History and Development of the International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (IAMSCU)

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Origins and Founding of IAMSCU

Methodist involvement in education dates back to the very beginnings of the movement. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, believed in uniting "knowledge and vital piety," establishing Kingswood School in 1748 as the first Methodist educational institution. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Methodist missionaries expanded this educational mission globally, founding schools and colleges across Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Notable examples include Pai Chai School in Korea (founded 1885), Piracicabano School in Brazil (1881), Madero Institute in Mexico (1873), and Isabella Thoburn College in India (1886), and of course, Aoyama Gakuin in Japan (1874). These institutions were built on Wesleyan ideals that education should foster personal faith *and* social good – "the key to eradicating slavery, poverty, hunger, illiteracy, unemployment and many other forms of oppression, education is the also key to promote peace, development and well-being" (Elrod, 2015). By the late 20th century, there existed a large but loosely connected array of Methodist-related schools and universities worldwide, all sharing a common heritage but lacking a formal global network.

Amid this context, Methodist educational leaders saw the need for greater international collaboration. In the 1980s, Methodist colleges in Latin America began reaching out to United Methodist Church (UMC) education officials in the U.S., seeking closer ties and support. The UMC's General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) – which traces its own roots to the Methodist Board of Education of 1866 was a natural catalyst for such connections. By 1991, momentum had built to create an official global association. A planning meeting was scheduled during the 16th World Methodist Conference, held in Singapore in July 1991, to bring together Methodist educational leaders from around the world. This effort was backed by the World Methodist Council (WMC), the international body linking Methodist denominations, which in that same conference established a new

Education Committee to promote Methodist education globally.

The International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges, and Universities (IAMSCU) was formally founded at the Singapore conference in 1991 as the vehicle for this global network. GBHEM played a pivotal role in the formation, providing key organizational support from the very beginning. Likewise, the World Methodist Council endorsed IAMSCU as a major initiative to "promote integration, internationalization and inter-institutional cooperation" among Wesleyan educational institutions. (Maia, 2011)

At its inauguration, twenty Methodist-related schools and colleges from various countries joined together to launch the association. This founding cohort represented a historic commitment: never before had Methodist institutions worldwide been linked in a single collaborative body. Through IAMSCU, Methodist educators envisioned uniting their heritage of *education and faith* to better serve the world. The founding charter emphasized increasing access to education, improving quality, and fostering cooperation grounded in shared Wesleyan values. In short, IAMSCU's birth in 1991 was the culmination of centuries of Methodist educational tradition and years of dialogue – an official global *home* for Methodist-related institutions to work and grow together. (Maia, 2011. Conference Proceedings, 2017.)

IAMSCU's Growth and Development

From its modest start in 1991, IAMSCU grew rapidly into a far-reaching network. The initial alliance of 20 institutions expanded as more schools, colleges, and universities across the Methodist and Wesleyan tradition learned of the association and sought membership. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, IAMSCU's membership rolls swelled into the hundreds. In 2008, for example, Cornell College's president noted that IAMSCU was connecting over 750 Methodist-affiliated institutions worldwide (Cornell College 2008). Continuing this trajectory, IAMSCU marked its 25th anniversary in 2016 with over 1,000 affiliated schools on six continents (GBHEM 2016). Today the association encompasses roughly 1,000–1,100 institutions in more than 80 countries, reflecting its global significance in Methodist education (GBHEM 2023). This dramatic growth – from a few dozen founders to a thousand-member network – illustrates IAMSCU's success in bringing together historically disparate Methodist-related schools under one umbrella.

Several key factors drove this development. First, IAMSCU established a clear organizational structure and regular gatherings that helped forge a *community* among members. The association is governed by an Assembly of all member institutions that

convenes every three years. Between assemblies, an elected Board of Directors provides leadership; importantly, the board's composition ensures global representation with members drawn from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and North America. Executive officers (president, vice-president, secretary/treasurer) are elected at the triennial meetings to guide the association's programs. This inclusive structure meant that as IAMSCU grew, institutions in every world region had a voice in its governance, reinforcing a sense of shared ownership in the mission.

Secondly, IAMSCU benefited from strong institutional partnerships, especially with the United Methodist Church's agencies. GBHEM has been a key partner from the beginning – staffing IAMSCU events, providing resources, and coordinating programs on the association's behalf. In effect, GBHEM's global education office has operated as IAMSCU's secretariat, ensuring continuity and administrative support. On occasion, the UMC's Board of Global Ministries has also lent support, especially as the work of education overlaps with mission initiatives. This backing gave IAMSCU stability and access to funding and expertise during its expansion. Likewise, the World Methodist Council's Education Committee partnered with IAMSCU to advocate lifelong learning and maintain Methodist educational ties globally. Such alliances increased IAMSCU's influence beyond its member schools – positioning it as the *recognized* voice for Methodist education worldwide.

Crucially, IAMSCU's growth was not just numeric but also *influence-oriented*. Over the decades, the association became a major forum for Methodist educators to share best practices, develop joint initiatives, and speak into global educational issues. Methodist-related institutions – many of which are autonomous with their own boards and charters – found in IAMSCU a common table to articulate their unique identity and values. By enabling cooperation across national and denominational lines, IAMSCU amplified the impact of Methodist education. Member universities began collaborating on student exchanges, research projects, and service programs through IAMSCU connections. Church leaders, in turn, increasingly looked to IAMSCU as an engine for developing future Christian leaders and addressing social challenges via education (GBHEM 2014). In sum, the period from 1991 to the present saw IAMSCU evolve from a nascent idea into a dynamic worldwide network. Its milestones include the formation of regional association, the launch of scholarship and exchange programs, and recognition within Methodist ecumenical structures. Each achievement reinforced the association's founding vision: that by uniting their efforts, Methodist schools and universities could *collectively* "prepare

a new generation of leaders" for church and society (Cornell College 2008).

IAMSCU Conferences

One of the primary ways IAMSCU has shaped its identity and direction is through its regular international conferences. These conferences – held roughly every three years in different parts of the world – serve as the IAMSCU Assembly gatherings and are major events for Methodist educators. From the outset, they have been more than administrative meetings; they function as global forums where scholars, administrators, and church leaders convene to address pressing educational and social themes. Here are a few conferences to highlight.

1991, Singapore (Founding Meeting): The inaugural gathering at the 16th World Methodist Conference in Singapore was where IAMSCU was born. Delegates from twenty institutions joined to formally establish the association. While this was technically a founding session rather than a full conference, it set the tone. The World Methodist Council's broader conference theme of global Christian unity provided a backdrop for IAMSCU's creation as a *connecting link* for Methodist schools. Outcomes of this meeting included the adoption of IAMSCU's initial goals (global access to education, quality improvement, inter-institutional collaboration and the election of early leaders. It also cemented the practice of holding IAMSCU meetings alongside WMC gatherings when feasible – emphasizing that education is integral to the Methodist worldwide witness.

Hiroshima 2014 (8th IAMSCU Conference): As IAMSCU matured, its conferences began explicitly engaging global issues through a Wesleyan lens. A landmark example was the May 2014 conference in Hiroshima, Japan, which convened about 250 participants from five continents (Nascimento 2014).The setting in Hiroshima – a city synonymous with the quest for peace after the atomic bomb – shaped the conference's focus on peace, reconciliation, and human rights in education. Methodist-related schools were challenged to become agents of peace and justice. High profile speakers were invited to inspire and challenge attendees. "The issue of peace is one of the greatest areas of need in the world today," noted one GBHEM leader, underscoring why a Methodist educators' gathering belonged in Hiroshima (United Methodist Communications 2014). This conference's outcome was a strengthened commitment across IAMSCU institutions to incorporate peacemaking and social justice into their curricula and exchanges. It demonstrated IAMSCU's capacity to respond to world events: the theme of peace and reconciliation resonated with the Methodist ethos and gave the association a prophetic voice on the

global stage.

Puebla 2017 (9th IAMSCU Conference): Three years later, IAMSCU met in Puebla, Mexico at Universidad Madero, a Methodist-founded university. Over 300 representatives from 30 countries attended, reflecting IAMSCU's growth into a "major pan-Methodist event" for education. The 2017 conference theme, "*Tearing Down Walls: A Pathway to Peace, Healing, and Humanity*," built on the previous assembly's focus by addressing barriers that divide societies. Coming as it did amid a global refugee crisis and debates about national borders, the theme was strikingly timely. Discussion forums and seminars examined how Methodist institutions could foster inclusion, interfaith understanding, and care for migrants. In the closing worship, participants were even challenged to envision a movement of "Methodists without Borders" in education and service. The Puebla conference's impact was to galvanize IAMSCU members around *practical actions* for solidarity. New partnerships were formed during the networking sessions, and IAMSCU's leaders emerged with fresh resolve to address contemporary issues like migration and cultural conflict through educational programs. (GBHEM 2017).

Bristol/Bath/Cambridge 2023 (10th IAMSCU Conference): After a delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic, IAMSCU's tenth international conference convened in 2023 in the United Kingdom – in partnership with the Methodist Schools in Britain. The multicultural gathering took place across historic Methodist sites in England, including John Wesley's Chapel in Bristol and Kingswood School in Bath—the very school Wesley founded in the 18th century (United Methodist News 2023). Fittingly, the conference theme was "*Transforming Lives to Shape a Just Society: Values-Based Higher Education*," aligning Methodist educational heritage with contemporary social justice aims. Around 260 participants from Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and North America attended. They commemorated the 275th anniversary of Kingswood's founding – using that milestone to reflect on how Wesley's vision of education can address today's rapidly changing world. The presence of Methodist educators in Wesley's original school was meaningful: as one attendee noted, it helped the group "refocus on our common heritage" and draw inspiration for modern challenges (Dunlap-Berg 2023). Outcomes of this 2023 conference included a renewed emphasis on *Methodist ethos* (articulating how faith-based values can guide education toward equity and inclusion) and stronger ties with the World Methodist Council. In fact, a WMC representative, Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, addressed the conference and highlighted the partnership between IAMSCU and the World Methodist Conference, inviting all to the upcoming WMC gathering in Sweden in 2024. The

conference also elected new IAMSCU leadership, indicating a rising generation of globally diverse leaders. Dr. Adriana Murriello, Argentine educator and president of Colegio Ward was elected IAMSCU President in 2023. The choice of theme and venue underscored IAMSCU's commitment to *bridge its historical foundations with future mission* – effectively "transforming lives" by strengthening values-based education across its network.

In addition to these, IAMSCU has held other assemblies and seminars (often jointly with regional Methodist education bodies or preceding World Methodist Council meetings). For instance, conferences in the early 2000s were hosted in locations like Rio de Janeiro (1996) and Nairobi (2001) in conjunction with regional Methodist gatherings (these meetings helped lay groundwork for the regional associations discussed below). Each IAMSCU conference, by design, rotates among continents, ensuring that the global nature of the Methodist educational family is visibly celebrated. The themes commonly draw from Methodist social principles – focusing on peace, justice, human rights, reconciliation, leadership, and service. As a whole, the series of IAMSCU conferences has been crucial in shaping the organization's direction. They function as incubators for new initiatives (many IAMSCU programs have been launched or announced at conferences) and as barometers of the challenges and opportunities facing Methodist education. Through these gatherings, IAMSCU continually reaffirms its core identity: a worldwide *connection* of schools and universities that "think together, work together, and pray together" in the cause of education and human flourishing (United Methodist News 2023).

Major IAMSCU Programs

Beyond conferences and networking, IAMSCU advances its mission through a variety of programs and initiatives. These programs are designed to foster collaboration among member institutions, build capacity in Methodist schools, and enrich the educational experience for students and faculty across the network. Here are some of the most significant IAMSCU initiatives.

Global Directory and Communication: One of IAMSCU's foundational services has been creating a *global directory* of Methodist-related educational institutions. This directory (regularly updated and accessible to members) allows any Methodist school in the world to identify peer institutions by country, denomination, or academic focus. It has greatly improved communication and partnership formation, effectively mapping the worldwide "campus" of Methodist education. Alongside the directory, IAMSCU maintains

communications like newsletters and an interactive website to share news, job postings, and resources among members, helping far-flung schools feel part of a common network. Academic and Cultural Exchange Programs: In the spirit of Methodist connectionalism, IAMSCU facilitates exchanges of students, faculty, and staff among its institutions. The *Methodist International Student Exchange Network (MISEN)* is a flagship program enabling students from one Methodist university to spend a semester or year at another Methodist-related institution abroad. By lowering barriers (through tuition exchange agreements and scholarships), MISEN opens up cross-cultural learning opportunities. The MISEN network also supports faculty and academic staff exchanges for research collaboration and professional development. These exchanges enrich the curriculum and global perspective of participating schools. Many alumni of MISEN have noted how these experiences embodied the Methodist ethos of worldwide fellowship and learning beyond borders.

Thematic Networks (Human Rights, Environmental Stewardship, Business Ethics and Social Responsibility): Reflecting the Church's social concerns, IAMSCU has organized member institutions into global working groups or "networks" around specific themes. Two prominent examples are the *Human Rights Network* and the *Environmental Sustainability (Environmental Humanities) Network*. These networks connect faculty and students in Methodist schools who are passionate about these issues. They share curriculum ideas, organize conferences or webinars, and sometimes coordinate advocacy. After the 2014 Hiroshima conference, for example, the Human Rights Network published resources on peace education that could be used in Methodist schools worldwide. The Environmental network likewise encourages Methodist institutions to incorporate care for creation into campus life and teaching, aligning with the Methodist belief in stewardship of the earth. Such networks illustrate IAMSCU's role in *catalyzing collective action*: a single Methodist college might have a small program in, say, eco-justice, but through IAMSCU's international network, it can join a larger movement and draw on global Methodist expertise in that area.

"Connecting Hubs" and Partnerships: In recent years, IAMSCU (through GBHEM's leadership) has emphasized regional associations and hubs that act as liaisons between the global office and local institutions (ResourceUMC 2023). These are regional hubs of GBHEM that coordinate with IAMSCU for action and connection. Each hub (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America) has a director embedded in a Methodist institution who coordinates programs in that region. These hubs cooperate to help facilitate

many of the initiatives on the ground. They also work to *reconnect* institutions that historically were Methodist but lost touch with the church network. For instance, the Asia hub identified several schools in South Asia that had Methodist origins but had become isolated; through outreach, some have rejoined IAMSCU's fold, gaining access to exchanges and conferences. IAMSCU also partners with secular and ecumenical organizations to advance its mission. It has cooperated with bodies like the United Nations (on education for sustainable development) and participates in interfaith education dialogues. By doing so, it raises the profile of Methodist education in broader circles while bringing back insights for its members. In essence, IAMSCU's programs demonstrate the practical outworking of connectionalism: sharing resources, learning together, and extending the reach of Methodist educational ministries well beyond what any single institution could do alone.

IAMSCU's Role in Regional Associations

To facilitate its expanding global network and respect regional contexts, IAMSCU has fostered regional associations of Methodist educational institutions. These bodies operate autonomously under the IAMSCU umbrella, coordinating Methodist-related schools within particular geographic areas: *Africa*, *Asia-Pacific*, *Europe*, *Latin America*, and *North America*. The regional associations allow IAMSCU to decentralize its activities, empower local leadership, and address region-specific needs while still aligning with the international movement. The development of each regional association is unique and the North American and Latin American associations pre-date the founding of IAMSCU itself.

In Africa, the *Africa Association of Methodist Institutions of Higher Education (AAMIHE)* was established to link Methodist universities and seminaries across the continent. With the tremendous growth of Methodism in Africa (and rapidly increasing enrollment in church-related schools there), African educators formed AAMIHE in the 2000s to share resources and jointly tackle challenges like accreditation and theological training. AAMIHE works closely with IAMSCU and the WMC Education Committee to ensure African perspectives are heard globally. It has organized consultations in countries such as Nigeria and Mozambique, focusing on leadership training and improving educational quality in Methodist institutions.

The Latin America region was actually one of the earliest to organize, given Latin American Methodist schools were instrumental in IAMSCU's founding. The *Asociación*

Latinoamericana de Instituciones Metodistas de Educación (ALAIME) serves as the Latin American regional arm. Headquartered in Brazil and Argentina (where Methodist education has a long history), ALAIME predates IAMSCU's 1991 formation – it emerged as Latin Methodist colleges sought both regional solidarity and connection to the global Methodist family. ALAIME facilitates programs in Spanish and Portuguese, such as regional conferences on Wesleyan pedagogy and cooperative ventures among Methodist universities in countries like Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, and Mexico. It also has helped channel funds for faculty development and student scholarships in Latin America, often in partnership with GBHEM. Latin American leaders like the late Dr. Amir de Souza Maia (Brazil) were among IAMSCU's founders, and their legacy continues through ALAIME's active contribution to IAMSCU's board and initiatives.

The North America region primarily includes the United States and Canada. In the U.S., Methodist-related schools have long had their own association in the National Association of Schools and Colleges of The United Methodist Church (NASCUMC). To interface with IAMSCU and create a more inclusive body, NASCUMC enlarged its mission and changed its name to become *NAAMSCU (*the *North American Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges, and Universities)*. NAAMSCU works in tandem with the UMC's University Senate and GBHEM to coordinate the more than 100 Methodist-affiliated colleges and universities in the U.S., as well as a few in Canada and the Caribbean. It provides a forum for North American Methodist educators to engage with global partners. One practical role of NAAMSCU is maintaining lists of schools and promoting student exchange participation from North America. Given that U.S. Methodist institutions range from large research universities to small liberal arts colleges, NAAMSCU also focuses on articulating the value of Methodist-related education in a pluralistic context, and encouraging those schools to remember their connectional heritage and values (such as welcoming international students or supporting church initiatives).

The Europe region's Methodist educational presence is smaller and somewhat unique. Outside of the United Kingdom, Methodist institutions in Europe are often theological schools or small colleges. In the U.K., however, Methodist education includes a network of primary/secondary schools and historically Methodist-founded universities (or Methodist colleges that are now part of larger universities). To unify these, a European regional grouping exists. This is sometimes facilitated through the *Methodist Theological Schools in Europe* network and partnerships with the Methodist Church in Britain's education office. European Methodist educators have held regional meetings (for example,

in Germany and Norway) to discuss secularization, religious education curriculum, and ecumenical partnerships. The Europe group collaborates closely with the WMC Education Committee (which is based in Europe through the Geneva secretary) and ensures European Methodist schools engage with IAMSCU's global programs. Notably, when the IAMSCU 2023 conference was in England, it was co-hosted by *Methodist Schools UK*, illustrating the synergy between the international and regional levels.

The Asia-Pacific region shares one association in the *Asia-Pacific Association of Methodist-related Educational Institutions (APAMEI)*. APAMEI is a prime example of how IAMSCU's regional strategy has unfolded. Founded in February 2012, APAMEI brought together Methodist-related institutions across East, South, and Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands. Its creation was driven by visionary leaders in Asia who saw an opportunity to strengthen ties in a region where Methodist schools range from large universities in Korea and the Philippines to small seminaries in places like Fiji. The goal was to *"foster solidarity, networking, and the development of visionary, dynamic, and holistic Christian leadership in Asia and the Pacific,"* as APAMEI's founding statement declared (Union of International Associations 2024). Professor Young-Min Paik of Yonsei University (Seoul, South Korea) was an early coordinator, working with GBHEM to launch APAMEI and reconnect institutions that had been disconnected from the global network.

APAMEI quickly moved from formation to action. In February 2015, it held an international conference in Incheon, South Korea – its first major gathering – drawing participants from across Asia-Pacific in cooperation with Yonsei University. At that meeting, representatives elected a governing board for APAMEI and outlined cooperative projects. For example, they discussed creating an Asian Methodist student exchange (which later dovetailed with MISEN) and collaborative research on *holistic education* inspired by Wesleyan theology. A Filipino laywoman, Dr. Priscilla Viuya, was elected to chair APAMEI's board in 2015, reflecting the broad regional ownership. Dr. Viuya also led the Philippine Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges, Universities, and Seminaries). "These institutions in Asia-Pacific are so willing to be connected," she observed, emphasizing the enthusiasm for learning from one another (United Methodist News 2023). APAMEI's conferences have reinforced themes of wholeness and unity amid diversity.

Since then, APAMEI has been very active. It convenes regular regional forums, such as a Global Education Forum held in Manila in 2018 focusing on "Education for

Sustainable Development and Peace" (Department of Education, Philippines 2018). That forum, co-organized with Wesleyan College of Manila, brought together IAMSCU and APAMEI leaders alongside government education officials in the Philippines, to dialogue on the role of faith-based schools in achieving societal goals. The presence of the Philippine Secretary of Education as keynote speaker signaled APAMEI's growing influence and the recognition that Methodist institutions are important stakeholders in the broader educational landscape.

During the COVID pandemic in 2020, APAMEI began holding monthly online educational forums that tackled many topics relevant to Methodist institutions around the world. These online forums, held monthly from 2020 until 2024, were attended by students and faculty not only from the Asia-Pacific region, but from other regions as well. The forums were streamed on YouTube and have continued to witness to the diversity and importance of Methodist educational themes long after the events were over.

By serving as IAMSCU's representative in a region with many Methodist schools and churches, APAMEI ensures that the Asia-Pacific context – with its unique cultural and religious diversity – is factored into IAMSCU's global plans. It exemplifies how IAMSCU's regional associations function: APAMEI takes IAMSCU's global vision and *incarnates* it locally, whether that means arranging mutual support visits between a Methodist university in India and one in Japan, or collectively addressing an issue like government regulations on private Christian colleges.

In summary, IAMSCU's collaboration with its regional associations creates a two-way street of benefits. The regional groups (AAMIHE, APAMEI, the European network, ALAIME, and NAAMSCU) adapt and implement IAMSCU's initiatives in contextually appropriate ways. They also generate grassroots ideas and leadership that flow up to IAMSCU, keeping the international organization responsive to local realities. This structure echoes Methodist ecclesiology – connectional yet contextual. Thanks to the regional associations, IAMSCU is not merely run from a distant global office; it lives in networks around the world. And as the case of APAMEI shows, when those regional bodies are energized, the entire IAMSCU network is strengthened. Together, they form a truly global coalition of Methodist schools, each region contributing its distinctive voice to the hymn of *"connecting through education."*

Contemporary Role and Future Prospects

Today, IAMSCU stands as a unique and influential coalition in global higher

education. Its contemporary role can be seen in how it impacts Methodist-related education today and how it positions itself for the future in a changing world. On the one hand, IAMSCU provides continuity – a way for Methodist institutions to remain rooted in their founding values and connected to a worldwide faith community. On the other hand, it is an agent of adaptation – helping those institutions face new challenges like globalization, technological change, and shifting religious landscapes.

IAMSCU serves as *both a symbol and instrument* of the Methodist commitment to education. It symbolizes the global unity of Wesleyan educational endeavors: when a student in Africa wears an IAMSCU scholarship badge, or a professor in Europe attends an IAMSCU webinar, they are reminded that they belong to a family of over a thousand institutions carrying the Methodist legacy. This sense of shared identity and values is crucial as many church-related schools navigate secular environments. IAMSCU helps schools affirm what makes Methodist education distinctive – such as emphasis on educating the whole person (mind and spirit), concern for social justice, and the concept of education as a means of "transforming lives" and serving the common good. For instance, Methodist colleges often speak of developing students of *character and conscience*; through IAMSCU's networks, they share how to integrate ethical and spiritual formation into curricula in relevant ways for today's youth.

Practically, IAMSCU has an on-the-ground impact through its programs. Hundreds of students have studied abroad within the Methodist network who might not otherwise have had that opportunity – building cross-cultural competencies and friendships that embody the *"world parish"* idea of Methodism. Faculty exchange and research collaborations have increased the academic output and teaching quality at member institutions. In areas like theology, religious studies, and service-learning, IAMSCU-sponsored consultations have enriched what Methodist schools can offer. Moreover, IAMSCU gives collective voice to Methodist education in ecumenical and global forums. It can advocate on issues like the right to education, peace education, or educational policy from a faith perspective. Retired Bishop Rosemarie Wenner of Germany (a WMC Education leader) highlighted this when she described IAMSCU as "an expression of the broad and lively Methodist connection" where educators meet to "respond to global challenges" based on shared values (Dunlap-Berg 2023). In effect, IAMSCU is making sure Methodist schools are at the table when global conversations about education happen – whether it's contributing to United Nations sustainable education goals or engaging in interfaith academic dialogues.

Of course, IAMSCU and its members face significant challenges in the contemporary era. Many Methodist-related institutions are dealing with financial pressures, competition in the education sector, and in some cases declining church affiliation among students. Additionally, political and social conflicts (from war to cultural polarization) can threaten the mission of educational institutions. IAMSCU's recent themes – peace, justice, human rights – indicate an acute awareness of these issues. The association's role here is often to *provide hope and connection*. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, IAMSCU facilitated virtual meetings so member schools could share strategies on online learning and campus ministry under lockdowns, thus helping each other through the crisis. In regions where Christians are a minority or where religious institutions face scrutiny, IAMSCU offers solidarity and a reminder that these schools are part of a larger, respected international network. This can be a source of moral support and even protection.

Looking ahead, IAMSCU's prospects appear strong, but will require adaptive leadership. One clear opportunity is the demographic shift in global Christianity. As studies note, the growth of Christianity is poised to be largest in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia in coming decades. This means Methodist-related educational institutions in those regions are likely to expand and new ones may be founded. IAMSCU is well-positioned to nurture these emerging institutions, integrating them into the global network from the start. We may see, for instance, new Methodist universities in countries that previously had none – IAMSCU can mentor them by sharing expertise from older institutions. Conversely, in the West (Europe and North America) where church-based schools face secularization, IAMSCU can help those institutions reimagine their mission and connect to the vitality of the global church. Andrew Gordon-Brown, Kingswood School headmaster noted at the 2023 converence that IAMSCU must be "the glue that binds global Methodist educational institutions," facilitating collaboration and solidarity (Dunlap-Berg 2023). This glue will be even more needed as the world becomes at once more interconnected and yet fragmented by cultural divides.

IAMSCU embodies the enduring values and ethos of Methodist education. The association will continue championing educational work that is *holistic* (academic excellence with spiritual and moral formation) and *transformative* (education as a tool for personal and social holiness, in Wesley's terms). Methodist education is about transforming lives for service to society, and IAMSCU helps to reinforce that tradition and legacy that contributes to the mission of Methodist schools.

In conclusion, the story of IAMSCU's history and development – from its origins in

1991 amid a vision of global connection, through decades of growth and expanding influence, to its current role as a connector and innovator in faith-based higher education – testifies to the enduring power of a shared mission. It began as a bold experiment: could Methodist schools around the world truly collaborate across cultural and national boundaries? Thirty-plus years later, the answer is a resounding yes. IAMSCU has not only survived but thrived, continually rejuvenated by the institutions it serves. Its journey reflects a dynamic interplay between local initiative and global unity, much like the Methodist movement itself. IAMSCU embodies a living history – one where *"knowledge and vital piety"* go hand in hand, and where the next generation of students can catch a vision of a world knit together by love, learning, and the Methodist ethos of "connectional" education.

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