

A CALL TO ACTION
The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church
May 8, 2009

There are signs of life and hope across the denomination, including the positive responses to the Four Areas of Focus at all levels of the church. People have been energized by the call to action around these Foci and have taken steps to implement one or more of them in inspired and creative ways.

HOWEVER, we face an unprecedented moment in our history. In the United States: church membership, worship attendance, and baptisms continue to decline; funding for connectional ministries continues to decline, and grows weaker in the current economic crisis; the “warm heart” of John Wesley’s initial movement has become a “contented heart” of institutional inertia; and the 1970’s organization and structure we live with is not sufficient, nimble, or responsive to the fast-changing 21st century world we inhabit. While these signs reflect the United States-oriented experience, the impact on our global sisters and brothers is profound and significant. The current global financial crisis has uncovered our hesitancy to act, but it has also gifted us with a sense of urgency and an opportunity to lead courageously.

In the midst of the crisis facing our global family and the urgency facing our denomination, the Council of Bishops acknowledges this *kairos* moment in time and affirms:

- That we are committed to expressing the love of God and making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world
- That business as usual is not working and it is past time for changing
- That we have not lost our heart or passion to be servant leaders for the whole church
- That we earnestly desire to be faithful and fruitful

Because the Council of Bishops is called to lead the church “for such a time as this” and because the urgency of this moment in history demands bold, courageous, transformative action, the Council of Bishops responds to this unique moment with this call to move toward a bold new future for the UMC:

- #1 The Council of Bishops will take these steps as initial signs for the reordering of our life as a Council and the life of the church.
- Beginning January 2010, and recognizing the present financial challenges facing the General Church, Annual Conferences, and our local churches, the Council of Bishops requests that the General Council on Finance and Administration roll back the salary of the active USA, Jurisdictional Bishops to the **2008** level
 - Beginning with the November 2009 meeting, the Council of Bishops will plan for the semi-annual meetings to be completed in one day less in order to practice faithful stewardship of time, energy and resources, and to model both efficiency and frugality
 - Responding to the deficit spending for 2008 General Conference, and to the projected budget shortfall of more than \$3 million for the next General Conference, the Council of Bishops will begin immediately to collaborate with the General Commission on the General Conference and the General Council on Finance and Administration to redesign the plan and operation of the 2012 General Conference.

- #2 Every member of the Council of Bishops takes responsibility for “telling the stories” of the many positive ways in which the Four Areas of Focus are being implemented around the world; and, by the end of 2009 will convene a series of Conversation Circles involving thousands of people engaged in prayer, reflection, and action around the Four Areas of Focus.
- #3 Every member of the Council of Bishops will collect, assemble and assess information about how congregations and other parts of the connection are adapting creatively to the global economic crisis. Every member will identify and clarify the challenges and constraints that must be faced in the annual conferences and the larger church. At the July 2009 meeting, the Executive Committee will develop a mechanism for collecting and reporting this information.
- #4 Working with the GBOPHB the Council of Bishops, individually and collectively, commits to complete the CCPI goal of raising \$20 million. Working with partners of the Global Health Initiative, the Council of Bishops commits to reaching the \$75 million goal by 2012. Every bishop, active and retired, will make voluntary financial contributions to the Global Health Initiative.
- #5 The Council of Bishops affirms the work of the Table of the COB officers, General Secretaries, and Agency Presidents over the last six months. Further, we authorize the continued work of a task group of people named by that Table (*) to guide our denominational response to the urgent opportunity for further alignment of the mission of the church and the four areas of focus, and to refashion and reposition the church for the 21st century. We assign this *ad interim* Steering Committee the responsibility for designing and bringing to the November 2009 meetings of the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table a plan of action that will lead to reordering the life of the church.

The President of the Council of Bishops will convene and lead this Steering Committee. With the President-elect serving as the project manager, the Steering Committee will:

- Consult with a broad-based constituency, including persons with organizational expertise as well as lay and clergy leaders from around the world, to generate proposals to radically refashion and reorder the life of The United Methodist Church
- Guide the denomination through the uncertain economic climate that dominates the lives of people around the world
- Lead the process of evaluating and recommending a holistic 21st century “method” for being and doing church around the world in radically new ways, and in keeping with our commitment to the world-wide nature of the church
- Suggest leadership alternatives that insure continuity, measurable progress and timeliness to achieve these and other objectives. This *may* include options such as a set-aside bishop, a special called session of General Conference, cost-effective web-based communications, or other interventions necessary to respond to changing realities of the church and the world.

**Steering Committee members are two Central Conference bishops to be named by the President of the Council of Bishops, plus Bishops Palmer, Goodpaster, Swenson, Hopkins, Radar, and General Secretaries Kumar, Hawkins, Alexander, Greenwaldt, and Hollon. The Committee may be expanded to include other persons of color and/or a bishop elected since 2004.*