



Wesleyan Covenant Association Prayer Guide March 2024

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THEME: Europe**

Historical Background

The Methodist churches throughout Europe are the result of migration between Europe and the US, the missionary efforts of the Methodist Episcopal Church as early as 1849, and British Methodists whose missional work precedes that date in many countries. One of the key elements in their growth were the indigenous leaders who were quickly identified, equipped and “turned loose” for ministry. European missionaries in turn were sent around the world. Between the two world wars many Western European churches became financially independent. Right now, there are a good number of countries in both Eastern and Western Europe where the government funds evangelical churches similarly to the way that they fund their state churches. (Two examples that are not exclusive are Slovakia and the Czech Republic). During the communist regime many churches were closed in the block countries, diminished, and cut off from the international church requiring a restart process when that period ended.

You can find scattered across Europe many of the different Methodist denominations: Global Methodist, Free Methodist, United Methodist, etc. In some countries the Methodist church is registered as a separate denomination that is not connected to any other countries or very few outside its borders. One such case is the British Methodist Church today, which works almost exclusively within the bounds of the UK with only a few churches in France and Northern Africa. The Italian Methodists merged with the Waldensian church and are nationally based. Theologically Europe is divided with Western Europe and the UK being more liberal and the countries to the east and south being more conservative. Russia also falls in that more conservative grouping.

The Global Methodist Church has already accepted churches from Croatia, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Spain. Ministers in full connection from Britain and Romania have also joined the GMC but without faith communities.

March 1-2

Verse for the week: “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”
Isaiah 40:31

Prayer Focus 1: Croatia

Just prior to the launch of the GMC, a restart was undertaken in the capital city of Zagreb under the leadership of a Croatian by the name of Rev. Vatroslav Župančić. He had been studying at a seminary in Germany and pastoring a UMC there. However, when his conservative views became well known, he was dismissed. He returned to Zagreb, became the first vice president of the WCA chapter for Eastern Europe, restarted the only Croatian UMC (which had been closed when the previous minister retired), and successfully transferred his credentials and the church's registration to the GMC.

- Please pray for strength and vision for Vatroslav.
- Pray that the families who have joined him on the journey will form a solid team to reach out in Zagreb and that others will come alongside him who will be an encouragement.
- Pray for the financial aid needed to continue the work as Vatroslav has been forced to become bivocational and the church meets in a rental space.

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Prayer Focus: 2. Ministers suspended for their conservative views

Vatroslav is not the only minister who has been suspended for his beliefs and firm stance on Biblical principles. There are others – mainly in Germany – who have suffered the same fate. In Austria, Germany, and Switzerland the liberal majority is dictating what is happening there and ministers of differing opinion are being silenced or driven away.

- Pray for these ministers who have been suspended that God will provide for their needs and open new opportunities for ministry in unexpected ways.

March 3-9

Verses for the week: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God... And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.” Ephesians 6:10-18

Prayer Focus: Bulgaria

Through the work of American Methodist missionaries, the Methodist church was established in Bulgaria as early as 1859 - just 3 years after their arrival. The church rapidly expanded with a focus on increasing literacy, equipping local leaders to serve in each mission location, and coordinating a new translation of the Bible into contemporary Bulgarian (at that time the Bible and Orthodox services were still in old church Slavic that was no longer understood by the masses). The church's expansion continued until the communist era when all but 3 churches were confiscated and closed. Many pastors were sent to labor camps and killed. When that period ended, a young lawyer was tasked with the job of getting church properties back. He later became a pastor and is now the presiding elder in Bulgaria. Through his leadership, the WCA chapter for Eastern Europe was founded,

and he now serves as a member of the GMC transitional leadership team. Bulgaria was the first annual conference to leave the UMC as a whole and joined the GMC in March even before the GMC was officially launched in May.

- Please pray for the pastors and presiding elder, Rev. Dr. Daniel Topalski, that God will breathe His Spirit onto them giving them fresh fire and that they will minister in the power of the Spirit.
- Pray against the widely held belief in Bulgaria that evangelical churches are sects or cults (leftover from communist propaganda).
- Pray specifically for the churches in Sofia, Botevgrad, Lovech, Pleven, Voivodovo, Mizia, Svishtov, Ruse, Tsenovo, Hotansa, Sevlievo, Veliko Tarnovo, Liyaskovets, Shumen, Varna, Dolni Chiflik, Staro Oryahovo, Dalgopol, Trastikovo, Osenovo, Dobrich, Aksakovo, Burgas, Straldja, and Varna (3 congregations: Bulgarian, Armenian, Turkish).
- Pray for the 5-year transitional plan to financial independence. Due to its rapid growth, the Bulgarian Methodist church (before communism and afterwards) has never been completely financially independent. Local churches pay their own bills and ministry expenses but cannot yet support their pastor's salary at 100%. (Salaries were being paid by the central conference and our UMC bishop until we joined the GMC.) We are in a partnership with the mid-Texas conference to transition to complete financial independence. Some local churches have already risen to the challenge in this first year and are paying not only their pastor's entire salary but are also helping other churches. Some congregations are small, and it is likely that some ministers will be forced to become bivocational but we are working on a solidarity principle and hoping that this can be avoided. This is a necessary but hard step towards maturity and growth.
- The revival in Bulgaria that happened after the fall of communism was long ago. We desperately need renewal and revival. Many of our churches that were bursting at the seams then are on the brink of closure now with very aging congregations.
- New ministries to young families with renewed ministries to children and youth.
- New ministers called into service and preparing to serve in ministry.

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March 10-16

Verses for the week: "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:58

Prayer Focus 1: Slovakia

In 1924 Methodist missionaries arrived in Slovakia and began planting churches first in Bratislava and then moving west and north from the capital. Following the devastation of WW2, the church was forced to re-establish itself in 1946 and also again in 1989 following the coup putting an end to the communist era. The majority of the churches that are now in

Slovakia date from after the demise of that regime. Dr. Kopas, a charter member and the first chairwoman of the WCA chapter in Eastern Europe, is now serving as the presiding elder in Slovakia. She is also the pastor of the two churches in the capital city, is married and has two children.

- Please pray for the pastors and the presiding elder, Rev. Dr. Gabriella Kopas. Pray that God will protect them and their families, that He will bless them with good health, and that His peace will be evident in their lives.
- Please pray specifically for the churches in Bratislava (2), Partizánske, Sered', Trnava, Michalovce, Slavkovce, Gerlachov, Jenkovce, Veľké Kapušany, and Dolný Kubín.
- Pray for the stability of the churches and their missional efforts in their communities.
- Pray that they will see the fruits of their faithful labor.

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Prayer Focus 2: Ministers who have joined the GMC without churches

- Pray for several ministers from the British Methodist church who have joined the GMC. To date no congregations from Britain have joined the GMC. But with conviction these ministers are taking a stand.
- Pray for Cristian Istrate, a Romanian Methodist minister, who has transferred his credentials to the GMC. Originally the three Romanian churches in the UMC planned to join the GMC when Bulgaria did so. The other two ministers went back on that decision. Cristian recently began serving with World Methodist Evangelism and is in the process of relocating to South Carolina. Pray for him, his wife and their 2 children in this time of transition.

March 17-23

Verses for the week: “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” 1 John 5:14-15

Prayer Focus 1: Russia

In 1889 the first Russian Methodist congregation was established in St. Petersburg by a pastor from Sweden. The ties between the Russian Methodist church have always been very strong between Finland and Sweden. In March of 1907 an American missionary joined the work. From Russia the Methodist church spread to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. After the fall of communism, the Methodists in Estonia were instrumental in helping the re-establish Methodism in Russia. Missionaries from South Korea, Liberia, Germany and the US were also involved. A seminary was founded in 1995.

- Please pray for the more than 100 churches and Bible groups.
- Pray for the safety and protection for Bishop Eduard and the 70 pastors (30 ministers in full connection). Pray that their witness with spread and their faith will stay strong even if imprisoned.

- Pray for their process of disaffiliation that will be completed following the convening general conference of the GMC.
- Pray for the challenges that the church is facing due to Putin’s religious persecution.

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Prayer Focus 2: Churches who have disaffiliated from UMC but not declared GMC

- The disaffiliation process for the 23 churches in Estonia was very difficult. Each church was required to have an individual vote and to obtain a quorum for the vote, 80% of the members were required to be present. In almost all of the churches a 100% vote was obtained for disaffiliation. They were required by the bishop to disaffiliate and not allowed to transfer to another denomination. The Estonian church is strong, it has a seminary, and it seeks to walk in the power of the Spirit. Something noteworthy about the Methodist church in Estonia is that during the first 30 years of communism the church grew from 1242 people to 2300.
 - Please pray for the presiding elder, Robert Tserenkov, the 1500 members of the Estonian Methodist churches, and their pastors.
 - Pray that God will guide them in the future and that they will be blessed for their decision to stand firm on Scripture. It is a possibility that they might affiliate with the GMC in the future. Pray for clarity for them on this issue.
- Please pray the churches in France who have separated from the UMC.

March 24-30

Verses for the week: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Romans 12:1-2

Prayer Focus 1: Spain

In the region of Catalonia, several churches have joined the GMC from the Free Methodist Church. They are excited to be a part of the GMC and are passionate about ministry. Please pray for their continued growth and that God will help them stay strong.

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Prayer Focus 2: Churches in conservative countries that are not currently in any process of disaffiliation

The following countries have Methodist churches and are conservative both theologically and culturally. Some of these countries were involved in conversations with the WCA and also the GMC, but at the present time those talks have stalled. Some of them are financially dependent on the UMC for pastoral salaries and ministry funds while others are completely financially independent from local church and state funding. It is expected that some of

these countries will eventually disaffiliate but they might choose to become national Methodist churches.

- Please pray for:
 - Hungary
 - Northern Macedonia
 - Albania
 - Serbia
 - Romania
 - Ukraine
 - Moldova
 - Poland
 - Czech Republic
- Please pray that a sense of conviction will fall upon the leaders and churches in these regions.
- If they are financially dependent now on the UMC, pray that their faith will grow and they will become dependent on God and not on others.
- Pray for those with conviction to speak boldly and to change the trajectory of the church.

March 31 – Western Easter

Verses for the week: “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” Ephesians 3:20-21

Prayer Focus: Easter Celebrations

The Americas, Western Europe, and parts of central Europe follow the Julian calendar and for them Easter will fall on March 31 this year. However, the Eastern part of the world will be celebrating Easter this year on May 5th according to the Gregorian calendar.

- Please pray for an outpouring of God’s Spirit in all our churches no matter when they will celebrate our Lord’s resurrection.
- Pray that outreach efforts moving towards Easter will be blessed.
- In many former communist countries, people are moving in mass back towards the Orthodox or Catholic church as a part of the cultural revival that has been taking place. People are celebrating these holidays that had been banned from their calendars but have little understanding of why and how to celebrate in meaningful ways. This allows the opportunity for all kinds of spiritual conversations. Pray that they will bear fruit.
- Pray that we will not get in God’s way and that He would truly do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine”. May He be glorified in His church and in all of us!

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