YOUNG PEOPLE’S ADDRESS
Presentation Date: Sat. May 14, 8:45-9:15am

PETER CIBUABUA:
I am Peter Cibuabua.

CHELSEA SPYRES:
I am Chelsea Spyres.

PETER:
I am from Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

CHELSEA:
I am from Delaware but now live and serve in Michigan here in the United States.

PETER:
The objective of this message is to help you, our brothers and sisters in the church, to understand how deeply the young people are engaged in Christ’s journey with energy and love. We hope that through our voices you hear the challenges our generation is facing and solutions we are finding, so that together we can build the church of God with Love, faith and Hope.

CHELSEA:
This message is built with Young People’s Voices from all around the world so that Peter and I are simply ambassadors of the young people here present on the stage.

PETER:
I come from a family of 9 children, five boys and four girls. I was born Muslim but it happened that I began studying in one of the United Methodist schools in my home village. I would spend much of my time with my Christian friends at school and after school discussing about our religions. But, I was not willing to be invited to a church.

CHELSEA:
I come from a family of 2 children, both of us girls. While neither of my parents attend church regularly I started attending my home congregation at a young age with my grandmother, my Nana. I would spend many Saturday nights at her house and we would go to church together Sunday. Once I got to middle school my parents were always willing to drop me off at church if they were not staying. I continued to participate in church, attend Methodist summer camp, and became active in mission work, both locally and further away, all at a fairly young age.

PETER:
At school it was an obligation while being a student to participate in the church program. I did stop going for a time, but the day I went back the preacher spoke about “Forgiveness as a gift that we receive from Jesus Christ after confessing our iniquities”.
Some of the time they were teaching us on decision made in Allah’s name cannot change. I was frightened about these statements. I decided myself to start going to UM Church but my parents were seriously stopping me. They even decided to tell me: If you go for that church, you have to find people to pay your school fees. I was like a stranger in my own house. I started learning English, singing the same time in the local church called United Methodist International English Church. Sweeping the church was my duty. I and my friend slept at the church each Saturday night to make things ready. Finally I got baptized and confirmed as a full member of the UMC. I started following teachings that were affirming my faith, spiritually I was fed. I loved the preaching about Love and Grace.

CHELSEA:
My home congregation Newark UMC was a place of family. It was a place growing up that I knew my voice mattered. From a young age I was invited into this family of faith. They encouraged me through awkward middle and high school years. They supported and help cultivate my call to ministry late in high school and through college. And they still challenge and support me from afar as I am serving in Detroit. That family of faith showed me what it meant to love, regardless of one’s race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic situation, age, ability, belief, or background, because all are beloved children of God. This family allowed me to see how powerful the body of Christ can be, when the church is looking outwardly more than inwardly. This family practiced what they preached, and transformed what the word church means to me.

PETER:
I realized that, I had another family, the “church” - and I understood things in different way. I could understand that God exists, and he forgives through Jesus Christ. I started my ministry in Sunday school with children, teaching them how to love and be friends of Jesus by obeying the word of God. Today I’m one of the leaders of the young people’s ministry proclaiming the gospel of Jesus in my local church and beyond. I became ambassador of Christ Ministries to show to others the power of God’s love and his grace. My wish is to be committed and be ready for God’s work. The first time I spoke to my bishop in his office, he said, “I recommended you as a delegate of the Episcopal Area to the African Young Methodist Leader Summit in Zimbabwe.” I could not imagine this, because I was neither a pastor’s son nor a lay leader’s son. Lifted from nowhere, by the Grace and forgiveness I can testify to the love of God. Today my parents are encouraging me and my brother to go to UM Church. Because they saw the light and the glory of God working in me. By faith today we are sharing this message.

CHELSEA:
The family of my home church taught me the power of relationships and encouraged me to apply for the Global Mission Fellows program through Global Ministries. In 2014 I trained to become a global mission fellow with 42 other young adults from around the world.

At times we disagreed, but the relationships we formed in the beginning, helped us move through these disagreements in love.
After training I began serving at the NOAH Project, a non-profit in downtown Detroit, Michigan where I have served the last two years. NOAH provides lunch and social services for homeless and low-income Detroits. Serving at NOAH has shown me, how powerful love really is, and how even though I cannot fix the challenging situations that our clients find themselves in, I can love, the way that Christ loves us, and spread that love through a welcoming smile, and a simple hello. Every day, I get a glimpse of the Kin-dom here on earth through a bag lunch and stories shared.

My story, and Peter's story are not the only stories that matter here. From the beginning of creating this Address Peter and I agreed that more voices than ours needed to be heard. Unfortunately due to technology complications we were not able to get pictures from young people all around the world. But, take a look at how many young people responded when first asked, "What are the weaknesses of the United Methodist Church? In what ways do you want the church to grow?"

CHELSEA:
Thank goodness that is not all the young people think about the Church. Now take a look at these pieces of hope, where we as a church are getting it right.

PETER:
Here you have seen some of the hopes and some of the fears of young people when thinking about their United Methodist Church. We are confident that this General Conference is listening and praying for solutions, and cares deeply about the witness of young people when discerning the possibilities for mission and ministry before us. We invite you to think about a young person in your life and how the decisions from this General Conference will affect that young people.

CHELSEA:
As human beings we get it wrong a lot. We think that we have it right, that we know what we are talking about until someone comes along and proves otherwise, or maybe God stops whispering and starts to yell. God stops waiting for us to find a quiet moment and shows up in very apparent ways.

We as the people who make up the Church can also get it wrong, we can find ourselves far from sharing God's love, and only portraying our personal intentions and goals. It is in these moments that I am so thankful for God's grace and grace from my neighbor.

One of the things that I hear the most from young people is that they feel like their voice is not being heard and that they are not welcomed. As a denomination we can get so focused on continuing to do things how we have always done them that sometimes we miss out on the new voices longing to be heard. We don't take the time to get to know the new person who has walked into worship, or the new demographic that has moved into our neighborhood. We make assumptions before building relationships.
As a Church we sometimes think because we have heard from one young person we have heard from them all. We must remember that each individual in our lives is unique, with their own story, their own background, and their own ideas for the future. Whether or not we agree theologically or personally with someone, we must remember that we are first God’s children, created equally, created from and for love.

How would the Church grow if we listened before we spoke? If we learned about each other’s cultural backgrounds before inserting our expectations? What would the church look like if before anything else, we loved, and I mean truly loved all. If first and foremost we sought to show the radical, undeserving, perfect love that Christ shows to us?

PETER:
The young people are involved in making decision, they are zealous to do work; they have passion for work and they can be very dedicated. They have the energy to execute tasks. If mobilized well they can work positively toward Jesus Ministry. They are very vibrant if energy is directed to a good cause. But, they can easily lose focus with improper guidance. They are very emotional and proper shepherding must always be given. They can be easily consumed by ego which might affect their work. They can do very well when well oriented. But young people’s programming is usually one of the lowest line items on a conference’s budget… can you imagine?

In these ways, young people are marginalized in the Church. It’s high time the church should change its primitive perspective of seeing “young people as the church of tomorrow.” In some corners of the world there are still divisions between the haves and have-nots in the Church. Young People are shaped by the good news of Jesus Christ, by the equality and justice presented in the Bible. But they can be easily either influenced positively and negatively. Some are victims; or witnesses of violence. Some have an awareness of crime and are possibly involved. Some are orphans because of war or HIV/AIDS. Some are Illiterate, some refugees, some carry weapons in Africa, some are drawn into terrorism in every part of the world. These crises produce fear, child trafficking, and the loss of identity. Even matters of racism and sexism create mountains and valleys for young people in the church. Some brothers of that side unwanted by the brothers of the other side.

CHELSEA:
When you look across the world there are many social issues that we as a denomination differ on. There are laws in some places that hold little significance in another. One of these social issues that holds different value depending on your cultural context is human sexuality.

I shared in my introduction that growing up in a church were all were welcomed and all were treated equal was a critical piece in my discernment of how God is calling me to love. When I look at our Wesleyan heritage, I see Wesley calling us to “Do good, of every possible sort, and as far as possible, to all,” and I see Jesus loving those that society considered to be outsiders, considered to be the least of these. Jesus did not say that people had to change their ways before he would love them or before they could follow him. Jesus simply said, I love you, you are my child, now follow and learn from me.
No matter where you stand on questions of human sexuality, we are called to love, and love before anything else. Then the transformational love of Jesus, will transform our hearts, and the hearts of those we are ministry with. We say in the Discipline that we commit to be in ministry with and for all persons, but are we really? Are we accepting and including all persons as they are, as God created them to be, or are we trying to conform them to who we think they should be?

**PETER:**
Today we experience homosexuality as a phenomenon that many people are treating out loud, as a social issue among many other social issues such as terrorism and wars. It is very important to objectively look at the practice of homosexuality and to evaluate the impact this has on the church’s witness. Treat together with bishops, clergy, and lay here present. Know that above and beyond everything the love of God should cover our personal sin.

We have to treat this subject with compassion and love, no matter what might happen. Remember, the church is the United Methodist Church, a global church. Our unity makes us strong and different believers in the world.

Would you be happy to have a divided church, a confused church, or a UMC of America, UMC of Asia, UMC of Africa, UMC of Europe? I believe your answer will be no. It is up to you and me to keep our identity. United we conquer the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Divided we are limited. We young people need the church to welcome everyone as he is. But let the love and the need of God break us. So together without differences we can proclaim the kingdom of heaven through Christ ministry. Remember we have one God, one Christ, one doctrine, one faith, one savior, one spirit, one body, one and one church.

**CHELSEA:**
We are a Church based in love: loving God, and loving each other. This transformational love in action is where the United Methodist Church is at its best --and what most connects with young adults' desire to make a difference in the world.

I see transformational love in action when I look at our United Methodist Committee on Relief. UMCOR is often the first on the scene after a disaster and the last to leave. UMCOR is not only focused on short term relief but also on long term recovery. And when UMCOR asks, the whole Church responds.

In 2008 the UMC committed as a denomination to join the fight against malaria. 8 years later, $68 Million has been given or pledged to the “Imagine No Malaria” campaign. How crazy is that! That is the Church on a local level gathering and responding in incredible ways. We are a Church of action, a Church that lives out our call to service. It is this type of response that draws young people into the Church. When the Church is able to make Christ’s love more visible in the world, young people want to be a part of that.
I mentioned that my home church in Delaware shaped my call to justice and service. When I moved to Detroit as a Global Mission Fellow, I began to look for a church that I would call home. I did not have to look very far as the first Sunday in Detroit I worshipped at Central UMC where the non-profit I work for is housed. Central is a place where our clients who are experiencing homelessness are welcomed and are able to worship beside business owners. Central is not only committed to direct service work but also to fighting for vulnerable populations on a political advocacy level. Central embodies ministry with, not to others.

There are many local churches that are doing ministry outside of the walls of the church, churches that are being the hands and feet of Christ. It is these churches that give us an example of how to continue to serve and be involved in the communities that God has called us to. We are a denomination that is more than words spoken on Sunday mornings, but are actions throughout the week, and for that I and many young people give thanks, and see a future for the denomination.

PETER:
The Young African Leaders Summit was a great and powerful activity in my young adult ministry that made me connected to the UMC in the world and opened my eyes. Above and beyond everything, through that experience I understood the importance of young people in the church and community. There I got: to have a new vision of the Church through young people; to create a network for all young leaders in Africa; the ability to share about the Christian ministry and young people’s activities in our respective Annual Conferences. The summit has created a space in which young leaders will exchange their ideas and experiences, where they have the time and space to discuss and exchange views on leadership.

When I participated in this young leader’s summit, I discovered a vision for the young people of the church in Africa and in the whole world. That is to live a life of a servant leader, and to encourage leadership among other young people. So, I organized two trainings on leadership and a writing project, and I went with a team to train another group of young Methodist leaders in another city 250 miles from the capital city. I got motivated to work for God and to be a carrier of Jesus’ cross without any reservation or fear. Now 70% of my time is oriented to my church work….teaching English for free in our center, on the Methodist Radio and cleaning the church still my favorite work in my life.

You see, love is patient, and the law of courtesy shows how we can love every one even when we are living in disagreement, love doesn’t show differences, when we have love we can live above and beyond any situation with a neighbor. Even if this one seems to be stranger in our community. Like the one day when we were doing evangelism house to house, and suddenly there was a man coming toward us, very dirty, and showing signs of mental illness. All my group members neglected the guy, but I went to him, called him to stop, and he stopped. I asked him a question (do you love God?) he said yes. Do you know Jesus? He said yes. Do you believe that God can transform you today? He said yes, then I held his dirty hands, I said “Close your eyes, let’s pray.” When it was done I gave him some money. This person was healed, after this sign many people came asking me to pray for them.
You see, around the world the UMC can help in many ways. Working with strangers is a way of showing the love of Christ. Let's welcome young people and give them a place to feel loved by the church. We want to be model of Christ, like John Wesley our founder. And we need to be honest of where we are coming from, that our identity is Christian. The young people want involvement of all persons for the entire family of Christ. Forget differences and work together in love for the sake and help of each other to reveal the truth and be witness of it.

CHELSEA:
As Peter and I said at the beginning of this address, the young people of the United Methodist Church are more than the two of us. The young people of the UMC include many diverse voices. Their voices are waiting to be heard, waiting to know that they are loved, and valued by their Church.

Continue to build relationships with the young people in your life. Your time spent encouraging them has a transformational power for what the UMC looks like now, and will look like in the future. In this next week, I hope we will all spend time building relationships with one another. This is an amazing opportunity to get to know delegates from different conferences and different parts of the world. I hope that we can be like Jesus and build relationships and love before anything else. I hope that we can show the rest of the church how things could be different if we could love and respect in the midst of differences.

Together, as one body, God gives us an opportunity. An opportunity to make disciples for the transformation of the world! It is time to take that opportunity, to give thanks to God who shows us love and grace when we do not deserve it, and to go into the world, to transform it.

PETER:
In the United Methodist Church, in Congo Central Conference the young people make up more than half of church participants by estimation. In all over the world they really want to be free, and experience that freedom in their ‘works in the church, feeling like nobody restricts them, they want to live their vision toward the church in the “Now” and the future. In much of world young people are forming an absolute majority in the United Methodist Church. They are people full of motivation, they are ready to serve anywhere at any time GBGM with Global Ministries, GBOD with young people ministries. They have been involved in most of committees and agencies of the Church. They are powerful, with vocation for ministry.

Talking about young people let share this huge example of one of them: Jesus Christ; servant leader died at age of 33 years old, he was everything, messiah, prophet, bishop, Apostle, Servant leader, Pastor…why not expect coming years young Bishop in our annual conferences?.....They are spiritually build with your teachings, advices, blessings….this is a slogan of the young people, TODAY FIRST, TOMORROW THEN, instead of saying….they are the church of tomorrow.
CHELSEA:
Peter and I are grateful that we’ve had this opportunity to address you, but more than anything, we hope you will connect with the young people in your own life and ministry. As a response to what you have heard this morning, we ask that you would take a postcard and write to a young person whose witness you are thankful for. Give them words of encouragement and share with them something that gives you hope from this experience. Then before the week is over, drop that postcard at the Discipleship Ministries exhibit and we will mail it to them. Continue to invite young people to conversations around decision making. Let the young people of Church know that their voices matter. Blessings! Shalom!

PETER:
Please join us as we close with this song: “Go to somebody, tell him (her) that you love him(her) lift up your hands together and praise the Lord.”

CHELSEA:
Blessings! Shalom!

PETER:
Amen