzenrater 2013,246). Wesley’s prediction was followed by continuous calls for unity to avert such foreseeable fracturing of the movement. He made one such call in a letter to Ezekiel Cooper in Philadelphia in 1791. It read, “...lose no opportunity of declaring to all that the Methodists are one people in all the world and that it is their full determination so to continue” (Wesley 1791,260).

In 1786, Wesley took time to reflect on the movement, and it seems he was not content with a lifeless sect without power (Watson 2007). In *Thoughts upon Methodism*, he wrote:

[I] am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold

fast to both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out (Wesley 1786,1).

Wesley's statement expressed his deep thoughts about the movement's future after his life. On one hand, Wesley was sure that Methodists would continue to thrive in Europe and America. On the other hand, he was not sure whether Methodism would survive as a movement, monument, organisation, or an organism that would live perpetually. For Wesley, Methodism's success was only possible if adherents held fast to the doctrine, spirit, and discipline. These were the fundamentals that led to the growth and development of Methodism. Iovina (2018) interpreted these fundamentals to include a rudimentary future that involved a reflection on the humble beginnings, where the poor and the less privileged were at the centre of Methodism, the life of Bible moths, the steadfast life of the Holy Club, the prison ministry, the field preaching, and class meetings as the aspects the movement was supposed to hold fast to.

The spirit and discipline of Methodism first set out by Wesley were also buttressed by Elie Halevy who argued that:

[T]he role of religion had a lot of impact in Britain hence the reason during the Industrial Revolution, there was no insurgency...The situation in Britain could have easily led to a revolution during the period between 1750 and 1850. The situation could have caused a revolution against the capitalistic society, but the opposite was true. The non-violent revolution was curtailed by the evangelisation that was done by the Anglicans and Methodists, particularly the latter because it was during this same period when the movement was growing stronger. The Methodists ministered to the compounds, squatters and mostly to the poor masses being led by John Wesley and George Whitefield. John Wesley was not only a teacher, preacher, and educator, but also a social revolutionary giant (Itzkin and Halévy 1975, 47; Oslen 1990, vii).

Although Wesley was concerned about the movement's future in Europe and America, Methodism reached other continents a few years after his death. Just like any other mainline church that came to Africa, Methodism rode on the wings of colonialism (Mujinga 2017,109). The church, represented by many denominations, grew numerically and missionally in Africa. Further, the AMC is the coordinating centre of Methodism on the continent, but in the scholarly discourse, few people know about the movement.

The Historical Development of Africa Methodist Council

The record of the history of the AMC was drawn from the organisation's Strategic Plan for 2022–2026 and some reports in the Council's files were presented to different meetings. The descriptive analysis used in this research presents documents showing that the movement's history can be traced back to 1986 when African Methodist leaders saw the possibility of a continental movement after hosting the World Methodist

Conference in Nairobi, Kenya in 1986. In his opening remarks, the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church in Kenya Bishop Lawi Imathiu reiterated that:

...Africa is so honoured at this time for this worldwide body to choose its venue for the conference in Kenya. Africa is a continent of origin, ... where you can track back to the Old Testament... we cannot underestimate the influence of this body of Christ that the Methodists can bring to the world for the betterment of humankind (Africa Methodist Council 2021,3).

In the conference, Bishop Imathiu was appointed the first black World Methodist President. This appointment made African leaders realise the potential of the Methodist movement on the continent. After the global conference, African leaders held follow-up meetings to strategise how they could create a similar continental body. Not much materialised in the first five years and the African Methodist leaders took advantage of church leaders' meeting at the World Methodist Conference held in 1991 in Singapore. Unfortunately, leaders who attended the conference failed to convene the meeting. They also hoped to meet at the World Methodist Conference held in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil in 1996 but once again they did not meet (AMC 2021,3).

From 1986, nothing tangible had been done to establish the continental body. The first formal meeting was held in March 1998 at Northfield Methodist Church, Benoni in South Africa. The theme of the meeting was "Africa our Parish" (AMC 2021,3). Delegates from 13 African countries attended the meeting. In their discussion, the Methodist leaders agreed to name the African Methodists coming together as the All-Africa Methodist Leaders Conference (AAMLC) (AMC 2021,3). The intent of the proposed name, AAMLC, was to ensure it was understood that the organisation was for all Methodist leaders. The delegates also agreed to appoint His Eminence, Dr Sunday Mbang, the Prelate of the Methodist Church Nigeria, to coordinate the work of the new organisation and organise the second meeting held in Benoni, South Africa, from 4 to 8 March 2001.

The momentum of the AAMLC increased and the first conference was held in Iperu Remo, Ogun State Nigeria from 1 to 5 March 2002. The meeting had delegates from South Africa, Ghana, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and representatives from the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) of the United Methodist Church, USA. It also included representatives from the Methodist Church in Great Britain. The resolutions from the conference provided the agenda for the fourth meeting scheduled for 29 to 31 October of the same year at the Kempton Park Conference Centre, in Johannesburg. The two meetings were meant to set the agenda and provide the template for the structure of the movement. Unfortunately, the Johannesburg meeting was postponed, and this cancellation reduced the momentum of establishing the Council (AMC 2021,3).

The sixth meeting was supposed to be held in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo from 26 to 31 October 2003, but unfortunately, the meeting was postponed again. The

postponement was a setback for the AAMLC as no meeting was convened until 2010. This failure to meet for seven years halted the implementation of brilliant action plans of the AAMLC. From 20 to 23 June 2010, the British Methodist Church hosted an All-Partners Consultation in London at which several Methodist leaders from Africa were present. The meeting provided a new opportunity to revisit the issue of providing the much-needed platform for Methodist families across the continent to meet. The meeting recognised and affirmed the various attempts to establish the Council in the previous years. It also agreed to put special attention to the establishment of the Council before the World Methodist Conference scheduled for South Africa in 2011 (AMC 2021,4).

After the British Methodist meeting, the AAMLC met in Durban, South Africa from 30 November to 2 December 2010. The leaders agreed to change the name of the organisation from AAMCL to Pan Africa Methodist Consultation Network (PAMCN). In their deliberations, the leaders agreed to undertake the following tasks:

[To] explore ways of maximising African input at the World Methodist Conference, to build capacity for a sustainable Pan African Methodist Consultation Network (PAMCN) to identify opportunities for mutual collaboration, dialogue, and sharing of gifts and resources, to discern what God might be calling Methodists in the continent to do jointly to focus on building capacity for sustainable networks, devotional Bible Study, to engage the GBGM for input on the life and mission of the new movement, to brief the World Methodist Conference on the developments and recognition of the new movement, to discuss areas of cooperation by women, men and youth (AMC 2021, 4).

The 2010 PAMCN that met in Durban agreed to meet again in Nairobi, Kenya from 22 to 24 March 2011. Twenty-one participants attended the meeting. The gathering made several resolutions that transformed the future of the PAMCN. The resolutions were well captured by John Muriungi, secretary of the meeting and were put together by the interim secretary of the organisation, Archbishop Kehinde, M. Stephen after the meeting. The PAMCN resolved that:

- i. Nigeria was going to be responsible for receiving the organisation's money contributed by other conferences. Each conference was asked to contribute \$500.00.
- ii. His Eminence, Dr Sunday Ola Makinde, Archbishop Kehinde Stephen, and Mrs Adetutu. O. Osindero (all from Nigeria) were the signatories to the Eco Bank.
- iii. The meeting agreed to change the organisation's name for the third time from Pan Africa Methodist Consultation Network to Africa Methodist Council. The meeting also agreed to advise the World Council of Churches and the World Methodist Council of the new movement.

- iv. The meeting resolved to establish a Secretariat for monitoring and mobilising resources for AMC activities in Nigeria.
- v. It was also agreed to divide the tasks of the Council into different regions as follows: Finance and Administration (Nigeria); Regional Unit Coordinator Secretariat and Communication (South Africa); Mission and Evangelism (Kenya); Peace, Justice and Reconciliation (Togo); Wesleyan Theological Dialogue was given to the Methodist Church Ghana; and the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe was tasked to undertake and promote pastoral exchange programmes on behalf of the AMC.
- vi. The Methodist Church in Kenya was tasked to assist in drawing up a budget for the Secretariat.
- vii. It was also agreed to consider Sign Language as an official language of the Council meetings.
- viii. South Africa was tasked to set up a website domain and an electronic communication network accessible to all member countries.
- ix. The meeting also insisted that theological seminaries should explore the possibilities of teaching one of the following languages, which they consider as foreign: French, English, Portuguese, Kiswahili, and Sign Language.
- x. The meeting resolved that members would meet biennially to review the Secretariat's activities, receive reports from every region, and review the work of specialised ministries like HIV/AIDS, women, youth, disability, peace, justice, and reconciliation.

The meeting in Kenya made several resolutions in line with the life and mission of AMC. Regional leaders agreed to meet again during the preparations for the World Methodist Conference in Durban, South Africa in July/August 2011. The resolutions from the March 2011 consultation were presented, but unfortunately, they were not acted upon. The proposals of the March 2011 meeting provided the framework for discussion and action at the Advanced Team Consultation that met in Ibadan, Nigeria between 23 and 27 November 2014. The Advanced Team Consultation proposed the basic structure, operational outlook, and budget for the AMC. In this consultation, members agreed on the Heads of Conferences Summit, set to take place between 15 and 18 October 2015 at the Freeman Methodist Centre, Kumasi, Ghana. The task of the Heads of Conferences Summit was to adopt the Draft Constitution (AMC 2023, 4).

Another opportunity for the meeting of the AMC leaders was provided at the World Methodist Conference in Houston Texas in August/September 2016. The meeting agreed that the Draft Constitution accepted in principle at the time of inauguration in 2015 in Kumasi ought to be further reviewed, expanded, and translated into French and

Portuguese and re-presented for ratification. Another consultation with West African Heads of Churches with emphasis on the Francophone conference was held at Hotel Marly, Bietry, Blvd De Marseille Cote d'Ivoire from 14 to 17 November 2017. It was also agreed that the Secretariat would move to Ghana, and the host countries for the various aspects of the work of the AMC should be prepared to make substantial contributions in addition to whatever budgetary responsibilities are allocated to each country. In the meeting, it was also agreed that the first conference would be held in Kenya in 2019 (Stephen 2011). Reasons for moving AMC headquarters from Nigeria to Ghana were not provided.

In 2018, the AMC started to operate with a temporary Secretariat at Archbishop Ayo Ladigbolu House, College Crescent, Molete, Ibadan, Nigeria with Very Rev. Opeyemi Awe as the Interim General Secretary, working with Archbishop Michael Kehinde Stephen as the Interim Chairperson. The two interim leaders planned for the first General Conference held in Kenya from 13 to 18 March 2019.

The Conference confirmed Very Rev. Opeyemi Awe to be the substantive General Secretary and appointed Rev. Joseph Mwaine Ntombura—the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church in Kenya—to be the President of the Council to replace Archbishop Stephen. Four Vice Presidents representing Anglophone West Africa, Rev. Dr Paul Kwabena Boafo, the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana, Francophone West Africa, His Eminence Dr Hounsa Kponjesu Amos, Presiding Bishop, Protestant Methodist of Benin, East Africa Samuel Kayinamura, Presiding Bishop of the Free Methodist Church in Rwanda, and Southern Africa was represented by Bishop Jacqueline Nhanala of the United Methodist Church Mozambique Episcopal Area. The Conference also appointed the General Director for Finance and Administration of the Methodist Church Ghana, Very Rev. Anthony Kwamena Cobbah, to be the Honorary Treasurer. As an extended executive of the AMC, the team mobilised member churches in their regions to join the Council.

The Conference also confirmed different commissions agreed on in 2011 to propel the AMC's work, and these were now called Coordinating Secretaries. The commissions were as follows:

- Communication: Ms Bonginkosi Moyo-Bango from the Methodist Church of Southern Africa;
- Justice, Development, Peace, and Reconciliation: Rev. Dr Paul Tiburce Kpamegan, Protestant Methodist of Benin;
- Mission and Evangelism: Bishop Nicholas Nteere, Methodist Church in Kenya; and

- Wesleyan Studies and Leadership Development: Very Rev. Prof. Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (Methodist Church Ghana).

The First Quadrennial Conference was held in Cotonou, Benin from 7 to 12 March 2023. The Conference appointed Rev. Dr Martin Mujinga, the General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, as the Second General Secretary. The Most. Rev Dr Paul Kwabena Boafo, the Vice President of West Africa Anglophone and Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana, was appointed President. The General Conference went further to replace the four Vice Presidents with the following:

- West Africa Anglophone Region: His Eminence Dr Oliver Ali Aba, the Prelate of the Methodist Church Nigeria;
- West Africa Francophone: Rev. Godson, Lawson Kpavuvu, the President of the Protestant Methodist of Togo;
- East Africa: Bishop Joseph Bundala, the Presiding Bishop of Tanzania Methodist Church; and
- Southern Africa: Bishop George Tavengerwei Mawire, the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe.

The vice presidents were also the chairpersons of the regions.

Further, the General Conference re-appointed Ms Bonginkosi Moyo-Bango as Commission Secretary of Communication and extended the term of office for Rev. Dr Paul Tiburce Kpamegan as the Commission Secretary for Justice, Development, Peace and Reconciliation. Bishop Emmanuel Asare-Kusi from the Methodist Church Ghana was appointed Commission Secretary for Mission and Evangelism replacing Bishop Nicholas Nteere from Kenya. Dr Mary Kinoti from the Methodist Church in Kenya replaced Prof. Johnson Asamoah-Gyadu as the Coordinating Secretary for Wesleyan Studies and Leadership Development.

The Conferences also approved the leadership of the Women's Movement with Bishop Purity Malinga from South Africa as the chairperson and Rev. Eunice Indangasi from Kenya as the Secretary. The Interim Men's Movement leadership comprised two men from Ghana—Edward Ofori, Interim Chairperson and Rueben Atsu Kugblenu, Interim Secretary. Rev. Rodger Gadzekpo was appointed the Youth Movement chairperson, while Hazel Gacheri became the youth secretary.

After the passing on of Bishop Bundala, Vice President of East Africa, in May 2024, the Heads of Conferences Summit met in Lagos, Nigeria from 29 May to 3 June and appointed Bishop Isaiah Deye, the Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church in Kenya, to be the Vice President and chairperson of East Africa region.

Vision, Mission, and Statement of Faith of AMC

The AMC's vision is to be a unifying Wesleyan movement for holistic evangelism to transform Africa and humanity. This vision is driven by the mission that aims to equip Methodists for Christian Ministry and ensure their active involvement in the socio-economic development of Africa and the world. The AMC affirms the Holy Bible as the inspired Word of God and as the only basis for its beliefs (AMC 2021,2).

Composition and Purpose of the Council

Given the intensive work done by Methodist scholars in Africa, this paper will not dwell much on an already saturated area. However, it suffices to say that Methodism with British roots, commonly known in Africa as Wesleyan Methodist, was the first to arrive on the continent as confirmed by Kumalo earlier. The other Methodists found in Africa are the United Methodists, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, African Methodist Episcopal, and Free Methodists, who all came from the United States of America and the United African Methodist Church Organisation with Nigerian roots. Tanzania Methodist Church originated from South Korea, while the United Church of Zambia is the union of the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Missionary Society, and the London Missionary Society that came together in African areas to form the Union Church of the Copperbelt, now the United Church of Zambia (World Council of Churches n.d).

Forty-four Conferences constitute the Africa Methodist Council. This family of Wesleyan Conferences is connected by the common heritage and faith, grounded in the Methodist tradition (AMC 2021,2). The Conferences are found among Anglophones, Francophones, and Lusophones with Equatorial Guinea-speaking Spanish. These churches are spread in most parts of East Africa, West Africa, and Southern Africa. Some Conferences operate intercountry, where many countries make one Conference. For example, the Methodist Church of Southern Africa embraces Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa. The United Methodist Mozambique Episcopal Area stretches to South Africa, while the African Methodist Zion Eastern West Africa Episcopal District operate in Nigeria, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Given their Wesleyan background, the Church of Nazarene and the Salvation Army are joining the movement. By the end of 2023, the AMC had 29 registered Conferences. The number increased in May 2024 to 44. The increase was necessitated by the mobilisation of some of the United Methodist Episcopal Areas that were added to the list of other Conferences from January to May 2024.

The Council's primary purpose is to glorify God by obeying the Great Commandment to love God and Humankind (Matthew 22: 36–40) and the Great Commission of witness and service to all nations that they may believe (Matthew 28:18–20). The process is designed to produce disciples of Christ and foster ecumenical and inter-religious activities that will enhance Methodism within Africa.

Structure of the Africa Methodist Council

At the apex of the Council's structure is the General Conference, held every four years (Africa Methodist Council n.d,7), starting from 2023. The General Conference is the supreme decision-making legislative body governing the Council. Its major function is to receive progress reports of the movement over four years. The General Secretary presents the reports, while the Honorary Treasurer presents the financial update. As the supreme decision-making body, the Conference also makes policies and approves or amends the Constitution. The Conference also appoints the President, four Vice Presidents (chairpersons of the regions, namely East Africa, Southern Africa, West Africa Anglophone, and West Africa Francophone), General Secretary, Honorary Treasurer, Coordinating Secretaries, and any other appointment (AMC n.d,7).

Delegates to the General Conference consist of five leaders (AMC n.d,7) from each Conference representing the head of the church, the lay president (lay leader of the conference), and the administrator who is known by different titles such as Secretary of Conference/ General Secretary,/ Administrative Bishop, or Administrative Assistant to the Bishop, one woman, and one youth representative. The General Conference is also a platform of fellowship where interested Methodists who register on time can join and be accommodated for fellowship (AMC n.d,9–10).

Below the General Conference is the Heads of Conference Summit, which meets annually for three years. The Heads of Conferences Summit makes decisions on behalf of the General Conference but presents the report for ratification at the meeting that sits in the fourth year. Under the Heads of Conferences Summit is the Extended Executive which meets twice a year and comprises the President, Vice Presidents, General Secretary, Honorary Treasurer, Coordinating Secretaries, and chairpersons of the youth and men's and women's movements. All the Coordinating Secretaries and the movements work under the leadership of the General Secretary who is the Administrator of the Council responsible for programming and implementing the AMC resolutions.

Programmes of the AMC

The AMC's activities are mostly administrative and focus mainly on programming. Mission works are run by different Conferences, and they are shared through the AMC social media pages and the website. The Coordinating Secretaries are the engines that propel the activities of the Council. Communication deals with publicity, capturing records, and maintaining the Council's social media pages. Mission and evangelism focus on the spiritual side of the Council, while the Wesleyan Studies and Leadership Development majors on the interconnection of Methodist education institutions in the continent and the world. The Commission propels the work of the Wesley studies and analyses how Wesleyan theology of social holiness and justice can be implemented in Africa. The Justice, Development, Peace, and Reconciliation Commission is the watchdog for social justice of the Council. The Council focuses on Africa's

socioeconomic and political transformation which stretches to issues of justice for women, youth and the poor. Political justice emphasises human rights issues given that Africa is one of the human rights abusers (AMC n.d, 21).

The Future of the AMC

In fulfilling Wesley's 1739 "World My Parish" statement and countering the 1786 fears of a religion without power, the AMC's future lies in holding fast to the doctrine, spirit and discipline set out by the early Methodists as a springboard to transform the African society. The Council aims to continue as a watchdog of justice in a continent that continues to unleash injustices. In doing this, the AMC will use the history of its foundation to care for the poor, advocate for justice, and speak truth to power. The Council's future is also anchored on inter-conference dialogue, partnership, Memorandum of Understanding, and exchange programmes to enhance unity among the Methodists. Moreover, the movement's training will be made possible by the construction of a training centre that will assist as a resource mobilisation strategy. In a continent where most young conferences struggle, the AMC will also consider helping such conferences with resources to promote justice and use Methodism to humanise the dehumanised people in different countries. With these future perspectives, the AMC will allay Wesley's fears of a religion without power. The transformation of the society serves as evidence of a powerful religion.

Conclusion

Although Wesley proclaimed the world to be his parish, he might not have imagined the existence of Methodism in Africa soon after his death. This paper found that Methodism came to Africa with laypeople four years after Wesley's death as a fulfilment of his "The World My Parish" proclamation. The movement has grown to encompass 44 Conferences that thrive as transformation centres. The paper argued that the AMC's establishment was made possible by taking advantage of the World Methodist Council platforms and the involvement of the British Methodist. Through its member churches, the AMC has grown numerically and philanthropically and has a full-time Secretariat. Its programmes and membership demonstrate that the AMC is thriving to be an impactful movement in Africa and the world, thereby allaying Wesley's fears of a movement that exists as a dead sect and proving that it is an organism with the power to transform society.

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