



MEOR ANNUAL REPORT

**SEPTEMBER 2021 -
AUGUST 2022**



**Methodist Ecumenical
Office Rome**

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THE PRESENCE OF THE WORLD METHODIST COUNCIL IN THE HEART OF ROME

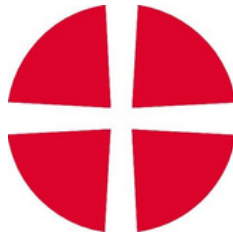
The Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome traces its roots to the emergence of fruitful ecumenical engagement between Methodists and Catholics in the mid-20th century. Pope John XXIII invited the World Methodist Council to appoint several Methodist fraternal delegates including Bishop William Cannon and Prof. Albert Outler to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Soon after the close of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI invited the World Methodist Council to bilateral theological dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. This bilateral theological dialogue has met continuously over the next half century since the close of Vatican II, publishing 11 reports since its inception. Additionally, an English-speaking Methodist congregation was established in 1955 in a chapel of the Italian Methodist Church located at Ponte Sant'Angelo on the Tiber River whose ministers served as an informal link to the Vatican and further strengthened the ecumenical connection.

This productive relationship with the Vatican led the World Methodist Council and the Methodist Church in Britain to form a unique partnership with several Methodist church partners, culminating in the establishment of the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome. The Revd Dr Tim Macquiban opened MEOR in 2014 and the current partnership configuration was implemented in 2016.

On 7 April 2016, Pope Francis said, "I was pleased to learn of the opening of the Methodist Ecumenical Office in Rome. It is a sign of our growing closeness, and particularly of our shared desire to overcome all that stands in the way of our full communion. May the Lord bless the work of the office and make it a place where Catholics and Methodists can encounter one another and grow in appreciation of one another's faith, whether they be groups of pilgrims, those training for ministry, or those who guide their communities. May it also be a place where the progress achieved through our theological dialogue is made known, celebrated, and advanced."

WHO WE ARE

The Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome is the presence of the World Methodist Council in Rome. MEOR's mission is advanced by a partnership of Methodist churches and Methodist councils of churches who provide resources and ministry oversight. With the World Methodist Council, MEOR is supported by the Methodist Church Britain, the European Methodist Council, the Methodist Churches in Italy (OPCEMI), and The United Methodist Church.



MEOR's oversight committee - The Forum - supervises and enables the work of the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome. Each institutional partner is entitled to two representatives on The Forum. Bishop Ivan Abrahams, general secretary of the World Methodist Council, and the Revd Michaela Youngson, assistant conference secretary and connexional ecumenical officer of the Methodist Church in Britain, served as co-chairs of The Forum this program year. Additional members of The Forum for 2021-2022 included the Rev. Mirella Manocchio (OPCEMI), the Rev. Dr. Jean Hawxhurst (UMC), Mr Kirby Hickey (WMC), Revd Conrad Hicks (MCB), Mr Doug Swanney (EMC, until April 2022), and the Revd Dr Heather Morris (EMC, from April 2022).



Bishop Ivan Abrahams
Co-Chair



Revd Michaela Youngson
Co-Chair

The Forum gives "attention to the following functions including receiving regular reports from the Director, approving an annual work plan, [and] authorising new initiatives after consultation." Furthermore, members of The Forum commit to "promote MEOR and its activities within its organization, encourage the Methodist family to make use of MEOR when arranging tours or planning ecumenical initiatives, [and] assist the smooth running of the Office to meet the demand on its services."

MEET OUR STAFF

The Reverend Matthew A. Laferty is the director of the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome. He also serves as the co-secretary of the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission, the official theological dialogue commission between the World Methodist Council and the Holy See. Rev. Laferty is a presbyter in The United Methodist Church and maintains clergy standing in the Methodist Church in Great Britain and Waldensian Evangelical Church (the Union of Methodist and Waldensians Churches in Italy). He has served ministry assignments in the United States, Russia, Austria, and Italy and brings extensive experience in ecumenism, mission, and migrant ministry. Originally from Crestline, Ohio, USA, Rev. Laferty holds a Master of Divinity degree from Yale University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science and international studies from Ohio Wesleyan University. He has been a member of the World Methodist Council since 2006.

Ms. Stefanie Gabuyo is the part-time office administrator, overseeing MEOR's administrative affairs and supporting all of MEOR's activities. A life-long Methodist, Ms. Gabuyo also works in the secretariat of the Methodist Churches in Italy (OPCEMI) and the Bible Society of Italy. Ms. Gabuyo is a trained violinist who is also currently completing her qualifications in pharmacological sciences. She is a member of the Ponte Sant' Angelo Methodist Church in Rome.



Pope Francis greeting Rev. Laferty during the Week of Prayer of Christian Unity on 25 January 2022

Photo © Vatican Media

WHAT WE DO

The Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome is the presence of the World Methodist Council in Rome, aiming:

- to be a channel of dialogue with other churches in the search for a deeper unity;
- to foster relationships with other agencies and faith communities in order to promote better understanding and joint action for justice and peace;
- to offer a ministry of prayer and reflection, of learning and growth; and
- to be a place of open hospitality to Methodists and all visitors to Rome.

To this end, MEOR engages in a wide range of activities including dialogue, educational programs, welcoming Methodist pilgrims, and networking, as well as being the voice and presence of the worldwide Methodist family in Rome. MEOR creates encounters between Methodists and Catholics, holds webinars, and shares Methodist theological perspectives in a number of venues. Furthermore, MEOR facilitates Methodist groups in short-term study programs in Rome and promotes Rome as a city of shared Christian heritage. MEOR's work is organic, adapting to the ebb and flow of relationally-driven ecumenism and the ever-changing needs of the World Methodist Council and its member churches.

Additionally, MEOR supports the dialogue work of the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission, the official theological dialogue commission between the World Methodist Council and the Holy See. In 2022, the commission's report - *God in Christ Reconciling: On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments, and Mission* - was published and MEOR is assisting Methodists around the world to receive the report.



DIALOGUE AND EDUCATION

Dialogue and education are central to MEOR's ministry which is achieved through formal dialogue, lectures, conferences, special events, and webinars. Additionally, MEOR serves to educate institutional partners, visiting groups, church leaders and officials, and the Vatican diplomatic community about the people called Methodist.

We offer a few examples of MEOR's efforts in dialogue and education:

The Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome is connected to and supports official dialogue between Methodists and Catholics. In this program year, MEOR facilitated the development of a new dialogue cycle between the World Methodist Council and the Holy See. MEOR worked with the WMC Standing Committee on Ecumenical Relationships to identify scholars and church leaders. Rev. Laferty was elected by the WMC Steering Committee as the international commission's secretary. Furthermore, Rev. Laferty participated in the national Methodist-Catholic dialogue in Great Britain which meets twice a year.

For MEOR's dialogue and education with visiting groups, see the section 'Welcome and Hospitality.'

Our director was also available to give lectures on Methodism, speaking in December at the Center for the Study of Ecumenism in Venice and in March at the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome.

In April and May, MEOR also organized site visits to the historic Great Synagogue in Rome and the Grand Mosque and Islamic Center of Italy for clergy and lay leaders serving foreign-language Christian congregations in Rome. The site visits oriented participants to the religious diversity of the city and strengthened their interreligious understanding.

At an event sponsored by the Belgian Embassy to the Holy See and the European Union Delegation in Rome, Rev. Laferty spoke at a high-level ambassadorial briefing in June on Methodist responses to Ukrainian asylum-seekers in Europe.

MEOR co-hosted with the Pontifical Urbaniana University an ecumenical international symposium on St. John Henry Newman in June. The event launched a new book on Newman by the Revd Dr Daniel Pratt Morris-Chapman, a Newman scholar and Methodist minister.

Rev. Laferty participated in a special roundtable on "European Policy Conversations of Religion and Sustainable Development" at the European Academy of Religion in June.



Top left: Group from the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education at the Basilica of St. Paul's-Outside-the-Walls in Rome in May 2022. **Top right:** Statue of St Paul in St. Peter's Square, sculpted in 1838 by Adamo Tadolini. **Bottom:** Rev. Laferty (center back) with Global Christian Forum secretary Rev. Casely B. Essamuah, Dr. Angela Wakhweya Essamuah, WMC Geneva Secretary Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, Italian Methodist president Rev. Mirella Mannochio, Catholic theologian Prof. Dr. Myriam Wiljens, Vatican official for Methodists Fr. Anthony Currer, and WMC youth and young adult president Rev. Samuel Murillo in February 2022.

WELCOME AND HOSPITALITY

Welcome and hospitality is a pillar of MEOR's ministry in Rome. From our office in central Rome, we welcome Methodists and other Christians from around the world to learn, dialogue, and discover. While the Covid pandemic continued to hinder pilgrims, students, and tourists from visiting the Eternal City, MEOR's staff remained ready to receive a number of guests and groups throughout the program year.

Rev. Laferty often meets with groups to share about Methodist history and theology as well as inform about Methodist ecumenical engagement in Rome and around the world. Visiting groups from the last year included young theologians from the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe, Methodist members of the Global Christian Forum Committee, leaders from the United Evangelical Mission, and mission co-workers based in Jerusalem.

MEOR also designed programs for several study groups to visit Rome. MEOR assisted a Methodist-Anglican group from Chester, UK, led by former MEOR director the Revd Dr Tim Macquiban, to study peace and justice in March 2022. Forty clergy and clergy spouses from the Association of International Churches in Europe and the Middle East studied the intersection between pilgrimage and Christian unity in May with MEOR arranging tours of historic Pauline sites in Rome (Paul's former prison, execution site, and tomb) as well as the Vatican Gardens. MEOR organized a program on ecumenism for Methodist ordinands from the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education in Birmingham, UK, who visited several Vatican offices as well as Protestant church leaders in June.

While MEOR is not a tourist agency, MEOR is able to assist groups in organizing study tours in Rome.

Pope Francis and Rev. Laferty with clergy and clergy spouses from the Association of International Churches in Europe and the Middle East on 4 May 2022. Photo © Vatican Media



MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

MEOR's location in Rome extends important opportunities to build enduring ecumenical relationships, demonstrate visible solidarity and unity, and cultivate strategic partnerships for the worldwide Methodist family. Our ministry of presence is prayerful, relational, and missional, seeking to live out Jesus' prayer "that they may all be one.....so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). The ecumenical movement in the 20th century taught Methodists worldwide that we are no longer strangers with Christians of other confessions. Rather, we are pilgrim companions in our pursuit of the unity of the church. To this end, MEOR is an active presence in Rome, accompanying Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians in our joint venture of Christian unity, peace, and justice.

While our ministry of presence is extensive, there are several highlights from the past year.

MEOR participated in a major international, interreligious peace meeting in Rome, organized by the Sant'Egidio Community. The Sant'Egidio Community won the World Methodist Peace Award in 1998.

In October, Rev. Laferty was invited by the Vatican to join Pope Francis for the opening of the Catholic Church's Synod on Synodality, one of only three non-Catholic delegates.

Rev. Laferty witnessed the creation of 20 new cardinals for the Catholic Church at a Papal Consistory in St. Peter's Basilica in August 2022.

MEOR was present at a number of special ecumenical worship services in local Methodist, Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran, Orthodox, and Catholic congregations, including the 50th anniversary of the Swedish Lutheran congregation, the feast day of Peter and Paul with leaders from the Evangelical Church in Germany, Remembrance Sunday in the Church of England parish, Harvest Sunday at the English-speaking Methodist congregation, and the Feast of St Theodore at the Greek Orthodox parish. MEOR was also present alongside Pope Francis at Christmas Eve, Vespers for the Week of Prayer of Christian Unity, the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul.

MEOR participated in a number of lectures and conferences this program year, including events on the Catholic laywoman Chiara Lubick, the Anglican-Catholic Malines Conversations, a new Greek-Italian translation of the Bible by Protestants and Catholics, and music from the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Each week our director joins with other ecumenical leaders to pray for the unity of the church in a gathering organized by MEOR and the Anglican Centre in Rome.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2022

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (18-25 January) is always a special and busy time in Rome as Christians of all confessions pray for the unity of the church and organize events to promote dialogue and greater understanding. The theme of the 2022 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was "we saw the star in the East, and we came to worship Him" from Matthew 2, the story of the coming of the Magi. The theme was chosen by the Middle East Council of Churches in order to draw attention to the unique features of ecumenism in the region.

The Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome partnered with the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem (MLOJ) to host a special webinar - "Voices from Bethlehem: Christian Unity in the Birthplace of Jesus" - on 18 January to hear first-hand stories from Christians in Bethlehem. The Revd Angleena Keizer from the MLOJ gave a powerful witness to the importance of Methodists praying and working for peace and justice in the region. Over 90 participants attended the webinar to hear perspectives from Lutheran, Greek Orthodox, Latin-rite Catholic, and Armenian Orthodox speakers. Additionally, MEOR and MLOJ organized a social media campaign with prayers for peace and Christian unity in Israel/Palestine. Prayers were written by Methodist-related partners in the region.

MEOR collaborated with the Anglican Centre in Rome and Centro Pro Unione to hold an online prayer vigil on 17 January, the eve of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

On 20 January, Methodists were highly visible at an event sponsored by Centro Pro Unione and the Lay Centre. Ms. Gillian Kingston, vice president of the World Methodist Council, was the featured speaker for the event and presented a paper on Methodist conferring and decision-making. Rev. Laferty offered a short sermon at an ecumenical prayer service following the lecture.

MEOR hosted a luncheon for Methodist students studying at the Bossey Institute, the World Council of Churches' ecumenical institute in Geneva, who were visiting Rome.

Left - MEOR staff with Methodist students studying at the Bossey Institute; right - Revd Dr Daniel Pratt Morris-Chapman and Ms Gillian Kingston after the Churches Together in Rome Unity Service on 23 January.



VISIT BY WMC VICE PRESIDENT

MEOR was honored to host Ms. Gillian Kingston, vice president of the World Methodist Council, for a high-level visit from 19-23 January 2022. Her visit coincided with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Ms. Kingston's visit was the first high-level Methodist visit to Rome since the start of the Covid pandemic.

In addition to giving a lecture at Centro Pro Unione (see previous page), Ms. Kingston preached twice during her visit. She preached for the Christian unity service at the Pontifical Irish College in Rome on 20 January and for Sunday morning worship at Ponte Sant'Angelo Methodist Church in Rome on 23 January.

She met with several senior church leaders including top Vatican leaders. She visited Cardinal Mario Grech from the Vatican Synod Office to discuss Methodist conferring and discernment and learn about the Catholic Church's synodal journey. She called upon Archbishop (now Cardinal) Arthur Roche from the Vatican worship and sacrament department. She also visited the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, where the Council's president Cardinal Kurt Koch noted, "we are very grateful that the World Methodist Council established the Ecumenical Office in Rome, a sign of your commitment to work collaboratively with the Catholic Church." Furthermore, Ms. Kingston met with Italian Methodist president Rev. Mirella Manocchio and with Rev. Luca Baratto and Ms. Marta Bernardini from the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy.

Ms. Kingston - a member of the Methodist Church in Ireland - also paid courtesy visits to the Irish Embassy to the Holy See and the British Embassy to the Holy See, meeting with Ambassador Derek Hannon and Ambassador Chris Trott respectively to discuss peace-making in the region.

Ms. Kingston also visited the Anglican Centre in Rome and the Pontifical University of Sant'Anselmo during her stay.

Left - Archbishop (now Cardinal) Arthur Roche with Ms Kingston; right - Rev. Lafety and Ms Kingston with Fr Tony Curren and Cardinal Mario Grech





GET INVOLVED

Get involved with the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome! Here are ten different ways to participate in MEOR's ministry.

Pray for MEOR and for Christian unity

Commit to praying regularly for the unity of the church, the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome, and the MEOR staff.

Spend a sabbatical or study period in Rome

MEOR has basic accommodation available in the heart of Rome for Methodist clergy and Methodist academics on study leave, sabbaticals, and spiritual renewal. Write our office (office@meorome.org) to explore how MEOR can support you during your study leave in Rome.

Organize a pilgrimage or study visit to Rome

MEOR is always welcoming visitors from abroad. Bring a small or large group to Rome to learn about Christian unity, early church history, or another topic. MEOR can assist in crafting a memorable itinerary.

Follow MEOR on Twitter and Facebook and visit our website

MEOR is constantly sharing stories about its work and news on social media. Follow MEOR on Twitter and Facebook and visit MEOR's website.

Attend MEOR events

Our in-person and online events are listed under 'Events' on MEOR's website.

Donate to MEOR to support new programs

Give generously to help MEOR launch new programs and initiatives.

Suggest topics for MEOR programs

Share your suggestions and ideas with us at office@meorome.org!

Share information about MEOR with your superintendent, presiding elder, bishop, or church president

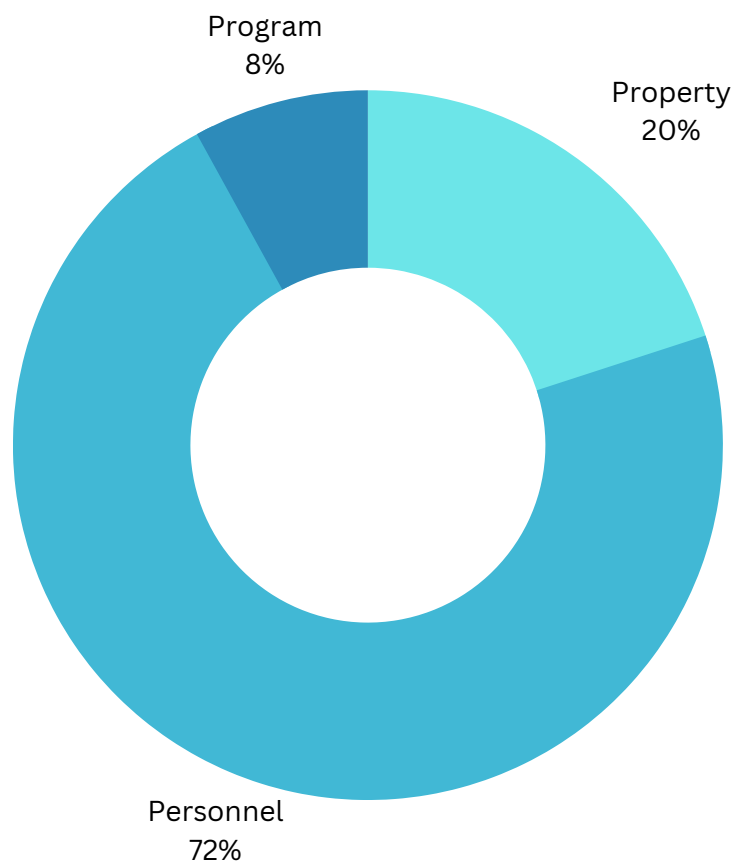
Invite our Director to speak at an event about MEOR

Rev. Laferty is always ready to share about MEOR's work at online or in-person events. Contact him at director@meorome.org.

OUR FUNDING

The Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome is principally funded by financial contributions and in-kind gifts from MEOR partners. Our budget for the 2021-2022 program year was £125,000 to cover three main expenditure areas - property, personnel, and program. Personnel costs cover a stipend for a full-time director and a part-time administrator, as well as the director's housing allowance and church pension. Property expenditures are related to renting the MEOR office and guesthouse, utilities, and property maintenance. Program expenses encompass costs for MEOR events, seminars, the director's travel, and office equipment.

The Methodist Church Britain acts as MEOR's fiduciary agent and ensures industry standard accounting practices and fund auditing.



MEOR also receives gifts from visiting groups and individual donors. If you would like to donate to support the Methodist Ecumenical Office, donations can be made by bank transfer to:

Methodist Church World Mission Fund
IBAN: GB26HBUK40020670951706
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