

# **Conversations Across the Church**

*A preliminary research report presented to*

**The State of the Church Task Force  
of  
The Connectional Table**

*August 2006*



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# Conversations Across the Church

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# Conversations Across the Church

## Agenda for Today

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## Conversations Across the Church

# Background and Methodology

## Conversations Across the Church

### Background and Objectives

The Connectional Table will develop and distribute an annual State of the Church Report. The first of these will be completed in 2006.

As input to the State of the Church Report, the Connectional Table will stimulate, encourage and support energetic and fruitful conversations across the connection.

The purpose of these conversations is to help the Connectional Table:

- *Define the current realities (signs of strength and weakness) in the life and ministries of the church*
- *Claim and honor the strengths of the heritage and work of the church*
- *Examine proposals for areas of concentrated attention and accountability that will be the stepping-stones for advancing the story of faithful witness and service*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Objectives

**The research will explore and describe the thoughts, feelings, values and judgments of a cross section of people who participate in and lead The United Methodist Church.**

**The purpose of the project is to develop a comprehensive baseline understanding of the attitudes, aspirations and judgments of the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church by the people called Methodist.**

**The research focused on the U.S., Europe, Africa and Philippines.**

# The conversations will provide the Connectional Table with a baseline for future planning.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Applications

#### ***A descriptive function:***

- They will provide a “scan” of the environment in which the 21<sup>st</sup>-century United Methodist Church is operating.

#### ***A prescriptive function:***

- They will enable the leaders of The United Methodist Church to address the issues that are uppermost in the minds of their constituents by providing guidance and direction for the future development of programs, policies, communications, tools and events.

**Future “conversations” on a periodic basis (perhaps annually) will enable the church to monitor changes and progress on how well issues are being addressed. They also will allow the identification of emerging issues. While this initial measure should be rigorous and detailed to establish a sound baseline, future measures can be more concise and structured.**

# Target audiences are listed below.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Grassroots

Active Members

Inactive Members

Informal Lay Leaders

*In*  
*U.S.*  
*Philippines*  
*Africa*  
*Europe*

### Leadership

Bishops

Pastors

District Superintendents

Annual Conference

Treasurers/  
Administrative Services Directors

Connectional Ministries Directors

Designated lay leaders

*In*  
*U.S.*  
*Philippines*  
*Africa*  
*Europe*

The research is following a three-phase plan. Results in this report represent Phase 2.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Research Phases

- **Phase 1: Secondary Research**
  - *Provides the backdrop*
- **Phase 2: Qualitative Research**
  - *Exploration, discovery and insights bring the issues to the surface.*
- **Phase 3: Quantitative Research**
  - *Provides verification; determines prevalence of insights; extrapolates to larger populations*

**Qualitative Research provides exploration, discovery and insight; it brings the issues to light.**

## Conversations Across the Church

### Phase 2: Qualitative Research

#### *The need for qualitative research*

- Qualitative research is an important precursor to quantitative research.
- Through **exploration, discovery and insight**, it enables us to know what is most relevant to target audiences.
- Quantitative research (survey) is essential for understanding the **prevalence** of emotions, opinions and attitudes surrounding issues.
- However, since surveys depend on a structured question-and-answer process, they can only quantify these variables once issues have been previously identified clearly. This was the function of the current qualitative research.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Qualitative Research

### One-on-One, In-Depth Interviews

The original plan that was presented and approved covered the following “grassroots” segments.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Phase 2: Qualitative Research

#### Sample Sizes: *Original Plan*

##### ***Members and Informal Lay Leaders***

- 80-90 in-person interviews—U.S., Europe, Africa, Philippines
- 85-100 telephone interviews—U.S., Europe, Africa, Philippines

##### ***Pastors***

- 15-20 in person—4-5 U.S. cities.
- 45-50 telephone—U.S., Europe, Africa, Philippines

The following church leaders were also in the plan.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Phase 2: Qualitative Research

Sample Sizes: *Original Plan*

**Leaders:**

- **Bishops: 3-4 in person (U.S.) ; 13-16 telephone (U.S., Europe, Africa, Philippines)**
- **District Superintendents: 4-8 in person (U.S.); 16-20 telephone (U.S., Europe, Africa, Philippines)**
- **Annual Conference Treasurers/Administrative Services Directors**
  - 4-6 telephone worldwide
- **Connectional Ministries Directors**
  - 4-6 telephone worldwide
- **Designated Lay Leaders**
  - 10-12 telephone worldwide

**The State of the Church Task Force and Martec jointly agreed on the locations that would represent the church for this phase of the study.**

## Conversations Across the Church

### Phase 2: Qualitative Research:

*The research was conducted in the following locations:*

**U.S.:**

In-person interviews: Houston, Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, Columbus, Baltimore, Tulsa, Dallas  
Telephone: multiple locations covering the U.S.

**Europe:**

Frankfurt, Germany; Zurich, Switzerland; Moscow, Russia; Stavanger, Norway \*

**Africa:**

Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo

**Philippines:**

Manila

\*Interviews in Norway were conducted by the Rev. Oyvind Helliesen.

This table presents the actual number of face-to-face and telephone interviews conducted. This report covers analyses from members, lay leaders and pastors. A separate report on leaders will be issued following completion of the remaining interviews.

## Conversations Across the Church

Respondent Type	US	Europe	Africa	Philippines	Total
Members/Lay Leaders	112	39*	23	15	180
Pastors	60	6	3	3	72
Bishops**	5	3	3	2	13
District Superintendents	7	4	4	4	19
Conference Treasurers/ Administrators	5	0	0	0	5
Ministry Directors	6	0	0	0	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>295</b>

*Includes both in-person and in-depth telephone interviews; nine interviews were conducted in Norway.  
\*\*A separate report on bishops will follow after further one-on-one interviews.*

## Conversations Across the Church

# Portraits

**The people of The United Methodist Church are diverse.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Portraits**

**Conversations about the church and its role in people's lives were held with United Methodists in many cities and towns in several countries: the U.S., Germany, Russia, Switzerland, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo and the Philippines.**

**Respondents came from diverse backgrounds and experiences.**

**This section of the report shares a handful of profiles and stories of the people of The United Methodist Church.**

## Conversations Across the Church

### Portraits

#### *Sample portraits of respondents*

- Respondents are promised anonymity

*In this section:*

- Names are changed.
- Identities and locations are obscured.
- Pictures are illustrations, not likenesses.
- Profiles are based on interviews.

# “Ann”

## Conversations Across the Church



“Ann”

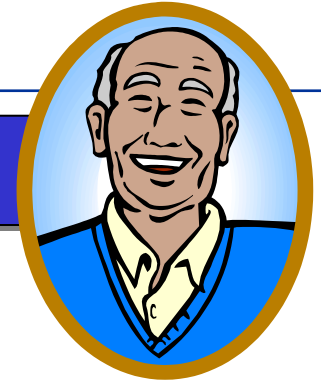
**Ann is a professor of mathematics at a major U.S. university. She grew up in a United Methodist family. During the early part of her career, she moved to a different city and, along with her husband, was a Congregationalist for a while. This gave her a different view of connectionalism. When she returned to her hometown, she reconnected with The United Methodist Church.**

**She loves The United Methodist Church for its commitment to making a difference in people’s lives through social action, as well as ministering to the faith.**

**She is alarmed by the precipitous decline in her church’s membership. She is disappointed in The United Methodist Church because, while it is inclusive, in her view, it is “very careful about who we include.”**

**She has strong feelings about the need to do a better job of matching pastors with their congregations. Her own congregation is suffering because, in her view, the pastor assigned to their church simply does not meet the needs of the people.**

# “Joe”



## Conversations Across the Church

### “Joe”

**Joe is African American and grew up in a low-income area of a large U.S. city. He has had a successful career, starting in the corporate world and moving into city government. He has been an elected official for many years and serves on the boards of several non-profit agencies. He is a prominent city father.**

**He grew up in a small African-American church in his childhood neighborhood. Though he moved away from his old neighborhood many years ago, he continues to be a member and leader of his small, original United Methodist Church.**

**Joe is passionately committed to his church and spends a lot of his time and effort with his involvement in its leadership. He is greatly concerned that membership is dwindling and feels immense frustration because this is a result of aging members who are resistant to change. New, younger members are not catered to or welcomed.**

**He believes it is very important to maintain the Black church. It provides a core and a foundation for the Black community and gives them a place where they are “somebody.”**

**Joe takes pride in being United Methodist; he feels, though his church is small, it is part of a larger entity that has a proud history of involvement in education, social justice and politics.**

# “Josephine”

## Conversations Across the Church



### “Josephine”

Josephine, an artist, is a young divorced mother of three, soon to remarry. She is not very active or engaged in her church. She is extremely busy raising her children and finds that once she misses one Sunday, it's easy to miss another. She “feels good” when she does get to church; it's getting there that's difficult.

What does get her to church is an invitation from someone she considers important in her life. More often than not it's an invitation to an event (a spaghetti dinner, a jumble sale) rather than Sunday service; however, once there, she is more inspired to attend services that week, taking her children along.

She loves the enormous cultural diversity of her church whose members come from all over the world. She also is inspired by her pastor who is dedicated and who provided great spiritual comfort when she was in need.

For Josephine, the attraction of church is the community it provides. She is not greatly taken with church doctrine or theology. She is “comfortable” in her United Methodist Church and would not think of switching. She wishes she could attend more often, but family and work commitments get in the way.

# “Edward”



## Conversations Across the Church

### “Edward”

Edward is in his 70s, retired and actively involved in his church in a mid-sized U.S. town. He is recovering from a heart attack that has slowed him down a little, but he continues to be engaged.

Edward’s main concern is with trying to grow the church. It is an ethnically mixed church with both younger and older people. Trying to put together a Sunday school has been frustrating because the church is small and there are not enough facilities or rooms.

Edward wants to stay with his church; he likes a small church where he knows everyone and everyone knows him. Fellowship is important to him. He would not like the anonymity of a large church.

Giving to the church is important to Edward. He sacrifices for himself if there is a need and doesn’t understand or admire people who have no heart to give to church causes. He also is open to changing worship styles and to being contemporary rather than traditional and is frustrated with members of his congregation who want to stay with traditional forms of music and worship. He believes this is an important barrier to growing the church.

Edward knows little about United Methodist doctrine. He simply knows he is more comfortable in a United Methodist atmosphere than elsewhere.

# “Paula”



## Conversations Across the Church

### “Paula”

**Paula is an African American who has been a pastor for more than 20 years. She is serving a mid-sized church with an aging, affluent, White congregation.**

**Being a pastor who is female and African American has always had its challenges for Paula. Some African-American churches she served resented a woman pastor. Her current congregation openly requested a White male pastor in the beginning. They slowly came to accept her, though never fully.**

**The church she serves is not growing, despite the potential in the neighborhood. The community is changing. There is a lot of new construction, and many younger families are moving in. However, Paula frets that the congregation is not welcoming. While they consider themselves open and friendly, they are more like a club than a church congregation. They are friendly to one another but not to anyone from the outside.**

**Paula has difficulty encouraging people to volunteer. Members get together outside of church services but usually for golf or other social outings. Their expectations from their pastor seem to Paula to be unreasonable. She is expected to draw in newcomers by herself with no support from member volunteers.**

**Paula loves The United Methodist Church and, despite the challenges she has faced, has no regrets about her career choice. She will, however, be relieved when she completes her current appointment and looks forward to her next challenge.**

# “Rolf”

## Conversations Across the Church



### “Rolf”

**Rolf is German and lives in a large city in Germany. He is middle-aged and has been married for nearly 20 years. He and his wife have two children. Rolf works for a big German industrial company in mid-level management. He has great dedication to music, likes to sing in a choir and plays several musical instruments.**

**He grew up in a small suburb where his grandfather was involved in founding the local Methodist congregation 60 years ago. Like his parents, Rolf has belonged to the German Methodist Church since birth. His current congregation, formed as a result of the merging of several smaller congregations, is located in his neighborhood. He was a supporter of the newly merged congregation to which he belongs and likes the premises and the fact that the building looks like a real church.**

**Elected a delegate to the annual conference, Rolf also is very active in his congregation as the leader of the choir and a member of the music committee and the congregation board.**

**While he supports merging smaller congregations to create a bigger one in order to achieve a better mixture of ages—what is sensed as today’s major challenge by him—and his voluntary work as a musician, Rolf sometimes feel a personal need for the more traditional style in music and service he experienced in his childhood and youth.**

# “Jodie”



## Conversations Across the Church

### “Jodie”

Jodie is a young pastor, now working in a conference office in a large U.S. city. She grew up in a small rural town where her family was active in The United Methodist Church. The people she admired growing up were United Methodist ministers; she felt they were honest, genuinely helpful people of integrity, and they became her role models.

Her first appointment was trial by fire. She was assigned to an urban church that was disintegrating. The building was in disrepair, and the congregation and community had been alienated. She has strong feelings about the need for greater accountability from those in responsible positions. Over some years, she was able to repair relationships and rebuild the congregation. While she takes pride in her accomplishments, her assignment was an overwhelming one for a young, inexperienced pastor.

Jodie has not experienced problems from being a female minister. She feels accepted and believes discrimination against women may have been stronger when women were newer to the ministry. She feels blessed to belong to a denomination so welcoming of women. Her challenges have come from being youthful; she feels she has to work extra hard to prove herself in a profession that has so many older members.

For Jodie, one of the greatest challenges the church faces is changing its personality to be more friendly and welcoming to youth and children. Another important need is a better understanding of the Latino culture and the development of more and better-equipped Latino ministers.

# “Heidi”



## Conversations Across the Church

### “Heidi”

**Heidi is married and in her 30s. She is originally from a small rural town in the U.S. and is currently a doctoral candidate at a major U.S. university. She grew up in a United Methodist Church, later joined Presbyterian and Baptist churches, and is now an active member of a United Methodist congregation in her community.**

**She always has looked for progressive, active churches and is now deeply involved in the peace center of her church, which actively works on social justice issues.**

**Heidi was very ill as a child, and when she pulled through that experience, she thought deeply and seriously about the purpose of her life. She concluded at a young age that we are all supposed to do the work of God. Religion and her church are her foundation, one of “the fundamental linchpins” of her life; they guide her and keep her centered.**

**She is deeply committed to making a difference in others’ lives, in her community and the world. Along with others in her church, she struggles with the social justice issues that surround all of us: war, conflict, immigration, inclusiveness and the fate of marginalized people.**

**She expresses severe disappointment in the church’s stance on homosexuality but admires the institutional church’s strong stand on war and other social justice issues.**

# “Carlos”

## Conversations Across the Church



### “Carlos”

**Carlos is from the Philippines. He is a physician who recently took an early retirement and is now engaged in private practice in the Philippines. He is deeply involved in his church activities. His mother was a staunch Catholic and influenced his father to join the Catholic church, but his grandparents were Methodist. He grew up attending Catholic as well as Methodist churches. He is a product of an evangelistic and discipleship effort of a number of Christians during his university years.**

**Carlos has been appointed to various positions in his United Methodist Church, such as chairman of the local church council. He also was a diaconal pastor before this ministry was abolished. He leads Bible studies and prayer meetings and evangelizes to the people while working in another company. Carlos was involved in founding the local United Methodist Church in his own city two decades ago.**

**He believes the church in the Philippines has become a very large bureaucracy, which hinders its growth.**

**Carlos is hoping to see some changes in terms of giving, not only to financial stewardship and to stewardship of faith, of the talents and time of the church members. He also hopes for the church to emphasize discipleship, train more people in ministries and go back to the basics.**

# “Jack”



## Conversations Across the Church

### “Jack”

**Jack is an attorney in a mid-sized U.S. city. He always has been a United Methodist. He and his parents were members of a small rural church where the church was the social center.**

**Jack graduated from a prestigious law school. At first he was vaguely interested in politics as a career, but he has remained a practicing attorney.**

**He and his wife are heavily involved in their church. He feels the world is not particularly easy to live in; most people have a tough time and the church is one of the few ways in which one can make sense of the world and life. He feels it is relatively easy to be a successful professional. It is much harder to figure out what really counts in life and what is really important, without the church as a basis and guide.**

**Jack and his wife teach discipleship classes together. Working together has enhanced their relationship.**

**Church has helped to give Jack a community and friendships. Involvement in his church makes him feel more relevant to the world.**

# “Ronald”

## Conversations Across the Church



### “Ronald”

Ronald is a young pastor, just out of seminary. He grew up in a Methodist home and started his career in the political arena but felt a strong calling to the ministry.

Ronald is passionate about learning and, as a youth, tried to learn as much as he could about the Scriptures. Growing up, he was mentored by his Sunday school teachers. He went through a questioning phase when he looked at other religions: Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. He came to a very conscious conclusion that his own view of the world was aligned with John Wesley’s teachings.

Though only recently out of seminary, Ronald has been appointed senior pastor of his church, a responsibility he takes very seriously. His gifts are a genuine interest in others and a passion for helping people.

Ronald has two major concerns: one is the possibility of burnout. As a pastor he works very long hours, and the job is extremely demanding. To stave off burnout, he is aware he needs to keep some time for himself. He stays in touch with friends outside the church and tries to take Fridays – he calls this his Sabbath – off. This is a challenge because he is always on call. One recent Friday when an older parishioner called his office and was told the pastor was observing Sabbath, the gentleman quipped, “I didn’t know we had a Jewish pastor!”

His second concern is his responsibility to support his family on a young pastor’s income. There are always temptations to pursue other lucrative professions, like so many of his friends and peers have done. For the foreseeable future, however, Ronald is dedicated to his chosen profession and always will be deeply committed to his faith.

# “Marco”



## Conversations Across the Church

### “Marco”

**Marco is a youth leader in a medium-sized, multicultural church in the U.S. Marco is originally from the Philippines where he observes young people are much more engaged and enthusiastic about their church. He agonizes over ways to get the youth in his community more interested and involved. To him, young people seem much more interested in being passively entertained, watching television or a football game.**

**Marco has visited a number of megachurches to try to understand why they succeed in attracting more young people. He feels they have found a way to be more relevant to young people with their use of state-of-the-art technology and their focus on lively music and youth activities.**

**He feels strongly that an essential ingredient for attracting young people is music that suits their tastes. Music touches the soul. While he loves traditional hymns, he believes today’s young people want much more upbeat music with the use of contemporary instruments. Current music will reach the hearts and souls of young people much faster.**

**Marco is working hard to find ways to introduce music and technology that will appeal to young people in his church.**

# “Iris”



## Conversations Across the Church

### “Iris”

**Iris is a young Swiss woman who recently received her degree of arts. She studied social sciences in Switzerland and abroad. After her return from abroad, she decided to become a regular member of The UMC in a congregation located in a small suburb of the large Swiss city where she lives.**

**Iris was baptized in the Reformed Church of Switzerland (*Schweizerische Reformierte Landeskirche*). When she was a child, her parents became members of The UMC. Since then, Iris has felt at home in The UMC, even after her lasting absence from her home.**

**Iris did some youth work in the past and now is engaged in a Latin-American work group, trying to establish a youth-exchange program and evaluating projects of financial support. She appreciates the involvement of different countries and cultures and likes to put her own daily life into perspective compared to the issues with which she deals in her voluntary work. It is this kind of voluntary work and personal commitment, as well as the openness in theology and atmosphere typical for The UMC, that she values highly.**

**Sometimes she feels the congregational work is a kind of obligation – a giving lot – but she gets a lot in return.**

# “George”

## Conversations Across the Church



### “George”

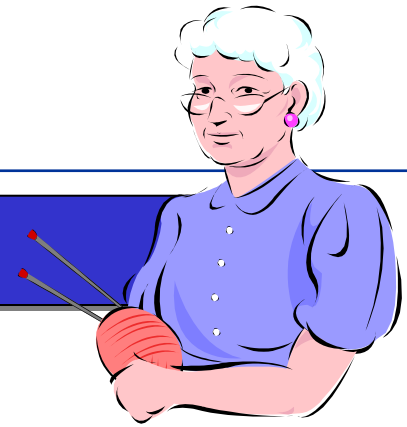
**George is a second-career pastor in a medium-sized U.S. city. He had a long career in industry, and now he feels tremendously blessed to be called to the ministry. He has several children and grandchildren.**

**Most fulfilling for him is the opportunity to transform the lives of those who already have accepted Christ as well as those who are experiencing Christ for the first time.**

**His frustrations mirror those of many other pastors: dealing with budgetary issues, not enough volunteers, not enough time. He particularly agonizes over the lack of commitment he sees in so many young people.**

**Drawing young people into the church is of special concern to him. He feels the United Methodist churches are old and established and expect newcomers to fit in with the establishment. Younger people are looking for something new and alive, where they can set the pace, rather than having to fit into something where they are out of their element.**

# “Emma”



## Conversations Across the Church

### “Emma”

**Emma is in her mid 80s and deeply involved in her church activities. She grew up in the Baptist church but switched to The United Methodist Church when she married**

**Her church in a major U.S. city had an aging population for a long time but has experienced a recent resurgence of new, younger members. This has given Emma great hope for its future, though she worries about the tendency of younger people to be less committed and always in a hurry.**

**Emma spent many years as a volunteer in her church taking care of a variety of necessary clerical activities. She now takes care of the visitor program.**

**Emma has spent a lot of time studying the Bible and has learned about United Methodist history, doctrine and values. She keep up with reports of what the conference is doing. She feels a part of the whole greater United Methodist system and finds this fulfilling.**

**Emma’s husband, though much less involved in the church, is very supportive of her activities, and she considers this a gift.**

Though the people of The United Methodist Church differ widely in their lifestyles and backgrounds, in all of them we observed a deep passion for their church.

## Conversations Across the Church

Joe, Ann, Josephine, Edward, Paula, Jodie, Ronald, Rolf, Carlos, Emma, George, Marco, Iris, Jack, Heidi—and many others

- A very diverse group
- Share some common traits:
  - *Deep commitment and passion for their church*
  - *Concern for its future*

## Conversations Across the Church

# Key Insights and Observations

*Summary highlights from our conversations*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Key Insights and Observations

**Interviews were conducted one on one and in depth. In-person interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Detailed notes were taken for the telephone interviews.**

**Responses have been analyzed in depth, and detailed findings are presented in the third section of this report.**

**This section provides a summary of key insights and observations.**

**While numbers have declined, passion for The United Methodist Church among its members remains strong.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **Pride and Passion**

**While United Methodist Church membership may be declining in numbers in the U.S., those who remain members are clearly passionately dedicated to their churches.**

**This holds true for pastors, leaders, members and even those who are not very active, around the world. Both older and younger members are dedicated to their church.**

**The church has an essential place in the lives of its members. Those with whom we had conversations display great pride in their affiliation with The United Methodist Church, for a variety of reasons.**

**For many, being United Methodist is an important part of their core identity.**

**Many are concerned about the future of the church. There is universal agreement that the church needs to focus on growth.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **Universal Concern about the Future**

**Along with the pride and passion comes a deep concern for the future of The United Methodist Church. People see numbers declining in their own and other churches, especially in the U.S. and Europe.**

**Many wonder if their church will survive. This is especially so for smaller churches that struggle to maintain their buildings and facilities.**

**Almost every member and leader expresses an urgent need for growing his or her church. While a few have found effective ways for accomplishing growth, many continue to founder and struggle with ways to do so.**

**Many see the nondenominational “megachurches” flourishing around them and wonder what they offer that Methodism does not.**

# The key to survival and growth is to attract young people.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Key Insights and Observations

#### The Urgent Need to Attract Youth

Most believe there is an urgent need to attract younger people. This includes a wide range of young people, from children to teenagers, young adults and young families.

The church in many countries is aging. On the one hand, older people are dedicated to their church and show great commitment. They also are more likely to support the church financially. On the other hand, as the church ages, it loses its members, and many worry that it could vanish.

Some churches have succeeded in attracting young people. However, the general feeling is The United Methodist Church has not changed with the times and does not cater to young people. In Africa, where the majority of church members are young, there is still a need to keep them engaged.

While most recognize the church must attract young people, there also is a clear recognition that younger people are less committed and less engaged than those who are older. This is frustrating to many.

Younger people are also more mobile, and this is another factor that keeps them from commitment.

Further, times have changed. While years ago, Sundays were focused on churchgoing, in today's world there are many competing activities on Sundays, especially for young families with children.

In some countries (Philippines, African countries) where young people form a large proportion of church membership, the challenge is not attracting them to the church but keeping them engaged.

**Many people have suggestions of ways to attract young people to the church but continue to be frustrated by lack of success.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **Thoughts on How to Attract Youth**

**People their own age are necessary to keep young people engaged. When young people see a sea of older people, they lose interest.**

**Younger pastors are also essential. Young people relate to young pastors and find it difficult to relate to older pastors who are more like their parents or grandparents. Members and leaders in the U.S., Europe and Africa feel the need for more young pastors.**

**Young people want to associate with their contemporaries. They lose interest if the other young people are not at their own age or stage of life.**

**Youth activities are necessary to keep young people engaged. Again, these must be geared to groups of similar ages.**

**Young people want activity; they don't enjoy just sitting and listening.**

**Many young people look for a progressive church and are attracted by the active stance of The United Methodist Church in social and political issues.**

**Young families are attracted to churches that cater to children; children's centers are essential, along with a "kid-friendly" atmosphere. Many churches seem staid and stuffy.**

**Young people enjoy mission work much more than volunteering for church positions.**

**Traditional music and worship styles do not appeal to many young people. Contemporary music and upbeat worship are more appealing.**

**While people believe they know what attracts young people, they continue to be frustrated because, for a variety of reasons, young people still are not joining and committing to the church.**

**Music and worship style are an important aspect of the character of the church. People have strong preferences.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **Music and Worship Styles**

**Differing views on music and worship styles are a source of tension within the church.**

**For longtime members of the church, traditional hymns and services are dear to their hearts. They are part of the character of the church, and longtime members identify with them.**

**Many recognize, however, these traditional services are “boring” for young people, who prefer upbeat contemporary music and more lively services.**

**Since many leaders are quite desperate to bring younger people into their churches, they are willing to change to more contemporary styles, but they meet with resistance from other older members.**

**This unwillingness to change is frustrating for many leaders who are faced with dwindling membership and who are aware that the “megachurches” and others around them are growing because they cater to younger tastes.**

**In addition to offering a variety of music styles, many larger churches can afford state-of-the-art technology, while smaller churches cannot. Many feel the church not kept pace with the rapid technological changes taking place outside the church.**

**Differing music and worship styles also divide cultural and ethnic groups.**

# Strong friendships are forged through church.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Key Insights and Observations

#### Social Relationships

**Church is the source of lasting and important friendships for many people. It is the core of social life for a large portion of members.**

**Many speak of the church as an extension of their family.**

**Church provides a deeper sense of community and of sharing not found in other places because of a common set of Christian values.**

**People are comfortable in their church environments, partly because they share a common set of values of The United Methodist Church.**

**Many who have relocated look first for a church to establish social connections.**

**The atmosphere of United Methodist churches is seen as open and welcoming, and people feel accepted.**

**Most enjoy being known and knowing others.**

**The pastor is the biggest source of inspiration for members and a critical element in the church.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **The Importance of Pastors**

**The pastor of a church is one of the most critical elements for members when they make decisions to join or stay with a church. They must be able to relate to the pastor.**

**Though people recognize intellectually that the body of the church is as important as the pastor, he or she continues to be very important in determining how much the member gets from the church experience. This is especially so in smaller churches.**

**When asked why people joined a church or why they like or dislike it, the pastor is frequently mentioned as the reason. The pastor is the face of the church.**

**Even longtime members will leave a church if they do not relate to the pastor or if they don't find the pastor inspiring.**

**The pastor's ability to preach and to reach people with his or her sermons is, of course, critical.**

**For many, the practice of changing pastors often is disturbing. Some pastors believe it takes up to four years to be accepted by a congregation.**

# Pastors and congregations sometimes do not match well.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Key Insights and Observations

#### Pastors and Congregations: the Match

Each congregation has its own character and their needs differ; some need nurturing, some more spiritual feeding; some are more intellectual. Matching the pastor to the needs of the congregation is critical.

Several members and leaders express frustration with the pastor assigned to their church for a variety of reasons.

#### For example:

- *Some members of small churches feel they are assigned pastors who are new, untrained or about to retire.*
- *A highly intellectual university community feels its pastor is inadequate for the job.*
- *A mid-sized church feels its pastor is not accessible and spends too much time on outside interests.*

Pastors too often have their own frustrations with their assignments.

#### For example:

- *African-American pastors assigned to all-White churches with aging populations who won't accept them*
- *Female pastors assigned to churches that won't accept them*
- *Young or inexperienced pastors given assignments that involve repairing relationships beyond their current capabilities*

Those who love and revere their pastors are in constant fear of losing them.

A common complaint among members and leaders is not having anyone to talk to about problems or needs.

**Pastors have a difficult job. Their idealism and dedication keep them on track.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **Pastor Issues**

**Pastors have many issues, the most important of which is lack of time. They are pulled in many different directions in a job that can be extremely demanding, and they don't always have enough time to complete these jobs to their satisfaction.**

**Pastors often have difficulty finding volunteer help. Commitment from members is hard to obtain.**

**Pastors are expected to attend all meetings and events; again, time becomes a precious commodity.**

**While most have strong theological training, many find that they are ill-equipped to deal with business issues; few have the business skills required and must lean heavily on member volunteers who have varying levels of skill in this area.**

**With the many demands on their time, many pastors are afraid of burnout. Some try to take time for themselves and their families, but this is hard.**

**Young pastors just out of seminary have special challenges. They must prove themselves to older populations. Some early assignments can be overwhelming, and young pastors often appreciate mentors.**

**Another challenge is resisting temptation to leave the church for more lucrative jobs outside.**

**Many say that the social agenda of The United Methodist Church is what they value most.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **The Social Agenda of The United Methodist Church**

**Many are attracted to The United Methodist Church because of its focus on societal issues and helping people.**

**Members recognize that, as Christians, it is their duty to help others.**

**Some want to help the poor in their neighborhoods. Others become involved in missions that are farther away and in other parts of the world. Still others want to address and affect broad social justice issues.**

**Whatever type of involvement they may choose is immensely fulfilling to them. However, most people want tangible feedback on the results of their involvement.**

**Open doors is a cherished value of The United Methodist Church.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **Inclusiveness of The United Methodist Church**

**An extremely important feature that attracts many to The United Methodist Church is the value it places on “open doors.” People identify with a church that is welcoming to all.**

**A significant aspect, often remarked upon, is the ability of anyone to take Holy Communion regardless of membership and denomination.**

**Disappointment is often expressed about what people perceive as shutting out homosexuals and those on the “fringes of society.”**

**People identify with their own local church.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **The Local Church and the Institutional Church**

**For most people, it is their local church that matters. They feel a sense of ownership for their church, and it is close to their hearts.**

**They do consider themselves United Methodists and value the identification. However, many choose their church based on its character and style and their level of comfort with the congregation.**

**Some, especially leaders, relate to the conference and want news of what's going on beyond the confines of their local church.**

# The institutional church is somewhat remote for most people.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Key Insights and Observations

#### Role of the Larger Church

The larger institutional church is somewhat remote for many. They have little contact with the larger church, unless they happen to be in leadership roles.

Some like knowing they are part of something larger and take pride in the accomplishments of the larger church, especially its focus on education and mission around the world.

The institutional church is seen as a source for resources and information to help in the workings of the local church.

On the negative side, it can sometimes be seen as an expensive bureaucracy.

Often, affiliation with the larger church can be beneficial. An example is when it was seen as a leader in hurricane relief. At other times, when there is negative news about the church, local churches attempt to distance themselves.

**People want to know how their money will be used and want to see tangible results.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **Giving to the Local Church and to the Larger Church**

**Most people are generous, recognizing that giving and helping are part of being Christian. Most are committed to giving to their local church above and beyond their pledge.**

**Requests for causes sponsored by the conference and the institutional church are met with less enthusiasm. These are remote and less close to people's hearts. People want to connect emotionally to the recipients of their gifts.**

**People want to see tangible results of their gifts. They want feedback on how their money was used.**

**When people give to their own church, closest to their hearts is giving to maintain and improve the church building and facilities. Next, they are eager to support missions supported by their local church, whether these are within their community or outside. They are able to get specific feedback on results accomplished, and this is gratifying.**

**People feel overwhelmed by the many requests for money, not just from the church but from other sources as well. They have to make choices, and they generally choose to give to those causes they understand and from which they get feedback. This is gratifying to them.**

**Requests from the institutional church (e.g. Special Sundays) meet with some resistance. These causes are remote and not well understood. For many, the connectional values of the church are not internalized, and giving to remote causes is not gratifying.**

**Small churches provide a level of closeness and intimacy but don't have the resources that larger churches can provide.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **Role for Small and Large Churches**

**Many prefer small churches because of the level of intimacy they afford. Fellowship is important to most, and small churches provide an opportunity to be known and to make friends. Small churches become an extension of the family and provide community.**

**On the other hand, small churches are handicapped with fewer resources. They struggle harder to maintain their facilities and are generally less attractive because they lack the resources to attract new members.**

**Larger churches can provide facilities for children and youth and are attractive for this reason. They also can keep up with technology and provide an enhanced experience.**

**When churches partner with one another, all benefit.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **Partnering with Other Churches**

**Several pastors and leaders report on the positive aspects of partnering with other churches.**

**Some churches lease their facilities to other congregations. This helps financially, though occasional problems may occur if the two congregations clash culturally.**

**Others report small churches pairing with larger churches and sharing resources, another model beneficial to the smaller churches that struggle to maintain themselves.**

**The diversity of The United Methodist Church is one of its important features and is highly valued.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Key Insights and Observations**

#### **Diversity and the Church**

**People value the great diversity of The United Methodist Church, racial and cultural. This goes hand in hand with its policy of inclusiveness and open doors.**

**Also highly valued is its open attitude toward women in leadership roles.**

**Many churches continue to remain single race because of cultural preferences – music and worship styles.**

**Those that are multicultural are lively and loved for their diversity.**

**As neighborhoods rapidly change, more churches are likely to become mixed. This is sometimes welcomed and sometimes not.**

# Many do not understand the doctrine and deeper values of The United Methodist Church.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Key Insights and Observations

#### Understanding of Church Doctrine and Values

For many members, being United Methodist is part of their identity.

For many, however, being United Methodist means they were born into United Methodist families or attend a United Methodist Church. They have a comfort level with the atmosphere and character of their church.

It does not necessarily mean they have internalized the values espoused by The United Methodist Church. Many are happy to be considered Methodist because it means a middle-of-the-road philosophy for them rather than a conservative or liberal one.

Many are only vaguely aware of the doctrine and connectional values of the church, and many pastors say they do not stress these values to members.

Those who do understand the societal agenda and connectional values of the church are greatly attracted to them, have deep convictions about them and want to live by these principles. They take great pride in being United Methodist. This is true of people in the U.S. as well as other countries.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Key Insights and Observations

#### Looking to the Future

**There is great hope and optimism for the future of The United Methodist Church among members, leaders and pastors. Most recognize, however, that change is necessary. There is a general feeling that times have changed and will continue to change rapidly, but the church has not changed correspondingly.**

**Many different opinions exist about the future direction of these changes, but the consensus is the church will have to find a way to maintain its values but be more accommodating to new generations rather than expecting them to fit into the old model.**

**An obstacle to progress is resistance to change among those who have been members for a long time and are comfortable with the way things are.**

# Conversations Across the Church

## Key Insights and Observations

### Reasons for Attraction and Commitment to the Church

**Most people we talked with are deeply committed to their church. Reasons differ.**

**“Functional” Commitment and Attraction:**

- People are committed to their church for “functional,” practical reasons: it is convenient; they grew up United Methodists and don’t know anything else; the other members are like them in some way.

**Attraction and Commitment to the Values of The United Methodist Church:**

- Many have made a conscious decision to commit to The United Methodist Church because they have deeper feelings for its values.

**Personal Reasons for Attraction and Commitment:**

- Many choose their church because they are attracted to the particular pastor or other people in their church.

## Conversations Across the Church

# Conversations

*Details from our Conversations  
with the  
People of The United Methodist Church*

**This section of the report provides detailed analysis of conversations, structured by broad “frames” and specific “themes.”**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Structure of the Analysis – Frames and Themes**

#### **Frames:**

- Below-the-surface patterns in the mind that structure and guide thought, experience and expression
- Core concepts—broad, universal
- Fundamental categories of thought and experience
- Provide the individual’s perspective on an issue

#### **Themes:**

- Thematic content within the frames, specifically related to the role of The United Methodist Church in the lives of respondents

**Frames and themes are supported by quotes from the interviews in the following analysis.**

## **Conversations Across the Church**

### **Structure of the Analysis – Frames and Themes**

**The analysis is presented as follows:**

- Summary overview of each Frame and Themes within the Frame
- The Frame: Underlying core concept
- Theme: Summary of theme expressed
- Elaboration of theme
- Exemplary quotes

## Conversations Across the Church

### Key Frames

**Personal Identity**

**Connection**

**Balance**

**Resources**

**System**

**Future**

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Personal Identity

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Personal Identity Overview

#### United Methodism as an integral part of one's identity

- For many people, being United Methodist is part of their identity. They may have grown up in a United Methodist family or switched because of other reasons, but they **identify strongly with the denomination.**

#### Being United Methodist because of belief in its values

- For many, the main reason they belong to the church is they believe in its values. These people have chosen The United Methodist Church over others or have chosen to stay with it because they **understand and believe in the work and values of United Methodism.**

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Personal Identity Overview (Continued)

#### Practical reasons for choosing to be United Methodist

- A number of people have joined their United Methodist church because it is convenient, because they like its worship style, because family members lean toward Methodism and for a variety of other practical reasons. For these people, **being Christian is very important; being United Methodist is much less so.**

#### Taking pride in the accomplishments of The United Methodist Church

- People take pride in the involvement of The United Methodist Church in issues of social justice and helping. Some feel The United Methodist Church **does not get enough credit for its accomplishments.** When bad publicity arises, some want to distance themselves from the denomination.

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Personal Identity: Identifying with the Church

*Theme: I am United Methodist. The church is my family.*

For many people, being United Methodist is part of their identity. They may have grown up in a United Methodist family or switched because of other reasons, but they identify strongly with the denomination.

*“Even if I were to move someplace else I would still find a Methodist Church because **that is what I grew up in**. I think you make friends wherever you go, but when you have been in a place 40 years, you have a lot of ties.” (Member)*

*“To me it’s a big deal, **but that’s also my upbringing**. I also realize God is everywhere. It doesn’t matter what I call myself or whatever self-proclaimed name. It’s whether we can get along as human beings together. So denomination is a big deal, but at the end of the day, I don’t think God is saying Methodists are better than Baptists. That really doesn’t matter.” (Pastor)*

*“I think it’s superior. **I just love it**. I have had such a good experience in the Methodist Church: the people, the ministers, the programs in the church. It’s just been rewarding from day one.” (Member)*

*“It’s important to me **because of my history with it**. It’s just like anything else. Like the team you root for growing up. It’s part of your identity in that way.” (Member) **I have my identity as a Methodist**, I am born into it, have served it as a minister for nearly 30 years and feel at home in its theology, and I do not know what denomination I would be a member of if The UMC stopped to exist.” (Member, Norway)*

*“**The UMC is my home**. I feel good to be among friends who are living their faith together, but this is also a place of respect for similar but different values, whereas we are all in common regarding the meaning or value of helping and supporting others. I am very proud to be part of this worldwide church. This is a sharp-witted church, which is not undergoing a revolution. Belonging to The UMC is an active choice; belonging to the Roman Catholic Church is a passive act by birth.” (Lay leader, Switzerland)*

*“**I am very proud to be Methodist**, I will remain it up to my death. Everywhere I go I claim it. The UMC learnt me to be a fair, honest and loving person. I learnt it in my church, and everywhere I have benefit from this love of God thought others. During my functions in the government I made everything possible not to muck up my church which enjoyed a very good reputation. The Church of the honest and organized men.” (Member, Democratic Republic of Congo)*

## Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: Personal Identity: Commitment to Church Values**

**Theme: *I believe in and am committed to the values of The United Methodist Church.***

**For many, the main reason they belong to the church is they believe in its values. These people have chosen The United Methodist Church over others or have chosen to stay with it because they understand and believe in the work and values of United Methodism.**

*"I think the denomination is more important to our church than most other churches I have been at. **We are very connectional**, but I have been at many churches that don't care what they are doing in other places in the country. And yet, those churches still paid apportionments. The fact that they pay apportionments proves there is something there even if it's just a duty and obligation. Part of it is that here we have mission-mindedness. We do more for others across the world—special offerings and crisis need. We offer more than other churches."* (Lay leader)

*"Number one **it's openness and it's acceptance of all kinds of people**. It's lack of a rigid position on creed or theology. It's not rigid. It's open to discussion any time. There's a lot to like about it. I like that we have pretty well-educated ministers. I'm sure these little churches that hire a guy because he studied the Bible get along all right, but I certainly do like the intelligence of the Methodist Church."* (Member)

*"I like the theology of the church. The denomination is very important to me. It's a big part of my life. I really like how The UMC helps people. How they reach out a helping hand to people who really needs it. **It's important to me to be a member in a church that cares about others.**"* (Member, Norway)

*"John Wesley is the reason I am a Methodist. **It is about the link between personal faith and social engagement I like most**. I think we have to stress aspects of the faith more intensively and consequently. This has not been the case in the past. The conservative powers within the Methodist Church have decreased. The more liberal elements emphasize the social aspects, with less obligation. Today these elements are more represented in the churches' leadership. The personal commitment has to be demanded. What is may be inconvenient, but otherwise we will not succeed."* (Member, Germany)

*"I like the worldwide connections and relations that are growing during the years of work. Within The UMC there is a very clear belief and faith – **also the fact that one is accepting others the way they are. It is not a closed way of thinking**. I have known this church since I was a child, and I like to be part of this community . This is binding, belonging and being part."* (Member, Switzerland)

*"The UMC is my 'home church.' **John Wesley's word "we think but we also let others think" has impressed me and was a big issue to me**. I did not know much about the Bible and Christianity, but I felt free to ask my questions, and no one denounced me."* (Pastor, Russia)

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Personal Identity : Practical Reasons for Membership

*Theme: I am a Christian first, and I happen to be a member of a United Methodist Church.*

**A number of people have joined their United Methodist Church because it is convenient, because they like its worship style, because family members lean toward Methodism and for a variety of other practical reasons. For these people, being Christian is very important; being United Methodist is much less so.**

*“I was churched in the Presbyterian Church in Missouri, not overly connected. I was, I guess, part of that 80 percent that goes every Sunday because we are supposed to but have since gone through a variety of things where I have really grown in my understanding of God’s love. So I became a Methodist because my wife was. **I am much more focused on being a Christian who is a currently a Methodist.**” (Member)*

*“I think I am a Christian, and that is more important than I am a Methodist. But if there is a discussion about a particular denomination, as sometimes people may talk about a particular denomination in a negative way and that gives all of Christianity a negative view, then **I would encourage them to try our denomination** but even another church within a denomination because they are different. You can go to different Methodist churches and almost get a different message. I mean it’s just so broad.” (Member)*

*“I’m not sure. **I don’t think it matters.** I know some of the things we do are different, but I don’t think it’s too different. We all still read from the same Bible.” (Member)*

*“To me, we are called to the body of Christ. **We are not called to be Methodists or Presbyterians.** So that’s really where I am much more focused. What I like about Methodism is its willingness to be open to how we read the word, to be loving to everybody, not to be finite in rules and regulations that I think go beyond the Scriptures and what God calls us to do. That’s what I like about it.” (Lay leader)*

*“I am **committed to the broader concept of church.** It grounds me. Being Methodist is less important. I am committed to my own church because it happens to be active in those things in which I believe – the social justice issues that face our world every day.” (Member)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Personal Identity: Church Accomplishments

*Theme: I am proud of The United Methodist Church's focus and accomplishments. I wish more people knew about them.*

People take pride in the involvement of The United Methodist Church in issues of social justice and helping. Some feel The United Methodist Church does not get enough credit for its accomplishments. On the other hand, when bad publicity arises, some want to distance themselves from the denomination.

*"I would love for us to be better at patting ourselves on the back more publicly. I think the Methodist Church is a good church, and we are doing a lot in the world. Oftentimes when there is world crisis, the Catholic Church will get the kudos for the work they've done. That just bites my butt. It's like what is this? I'm not even saying just the Catholics. There are many churches working out there, but **I don't see the press even recognizing the work that's being done by The UMC.**" (Member)*

*"We do so many good things, but we **never get any publicity.** You hear about the Red Cross and the other churches, but even though our church is there and we stay the course, you seldom hear anything about The United Methodist Church." (Lay leader)*

*"**Sometimes it's a burden,** especially in the way the church is treating the issue of homosexuality. I and, I think, the church in general remain very committed to the denomination. I think the connection is essential to who we are. We need to remain good. So we have a strong commitment to apportionment, Rainbow Covenant and giving. The reconciling movement is very important to our congregation." (Pastor)*

*"Like all major denominations, The United Methodist Church at large is **struggling a little bit to define who they are.** I think a lot of people tend to see it almost as a political thing. It's almost as if our politics have started defining our theology. I think The United Methodist Church in general is seen as fairly liberal, at least up until recently." (Pastor)*

*"I think people in the local church, particularly in the South and particularly in Atlanta and particularly in East Cobb where I live which is an extremely conservative population, **is a little reluctant to identify strongly.** I don't even see that connection within the conference. I think a lot of churches, and ours is the same way." (Pastor)*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Connection

“Connection” is an important core concept in this study. United Methodists feel connected to their congregations and their church. They seek connections with the church, each other, their pastors and the world. They feel the need for better connections with youth.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Connection Overview

#### Strong connections and involvement in church

- For most of those with whom we had conversations, the church is extremely important. They are heavily involved in their church and its activities. Many volunteer for positions in administering the church. Many also become involved in mission work sponsored by their church.

#### People are connected with one another in congregations.

- Church is where people feel comfortable. It’s like an extension of family. People connect with other people and like to be known. People also are most comfortable when they are in tune with the beliefs, style and actions of the church and congregation. The development of friendships and social relationships is a very important reason for being a member of a church.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Connection Overview (cont'd)

#### Spiritual connections

- People have deep needs for spiritual connections. Through the church they find this spiritual feeding, especially when they connect with others. The church provides a sense of belonging that facilitates spiritual connections.

#### Importance of connecting with young people

- Finding ways to connect with and be more relevant to young people is of concern to everybody. The church is aging and decreasing in size. Growing the church is a universal issue.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Connection Overview (cont'd)

#### Young people want to be around their peers.

- Young people are attracted to a church when they see other people of their own age. Most churches are aging, and when confronted with a large number of older people, young people do not connect. This is complicated further by the fact that younger people really want to connect with their peers, not with those even slightly younger or older than they are.

#### Young people want to be active.

- It's universally agreed that to connect with youth, they must have activity. Young people don't want to come to church simply to listen. Given projects that engage them, they will pitch in, take responsibility and be committed to the project. It is important to find a balance, however, and ensure the youth activities are spiritually uplifting, learning experiences and not merely entertainment.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Connection Overview (cont'd)

#### Young people connect better with contemporary music and lively worship styles.

- Most believe younger people are not attracted to traditional music and worship styles. They are engaged when music is contemporary, in keeping with their own tastes and when the service is upbeat.

#### Young people connect with younger pastors.

- Many people discuss the importance of developing young pastors. Young people relate better to young pastors. The majority of pastors tend to be somewhat older and have less success relating to young people. Pastors need to work hard to stay in touch with young people.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Connection Overview (cont'd)

#### Young people are engaged in church in some countries.

- In the Philippines and in African countries, young people make up a large portion of the congregations and are engaged in their church activities. These churches work to maintain their youth bases. In Africa the Methodist schools and evangelism keep interest in the church alive among youth.

#### Lack of commitment among young people

- Many people feel young people have short attention spans and do not stay committed for long. This is true, not just for teenagers and young adults, but, some say, baby boomers as well. Many remark that young people will become engaged in mission work because it is fulfilling, exciting and has a definite end. Younger people seldom volunteer for long-term church administration jobs.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Connection Overview (cont'd)

#### The importance of being welcoming

- People agree churches must always be welcoming. Most people believe they are. Some feel resistance to change can result in a church not being seen as welcoming. Some well-established churches have members who are nice to each other but not to outsiders.

#### People connect with the pastor of the church.

- The pastor is the face of the church. Many people are attracted to the church because of the pastor. Some people are disappointed in the pastors chosen for their churches and express frustration.

#### Not connecting: cultures can sometimes clash.

- There are many multicultural congregations, and the members love this diversity. However, occasionally cultures clash, and the needs of one culture do not mesh well with another.

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Connection: Strong Connections and Involvement in Church

*Theme: I am very active in my church. It plays a huge role in my life and is very important to me.*

For most of those with whom we had conversations, the church is extremely important. They are enthusiastically involved in their church and its activities. Many volunteer for positions in administering the church. Many also become involved in mission work sponsored by their church.

*"I think I've made it clear **I am an enthusiastic Methodist** and have been all my adult life and involved in the church. As I have gotten older, I have been more enthusiastic about UMCOR and the effort to really help people in crisis." (Member)*

*"My mother, father and grandmother are all on the finance committee, and my father is the lay leader of the church. My grandmother and my father are both in the choir. My mom, she's the activities person. I don't know how to say it. Most of the activities that go on, **she is involved in a big part of it.**" (Member)*

*"I just came from vacation Bible school. We are doing that this week. **I've done about everything.** I've been a Sunday school teacher. I've been the chairman of the program council. I've been on the education committee for many years." (Member)*

*"I'm a school teacher, and in the summers I get to spend a lot more time helping the church. We are in a transitional time. Our associate pastor is leaving to go to a new church, and he really was our jack-of-all-trades prior to that. **But most of my friends now are within that church.** Most of the recreational things I do are with members of that church, whether it's softball, volleyball or golf." (Member)*

*"I **have been elected to many positions.** I've been a board of trustees chairman, a church council chairperson, and lately I'm a lay leader in the church of Makati. In my district annual conference, I'm a member of various committees and organizations, just the few important ones." (Leader, Philippines)*

*"It **plays a huge role in my life.** I am a committee member. I am, I guess, responsible for the nominating committee and other areas. I wear lots of hats as one does in a small church. Well Spring was a plant church by the North Texas Conference three years ago." (Leader)*

*"I am **involved in just about everything.** I have been chair of every committee possible in my years of membership. I teach a Sunday school class at the church. I do readings every couple a months in the service. I volunteer in rummage sales and fund-raisers also. I have been to the committee meetings in the past. I try not to be too much involved in leadership at my church because I don't want to make it seem like I'm taking over the church." (Leader)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Connection: Connecting with Others

*Theme: I am very comfortable in my church. It feels like part of my home and family.*

**Church is where people feel comfortable. It's like an extension of family. People connect with other people and like to be known. People are also most comfortable when they are in tune with the beliefs, style and actions of the church. Friendships and social relationships are an important reason for being a member of a church.**

*"It has **become my community**. The thing that stops me from finding a different community is there is a motto on our reader board that made me stay with the church when I was doubtful about returning. It says it all: "open hearts, open minds, open doors." I may have used the word 'inclusive' earlier, and that makes me the most proud to be part of the Methodist Church." (Member)*

*"The church does a lot of good things that politically I agree with and value. Disaster relief, education and the colleges, and all those things. The UMC does a lot of those things too. **Since I grew up with it—I feel like with a family that grew up Catholic, a lot of the rituals are very similar**. The language is very easy to get to. Nothing really felt that unusual as opposed to going to the Unitarian Church. Having grown up Methodist, I don't think I could do it." (Member)*

*"I think one of the reasons **is I feel like home there**. There aren't many members my age, but I feel we have many possibilities to build a rich and growing church. Our church is in the middle of the centre, and there is much we can do for the people in the neighbourhood. When I think of all the possibilities we have, I really like to go to my church, and I want to do something." (Member, Norway)*

*"Our very closest friends in the city are the ones we met at church. If I were to think of the 30 best friends I have in the country, half of them go to my church. It seems weird, but it's just the case. It's one that is welcoming of all people, specifically around issues of sexual orientation. That has made a huge difference in being able to share in the stories of people who have felt, in their own way, persecuted. **Them feeling welcomed and being a part of that has been a really big thing for me.**" (Member)*

*"I like many things with The UMC. The UMC is not so big in Norway, but when we have youth camps or other youth arrangement, we meet a lot of people from the whole country. That means I have friends many places in Norway. I've also been to arrangements outside Norway and met a lot of nice people. **I like that The UMC is a worldwide church, and you feel welcome wherever you go.**" (Member, Norway)*

*"I think to me, and this is probably not a good answer, but **I have a lot of friends there**. After you go there 40 years even though you've moved out of the area, you still have a lot of friends there. It's the renewing of friendships." (Member)*

*"I think **just a sense of community and a sense of the connections I have made**. This is probably the fourth different church I've been involved with in my life in terms of just moving around and relocating. The thing I like about them is the sense of community and the sense that I got of developing relationships with people who are also kind of the same mindset in terms of following Christ. It's just been a nice way that without the church I probably wouldn't meet. It's been a real blessing for me." (Member)*

*"I feel I could come up to anybody in our church and approach them on a first-name basis. They would not only know who I was but, they would feel comfortable with me. That's the connection I was looking for, I guess," (Member)*

*"What attracts me most is the Sunday morning worship, the collegial fellowship with the pastor and some of the other lay persons." (Pastor, Norway)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Connection: Spiritual Connections

*Theme: I find spiritual connections through my fellowship with others.*

People have deep needs for spiritual connections. Through the church they find this spiritual feeding, especially when they connect with others. The church provides a sense of belonging that facilitates spiritual connections. Leaders stress the need to focus on the Bible and on the understanding of the values of The United Methodist Church

*"I think people are longing to transform their lives and to find something that is missing, and we all want to please something. We all want to be part of something. We all want to feel as though there is something more than getting in a car and getting up every morning, and **I think church is a place where people can find and fill that need** and then find all the details about what it is that goes on."* (Lay leader)

*"I have seen, I can think of one man in particular who will never leave the prison walls. He murdered, several people. But this particular man was extremely leery of us and would have no part of it and kept sitting back. But over the process of a day and a half of seeing a chain of prayers by people who were praying for him, not because they had to, because they chose to, seeing a guy who hadn't eaten a home-cooked meal and to be incarcerated 12 years earlier, lifting up his plate of home-cooked meal to look at a place mat made by a 3-year-old and crying, **that's how God works.**"* (Lay leader)

*"Every team that plays us in softball knows we are going to force them to smile and at the end of the game we are going to invite them to come pray with us. We don't care who they are or where they have been. We invite everyone to come and join us. We think that is an important part of the ministry we offer. Same thing with golf. **How powerful is it to see a group of men gather together to pray before they tee off?** How many other people does that impact? Every time we gather, whether we are going to baseball game, and I just think what Methodism promotes in its nature."* (Lay leader)

*"Relevance in daily lives. Need of members. How their spiritual needs are being met. **They are looking for a strong spiritual connection.** There must be a sense that what is being done is helpful and that they have a sense of belonging and connectedness. They would like to make a difference in the world and on social issues."* (Pastor)

*"There needs to be less focus on committee meetings and more focus on ministry development. **Greater return to Scripture** as the authority and the authoritative method of governing the church."* (Pastor)

*"Definitely being a Methodist is having and establishing the Wesleyan way of being bold enough to spread the gospel. And the spiritual aspect they also have, the social concern, **not only the fundamentals of the Bible, but the spiritual aspect of knowing God.**"* (Member)

*"I do think Christian education and **the whole area of education is something we really need to be focusing on** and how to make that relevant to families, young children and alternative-type families. Especially here in the city, that is a really big issue."* (Pastor)

*"If the leadership in the local church **does not make enough or promote connectionalism, then I think it's almost impossible to feel that.** I think the second reason is, like all major denominations, The United Methodist Church at large is struggling a little bit to define who they are. I think a lot of people tend to see it almost as a political thing."* (Leader)

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Connection: Growing the church

*Theme: It is very important to try to bring in new members to our church, especially the young.*

**Finding ways to connect with and be more relevant to young people is of concern to everybody. The church is aging and decreasing in size. Growing the church is a universal issue.**

*“The only thing I wish there was something we could do more about would be **attracting newer members**. I just think eventually there are people who are taking a lot of responsibilities as lay persons within in the church that are eventually not going to be able to do the things they volunteered for, for the past 30 years. I think somebody needs to be there to step up.” (Member)*

*“We **don’t have any young**. Every year we have two or three interns, I guess you call them that are in the seminary that work in the church, and so they are assigned or they come. I’m not sure how that works, and they are delightful to have, and we really enjoy them, and the one that came last year joined the church. They aren’t normally members, but she had such a good experience that she joined, and we are crazy about her but we don’t have any young people.” (Lay Leader)*

*“Young people are not attracted to our church. I think it’s hard to find reasons, but we struggle to find activities young people like, and we also struggle to find people who want to help building up activities for youth and other young people. When you feel **almost alone as a young person in a church**, it’s easy to find other places with many young people.” (Member)*

*“In my congregation we are offering very attractive activities. Also, the fact that the services are held with 2 pastors gives a new and different way to conduct services (preaching in dialog for example) and nice music. **The problem is activities for the age group between 20 and 35 are missing. There is nothing offered for this group**, and nobody is determining whether there are even needs and wants for this group. For youth below 20, many activities are offered.” (Swiss member)*

*“There are many things I like to see change. **I really want to see many children and young people in my church**. See that people really want to go there, and feel that my church makes differences for many people. No, young people are not attracted to the church. The reason is our culture in worship and fellowship is a middle age, grown-up culture. The present attitude in the church is we do not have capacity to engage in changing culture and be a church for young people.” (Norway member)*

*“We have youth in several of our churches not in all....When there is intentional ministry directed toward youth, youth will respond. **No youth will come automatically** to church.” (Russian Bishop)*

*“**How to get in touch with the youth and how to integrate them is a challenge**. We are discussing special youth services as an thinkable approach at the annual conference....We have a good mixture of ages in our congregation with a very good mutual acceptance, which I like very much....Many older people passing away but the young people make up for that.” (German lay leader)*

## Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: Connection: Young people want their peers.**

*Theme: Young people want to connect with other young people.*

Young people are attracted to a church when they see other people of their own age. Most churches are aging, and when confronted with a large number of older people, young people do not connect. This is complicated further by the fact that younger people really want to connect with their peers, not with those even slightly younger or older than they are.

*“We just have a new youth minister. She just started in May, and I’m not sure it’s very fair to judge that quite yet. I think, too, we **can’t lump junior and senior high together**. They have to be separated because the senior high sees the junior high as immature and the junior high kids are intimidated by the senior high kids. I’m not sure they are separating the two groups because my junior high girl does not like to go to Sunday night activities either but she goes to Wednesday night and she goes to Sunday school.” (Lay leader)*

*“There just **doesn’t seem to be what those kids need at our church**. And then even singles. I was talking with a lady who is in her late 20s or early 30s and single, and there is nothing for her. There is a single’s ministry, but it is very young, and I think it’s very small, and she doesn’t feel like she fits in and that type of thing. She doesn’t have any children and has never been married. Someone who has never been married has different experiences than someone who is a divorced person and maybe has children. They all have different needs.” (Pastor)*

*“**Other young people, for one**. I don’t have the money to spend on things like the computerized screens and things like that. Due to a variety of music, I think it would be really nice to have a praise band. I think that would do good to attract. I did get one in to Chicago Lawn in May. They really enjoyed it.” (Pastor)*

*“We **attract young people because we already have some young people**. A lot of churches have no young people and can’t attract young people. You cannot have young people join if you don’t have young people. You can’t start a youth group if you have only 70-year-olds. You can’t have a children’s ministry if everyone is over 70.” (Pastor)*

*“Our female pastor is very engaged in the work with the youth. And the youth in our congregation give their full commitment. They invite friends and bring them along. **In a place where there a youth, other peers feel attracted. They take a look and join.**” (Member, Germany)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Connection: Young People and Activity

*Theme: Young people want activity.*

It's universally agreed that to connect with youth, they must have activity. Young people don't want to come to church simply to listen. Given projects that engage them, they will pitch in, take responsibility and be committed to the project. It is important to find a balance, however, and ensure the youth activities that may be created are spiritually uplifting, learning experiences and not merely entertainment.

*"Well I think **young people want to have something to do**. Activities, and we need to do a better job, but I know a lot of larger churches in town entertain. They may have a coffeehouse or something. I've heard older people, not elderly but my age, 50s, 40s say they are bringing them in, they entertain them but they are not doing anything to move them in their spiritual journey to get them to serve, so yes, they are in and they are being active, but they are not serving." (Member)*

*"The college youth in their early 20s really want to do things to try to change. They don't want to just throw money. **They want to be involved**, so I think we need to be sure we continue to offer opportunities for them." (Lay leader)*

*"Two or three weeks ago our service was a U2 Eucharist. We did the entire service as U2 songs. It was a packed house. It was just amazing. We took an offering for Bread for the Poor. A whole service about doing something about worldwide poverty. It was amazing. Those are the kinds of things—you can go to Catholic mass every single week for your whole life and never be reached that way. It is just a no-brainer to me. **I am drawn to something that is going to reach me intellectually and on issues I care about**. It was a really great day." (Young member)*

*"We did a **homeless dinner that has been going on for 10 years** at one of my previous churches. Every week the homeless would come and have food. It was called Dig Me Diner. They were served, and it was treated like a restaurant. That was a big deal in my life to support that." (Young member)*

*"For a short while they are interested. **But I don't think the church can give them all the 'entertainment' youth are used to everywhere today**. And we are not clear enough on what we have to offer that is different from what other activities have. So we try to give them a great activity, but we don't do it as well as sports, clubs and so do. And we forget to focus of the importance of our faith." (Member, Norway)*

*"**Things for young people to do....and do together**. What I have been trying to do lately is make sure our young people went to camp together. So they have that experience together so the church is not just (sigh). I try to get them involved in worship. I try to let them either be a liturgist or try to get them involved in worship. I know when I was that age being a choir member kept me in church. I try to be interesting when I speak. I try to be relevant." (Pastor)*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Connection: Youth and Worship Style

*Theme: Young people want lively, active music and worship.*

**Most believe younger people are not attracted to traditional music and worship styles. They are engaged when music is contemporary, in keeping with their own tastes, and when the service is upbeat. They respond to technology.**

*“Most of the old people have a tendency to be conservative. They try to maintain the old tradition. We had done studies, and we are only losing young people because most of the young people and even **young adults nowadays prefer a livelier worship** that is not restricted.” (Lay leader, Philippines)*

*“We do a lot of alternative kinds of worship things. **We have a great group of musicians there in the church.** So that combination of not just organ music and—I think the fact that I am a woman makes a difference to a lot of people and the fact that we are welcoming. We are doing stuff like theatre and concerts.” (Member)*

*“I also like the freedom churches have. **My pastor, growing up, was a musician and a playwright. His wife was a play director. We often had contemporary music in worship.** We had plays they had written that we performed in worship. This is in a small town in Kansas. You had the entire worship service be a play about the homeless. People loved it. It wasn’t the kind of thing you wouldn’t expect to see. So I really appreciated that. Then coming here, the fact that each church was kind of free to do those things and play off the strengths of the staff and the people in the congregation, I really liked that too.” (Young member)*

*“We need to incorporate different language. **The youth are so sound-bite driven....if you use 20 words rather than 10, you have lost them.** They want to relate with the church through new technology. Those churches that don’t use technology are falling way behind.” (Pastor)*

*“The young people these days **want a beat. They want something exciting and uplifting.** They want instruments and want to sing and be engaged. The traditional Methodist hymns are beautiful, but at some point we are going to have to let go. We have to accept some changes. Maybe we don’t have to change everything, but we do have to become more relevant to people especially the young. And what’s the harm in a beat anyway?” (Leader)*

*“They **had a praise and worship band,** and it was a very contemporary Lutheran church, so I think that type of formality is just different for them. I think they see it as a little stuffy. People are just kind of going to church as a duty and going through the motions and that type of thing. Again, some people like those rituals. There are some rituals I do like but also, for instance, the other reason I wanted my daughter to go to the 11:00 service was to hear some of those hymns you just don’t hear in contemporary music and some of the other rituals.” (Member)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Connection: Youth and Pastors

*Theme: Young people connect with young pastors.*

Many people discuss the importance of developing young pastors. Young people relate better to young pastors. The majority of pastors tend to be somewhat older and have less success relating to young people. Pastors need to work hard to stay in touch with young people.

*"We had a great pastor before, and our new pastor has been there two years. **He's very engaging and also young.** I think our previous pastor when he left was 32 or 33. Pastor Trey, I think, just turned 30. So that is certainly in line with the neighborhood and the age of people living there. For one thing, it's a novelty. They think it's pretty unusual. They think he's too young to be a pastor. He's brilliant and a great speaker. Great singer. All the kind of cult and personality that can happen around a pastor. I think that's a part of it." (Young member)*

*"Young people come to our churches and enjoy the worship and understand what is all about, so they say. But on the other hand they are **not very interested to get in contact with an older pastor.**" (Lay leader)*

*"The pastor has been really good at using them for calling or e-mailing newcomers and really following up with people. In the past, we would get five new people each week who may come or go. They are **more likely to stay now because they get followed up with.**" (Leader)*

*"We **have not enough young pastors.** I'm over 60. If we had more young pastors, more young people would come to the church. .... is a young pastor, and many young people are coming to his worship." (Superintendent, Russia)*

*"We are missing young pastors. Younger people are coming to our church, **but not returning because they do not find a pastor who really understand their problems and issues.**" ( Pastor, Russia)*

*"We should have services exclusively for young attendants with less liturgical content. Such a kind of service should be held by a **younger pastor who is able to empathize with the younger people's needs.**" (Member, Russia)*

*"We want the adults to trust us and to enjoy freedom in our activities; also **we need young Bible teacher, who can better understand our needs and ideas** and be closer to us so we can collaborate better with the elders." ( Young member, Democratic Republic of Congo)*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Connection: Youth in Other Countries

*Theme: In some countries, youth are very engaged in their church.*

**In the Philippines and in African countries, young people make up a large portion of the congregations and are engaged in their church activities. These churches work to maintain their youth bases. In Africa the Methodist schools and evangelism keep interest in the church alive among youth.**

*"Unlike in the U.S. **young people here are very active.** They're active both in the church and in the district. They go out and help in mission work. They do jail ministry and evangelization in the park. We train them to be leaders We never have problems of who would take over. Our young people from childhood they grew up joining the activities in the church." (Member, Philippines)*

*"We are made up of 60 percent youth for 10 percent men and 30 percent women. Therefore, is composed the church by the youth, and their interests are always growing. **Our responsibilities are to manage this; otherwise, we will lose the youth.**" (Bishop, Democratic Republic of Congo)*

*"**The youth are interested, but it misunderstood by adults, and in those circumstances, the reactions become uncontrolled.** Sometimes they are in disagreement with the preacher, and they feel put down. They think the elders don't want to let them express themselves. I think it is necessary to love the children and the young people just as they are and to try to fit to their physical and mental evolutions, to promote their ideas, to orientate them and to give them the possibility of decision making." (Member)*

*" Our church is predominantly composed by the youth. **We give them a place in all opportunities where they are required.** " (Bishop, Ivory Coast)*

*" **Our preoccupation is that we will feel free to do what we want, without interference.** We need not to be suspected as people who want to destroy the church. If one of the elders speaks badly about something, it is the youth who is then bad seen." (Member, Ivory Coast)*

*"For me, the youth are free, they do what they need to do, **it is important that they trust in us. We are able to do a lot things, but sometimes, the elders do not allow to do it by ourselves.** " (Member, Ivory Coast)*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Connection: Youth and Commitment

*Theme: It distresses me that young people don't stay committed.*

Many people feel young people have short attention spans and they do not stay committed for long. This is true, not just for teenagers and young adults, but, some say, baby boomers as well. Many remark that young people will become engaged in mission work because it is fulfilling, exciting and also has a definite end. Younger people seldom volunteer for long-term church administration jobs.

*"The Generation X who like to come and worship and go and who live busy lives and if you catch them on the run, but even I would say **probably a general lack of commitment on a lot of baby boomers too** who don't follow through with things they are asked to do and don't show up for meetings." (Pastor)*

*"We've seen a lot of younger couples who have come in and left after a few months. While they may be significant contributors in the time they are there, **they don't wind up staying for a long time.** I am not sure exactly why." (Member)*

*"I think we are also **dealing with a generation that doesn't commit.** That's why you can't get an RSVP to something that you sent out invitations for. It seems to be like under 30 but even some 30s to 40s won't RSVP, but that lack of commitment goes into will they commit for stewardship and giving, and I don't think they do. Even in their marriages do they commit or do; is it disposable, we can just split and go on our own ways." (Lay leader)*

*"That post-college age group is such a wonderful, energy-giving age group when they come into the church and when they are involved. But it is **also a time in their lives when they are moving on.** They come, and they go. So commitment is really low." (Pastor)*

*"The number of visiting members during Sunday churches is staying stable, but the total number of members is reducing. Lots of friends **do not want to make this commitment and have all the rights of a member;** they do not see the advantages between becoming a member or staying a friend and, therefore, choose to stay as a friend." (Germany)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Connection: Being Welcoming

*Theme: Being welcoming and open is one of the most important things for a church.*

People agree churches must always be welcoming. Most people believe they are. Some feel resistance to change can result in a church not being seen as welcoming. Some well-established churches have members who are nice to each other but not to outsiders.

*“Well, why are we shrinking? I think it’s because it’s our club and you don’t like our club, go somewhere else. That isn’t who the church can be. That isn’t who Methodists should be.” (Pastor)*

*“We have an obligation connected to the membership that means the members knowing each other; they come close together, so it could be characterized as familiar. That’s a good thing we should preserve because it sustains the people. But, on the other hand, such familiar structures can appear self-contained, and it is difficult to get inside.” (District superintendent, Germany)*

*“It is about the very informal atmosphere due to the fact that one can feel very welcomed. I appreciate that very much, especially since I got other experiences within the orthodox church.” (Lay leader, Russia)*

*“Our worship, I think, is very special in that it is a very warm, inclusive loving community. People walk in. You can’t sneak into our body of faith. You are going to be found, and you are going to be welcomed, and you are going to be loved. We also will try to feed you and give you something to drink. We think that’s important. We think it’s important to make people feel welcome, to notice them without making them feel awkward, to include them.” (Leader)*

*“(I’m attracted by) good ministry and leadership. The community. Even more than that, people who are there working to help it grow through personal outreach to newcomers. Welcoming them. It’s a welcoming church. Also activities that are starting to engage the community.” (Young member)*

*“The preaching and experience is very upbeat. I can only say when people visit the congregation, I try to be very personable. I greet members coming in and greet them leaving and at the end of the worship. I want to be welcoming. We have fellowship and welcoming after service so we make it very personal. If I know any anecdotes about the church they come from, I try to make it known. I make people feel welcome. Also they see other people in their age group, people with whom they communicate in the community, so we have a lot of members who bring members.” (Member)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Connection: Connection with Pastors

*Theme: I love my church because my pastor is great. If I don't connect with my pastor, I am not spiritually fulfilled.*

**The pastor is the face of the church. Many people are attracted to the church because of their pastor. Some people are disappointed in the pastors chosen for their churches and express frustration.**

*"I will say 15 years ago our congregation got the first woman minister, and it was very traumatic. She was very good, but not only was it a woman minister who had a wonderful husband and helped her, but they had a Black adopted daughter, **so that was very, very hard for our congregation to accept.**" (Leader)*

*"I also think the pastor has to be someone **who can speak to you and make a connection with you inside** when you are listening to the sermons. If you are not getting anything out of it—I know I wouldn't stay somewhere where I wasn't." (Leader)*

*"The pastor is, in a lot of ways, **the face of the church.** It is true I don't think the pastor is bigger than the church or the pastor should be dictating policy or anything like that. I think the pastor is someone who members need to feel understands their needs. Not just their spiritual needs but also their problems in day-to-day life." (Member)*

*"Actually her sermons and in the way she ran her sermons and the things that she said—the way she was able to tie them into day and life, to me that is one of the things that struck me and one of the things **that made me feel like this was a church that I wanted to come back to.**" (Member)*

*"The inner city would get pastors who when I was growing up who were **either about to retire but mostly were just starting out** or they just weren't as capable as some of their peers. Nothing was worse than sermon time as a child going through worship services. The highlights were being able to sing the hymns. The lowlights were having to sit back and listen to some very poor speakers. One pastor we had was a rookie when we had him. As a 12-year-old I was obnoxious. I used to count his 'uhs.'" (Member)*

*"Yes. I don't know about the United Methodists at large, but within the church I go to **I would like for us to have more freedom as to whom our pastor could be.** His first language is Chinese or Korean. It's kind of hard to understand his point sometimes. I talked to people who would come every once in a while, and they would say 'I really enjoyed the service, but I didn't really understand what they pastor was saying.' That was it. They wouldn't show up again. I think it is a big issue." (Young member)*

*"You find membership decline in some churches, and **when the pastor changes, members go back.** That's not good because you don't look at the pastor. You go to church to worship but you can't help the members being affected. Like, for example, if you see somebody standing in the altar and you feel he shouldn't be there." (Lay leader, Philippines)*

*"I love having a good pastor, don't get me wrong, but **I don't think that's the most critical piece.** I think for too many people that is the critical piece. Is that what will get people in the door? Yes. Will that keep some? You bet; I mean, look at some of these large churches we have. But then turn around and look at how involved are they?" (Member)*

## Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: Connection: Cultural Differences**

**Theme: *The United Methodist Church is a multicultural entity. However, cultures don't always mix well.***

***There are many multicultural congregations, and the members love this diversity. However, occasionally cultures clash, and the needs on one culture do not mesh well with another.***

*“Several years ago we had a woman who was Black and transferred here from Baltimore, and she became a very active member of our church. She taught Sunday school class, but she was into amening after everything, and **that was difficult for our congregation.**” (Lay leader)*

*“The biggest thing and the only reason they wanted them to move was they were having two services at the same time, and occasionally they could hear the drums from the Hispanics, and it just irritated them instead of celebrating the fact that we've got another congregation meeting in our church that is thriving. **They were irritated by that and then** they get irritated that, well, why don't those people come in and speak English like we do?” (Lay leader)*

*“Our churches and our pastors **cannot relate to the culture of the economically disadvantaged.** When we get somebody from that culture and they are called to ministry in the Methodist Church, we make them go through a process to be trained for ministry that effectively removes them from that culture so they can't go back into that culture and relate to those people.” (District superintendent)*

*“That's who **we are, middle and upper middle class, and everything we do focuses on that.** That's the culture we target, and that's why so many of our inner -city churches that were strong once are really declining now.” (Leader)*

*“There was **a lot of hostility about it because, well, they are different.** They do a lot of singing and dancing in the aisles and drum banging, but ,you know, they set up their instruments in our sanctuary. We have our church and are out of there at quarter to 11, and we are on a strict timetable. People have got so they accept it, and they start their church at 11 and go to whenever.” (Leader)*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Balance

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Balance Overview

#### Achieving a balance between the needs and tastes of old and young

- Pastors and leaders recognize the church must change in order to attract new young people. However, many meet with resistance to change from older members accustomed to traditional ways. The balance is difficult to achieve, especially since the older members of congregations have been loyal and committed and are the ones who support the church financially.

#### Maintaining balance between traditional and contemporary music and worship styles

- Older congregations lean heavily toward maintaining traditional forms of music and worship. Many leaders are aware of a need to make these more contemporary in order to keep up with the times and attract younger people to the church. They often meet with resistance to change. Attempting to balance the needs of older traditional congregations with those of younger people is difficult. Congregations in the Philippines and Africa have greater success with changing traditional music and worship to livelier forms.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Balance: Old and Young

*Theme: It's difficult to maintain the balance between pleasing older people and attracting young people.*

**Pastors and leaders recognize the church must change in order to attract new young people. However, many meet with resistance to change from older members accustomed to traditional ways. The balance is difficult to achieve, especially since the older members of congregations have been loyal and committed and are the ones who support the church financially.**

*"I guess my answer summarized is: **be old but act young and look interesting**. Be attractive and be exciting. Be caring and when you are in the presence of other people, know there is worship going on and they are excited about the Lord and in the places that we can build new walls and be a church that looks brand new like some of them do, then do that. But the majority of the churches are not young. We are established churches. If it weren't for the established church, right now there wouldn't be a connectional system." (Pastor)*

*"Lots of people are searching for answers to major questions, need more orientation and want to add a meaning to life. Especially now in society most people are living alone or with just a few friends. This is a main challenge for UMC to give answers to those questions and to offer a social environment, which keeps people together. So UMC can offer a community with a network of relations. The **biggest challenge in my congregation is to move forward and keep the older members satisfied at the same time**. We have to find new ways without losing the older members. To find this kind of balance is very difficult for me as a pastor." (Pastor, Switzerland)*

*"The youth worship, which is not very developed, is very important for me. The church is geared to the older generations, which, of course, also need help. **But they should include the young people too, for the continuity directly depends on the young generation.**" (Member, Russia)*

*"I love the sense of meeting people who have been worshipping at the church for 50 years and **kind of balancing that with younger people and even some kids**. We have a 6-year-old, so it has been kind of nice." (Pastor)*

*"The **youth are interested but misunderstood by adults**, and in those circumstances, the reactions become uncontrolled. Sometimes they are in disagreement with the preacher, and they feel put down. They think the elders don't want to let them express themselves. I think it is necessary to love the children and the young people just as they are and to try to fit to their physical and mental evolutions, to promote their ideas, to orientate them and to give them the possibility of decision making." (Member, Ivory Coast)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Balance: Traditional and Contemporary

*Theme: It's important to create a balance between the traditional worship and music styles that older people want and the livelier, contemporary styles that appeal to young people.*

Older congregations lean heavily toward maintaining traditional forms of music and worship. Many leaders are aware of a need to make these more contemporary in order to keep up with the times and attract younger people to the church. They often meet with resistance to change. Attempting to balance the needs of older traditional congregations with those of younger people is difficult.

*"So you know you are trying to change in the direction of **making worship interesting and attractive for the younger generation and still the older generation would like it to stay the way it was.**" (Pastor)*

*"We do a **blended worship**, I guess you would call it. We do a lot of praise and worship to start, but we have a choir and they sing from the hymnal sometimes." (Lay leader)*

*"Different music styles are an issue. The elderly have other expectations than the younger ones. For the youth and friends outside the congregation there is a great barrier to overcome when we trying to raise their interest in the church. **We try to approach them with experimental services held in the evening with modern music.**" ( Pastor, Germany)*

*"Although our worship services is nice, I would have **preferred more contemporary music** and more praise songs." (Norway)*

*"To engage within a choir was ever yet very important to the Methodists, and there is the dictum according to that theology has to be sung. In this view a gospel or youth choir is an inviting and **connecting element for the most congregations** and enables them to get in touch with young people and with the faith itself. " (Bishop, Germany)*

*"In front of last Easter we (the choir) discussed our repertoire, and **it was decided to sing some gospels and modern music.** But who wants to hear a gospel song on Good Friday?" (Member, Germany)*

*"We are listening to the modern music, youth music. We try to use modern music at some parts of the worship to make it more interesting for us to sing to it. **And some grannies like it, too, sometimes.** But we also use usual, traditional anthems." (Member, Russia)*

*"We sing and play lots of music during our services. We make sure to perform **traditional music as well as a modern style, and sometimes we try to mix it.** Together with some youngsters I am attending concerts, and they make me feel as though I belong, despite my higher age; this is what I appreciate the most." (Pastor, Russia)*

# Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: Balance: Traditional and Contemporary: Philippines and Africa**

**Theme: Music is a key to people's souls, and our churches focus on upbeat, lively music and worship that can appeal to all.**

**Congregations in the Philippines and Africa have greater success with changing traditional music and worship to livelier forms.**

*"When we started the praise and worship service, there were conservative members who preferred the traditional ways, but since the beginning of the year 2000 up to the present, the changes have been inevitable. Even the Catholics have adapted this praise and worship. **It is just a matter of integrating the heart and mind of the members, the real meaning of praise and worship.**" (Leader, Philippines)*

*"Yes, **it's alive, and you can express yourself** through clapping, dancing and singing at the top of your voice in praising the Lord. It's not the performance that matters most. There's a oneness and unity in praising the Lord." (Member, Philippines)*

*"We don't have to be fundamental and traditional just to stay in our Wesleyan habit but can be more flexible right now. **We adapt to the trend and what will be effective for young people.** We are definitely adjusting to different generations, so, as far as the worship is concerned, it varies, and we don't just stick with the traditional. It a mixture of everything so we reach all genders and generations." (Member, Philippines)*

*"Now we have both the traditional and Aldersgate service. **The tendency now is for the other services to move toward the direction of being a livelier service.** Most of them have the praise and worship and the band." (Lay leader, Philippines)*

*"Music is the domain of expression for the youth. To **reconcile both aspects of music**, to sing together in the book and the other popular hymns has become imperative for us." ( Bishop, Democratic Republic of Congo)*

*"We are made up of 60 percent youth for 10 percent men and 30 percent women. It is then necessary to make a **considerable effort to create different ministries** for the youth, especially in the music area." (Pastor, Democratic Republic of Congo)*

*"Our concern is to **en liven the church service**; otherwise we would be disconnected with the African society in this particular time, but the liturgy is suffering somehow!!!" ( Superintendent, Democratic Republic of Congo)*

*"In Congo the **youth are fond of a lively atmosphere** in church with lots of music, and lots of dynamic events. Therefore, outfitting each parish with modern musical equipment would help attract a considerable amount of youth. Retreats and vacation camps where Christian music is played are very successful with our youth." (Bishop, Democratic Republic of Congo)*

*"Every parish in Africa **wants to have a music which attracts young people.**" ( Bishop, Ivory Coast)*

*"We want many music in all the forms." (Member, Ivory Coast)*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Resources

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Resources Overview

#### Need for Money

- Budgetary concerns are uppermost in the minds of leaders. Building and facilities maintenance and administrative costs are a primary concern. In parts of Europe and Africa, funding is a huge concern. Most churches take pride in paying their apportionments. While there is good understanding of the need for apportionments, occasionally some resentment is expressed about paying them.
- In Europe the need is not so much for money but for better money management.

#### Need for Volunteers

- The churches are run by volunteers. Older people have traditionally been very dedicated volunteers for both administrative tasks as well as running missions. Many now say they have done as much as they can do and look to others to pitch in. Younger people, however, are extremely busy and less committed to routine volunteer work. They are more likely to prefer missions which tend to involve a shorter time commitment.

# Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: Resources: Money**

**Theme: Churches are always in need of more money.**

**Budgetary concerns are uppermost in the minds of leaders. Building and facilities maintenance and administrative costs are a primary concern. In parts of Europe and Africa, funding is a huge concern. Most churches take pride in paying their apportionments. While there is good understanding of the need for apportionments, occasionally some resentment is expressed about paying them.**

*"We're trying to do community outreach programs which is fine and I certainly agree with that, but it isn't bringing people into the church building nor is it bringing money into our church. I've always dealt with the church with money, and I see the financial end of it and **you can't keep a big building running with no money.** That's the way it is." (Lay leader)*

*"I would love to have us have, **not necessarily more people, but I just wish we had a lot more money.** It's just the thing about being in the urban setting that things just cost more. The health insurance thing really peeves me. The fact that our pastor is 29 and in perfect health and we have to pay something like \$15,000 to \$20,000. I could buy him a private insurance or someone could probably just pay for a private insurance policy for him. What it means is we can't have office staff to help. We have only par-time office staff to help him." (Member)*

*"We are doing work on the building. It has gotten run down over the years, so in order to make it attractive to those who are moving into the neighborhood, we have to put some money into it; yet **we don't have that much money without getting more people into the church.** So it is kind of that difficult cycle that we are in." (Pastor)*

*"There are very **few congregations in Russia able to sustain themselves** due to the low income of the Russian people, so they are widely depending on donations." (Lay leader, Russia)*

*"It is **impossible for nearly all of our members to donate even 10 percent** because of their low salary" (Lay leader, Russia)*

*"I wish we become self-dependent in the next 10, maximum 20, years. In my own congregation, I'd like to stand right now on my own feet. I consider it possible. Many talk about an economic crisis, but in Moscow, there are people, even if not many, who earn good money, sometimes more than in western Europe. **There are people ready to invest their money in the church and help the people who** are in great need. We work very seriously on that subject, and I consider it possible." (Lay leader, Russia)*

*"People are donating money even if they have not much. But it is **just a drop in the ocean.**" (Pastor, Russia)*

*"UMC has a big load in my Bishopric. We care for more than 50,000 refugees, 354 war widows and orphans; we have more than 150 health centers, 983 pastors and 36 supervisors. **This means our finances are very restricted.** There are thousands of volunteers to manage, and this is very difficult." (Bishop, Democratic Republic of Congo)*

*"We are going on with the few funds we have, but **our wish is to do better. The church must build a cathedral and a youth center.**" (Pastor, Ivory Coast)*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Resources: Money Management

*Theme: Churches are in need of better money management.*

**In Europe the need expressed is that of money management rather than simply more money.**

*“It is often complained that we are lacking of money. But **there are a lot things where we could save money**, for example, the annual conferences. If the conferences would take place every second year, this would be enough.” (Lay leader, Germany)*

*“For example, the music committee: Some 14 people coming together for just two hours. For two hours! **In total they drive 3,500 miles with their cars for a meeting lasting for two hours only; that’s impossible!**” (Member, Germany)*

*“The **financial situation is well covered. Some districts are not handling the money with the necessary responsibility**. This means they are taking more out as they put in. This is always a delicate subject and needs to be discussed. The main question is how they are handling this in the future to avoid this happening again.” (Leader, Germany)*

*“Regarding the money issue, we need a more self-confident approach in my opinion. **The money is there, but we should give it more attention. Money is not a major subject**, as we can sustain ourselves and even have enough to spend largely. **Of course, we have to make budgets and a financial plan, keep track of spending** and so on.” (Pastor, Switzerland)*

*“My opinion may differ from others. I think it is never problematic to find money. **If there is a good project or a good idea, you’ll find money for it. It is much more important to find qualified and responsible people.**” (Male pastor, Russia)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: Resources: Volunteers

*Theme: Churches need volunteers. Many older people are committed to volunteering; younger people are much less committed.*

The churches are run by volunteers. Older people have traditionally been very dedicated volunteers for administrative tasks as well as running missions. Many now say they have done as much as they can and look to others to pitch in. Younger people, however, are extremely busy and less committed to routine volunteer work. They are more likely to prefer missions which tend to involve a shorter time commitment. Some are concerned that by expecting people to volunteer, the church is turning away potential members.

*“Quality and the commitment is the highest, I think – you know God calls unqualified people like myself to do ministry. Just give me an able-bodied person who really wants to show up and do work for the Lord, and we’ll supply the rest. **There is overall general lack of accountability and commitment on the part of the baby boomers.**” (Lay leader)*

*“People lead busy, hectic lives, and reaching them is difficult **They are so busy and so hectic.** There is not a lot of common meeting places for activities. When do you schedule meetings? How can we get people together and out? Time and energy and money. How not to burn out the persons who are involve.” (Pastor)*

*“Many people have to face high demands when they come to us. I don’t like that a new, interested person has to participate everywhere. We should be more cautious and give them time to take a look and to grow into the congregation. **We must not tell them: “If you come, you have to...”**” (Lay leader, Germany)*

*“I am secretary of the parish council, I organize events and doing the children’s service. **Volunteering is always a problem, even in every sports club.**” (Member, Germany)*

*“Some people are so involved in their professional life that they are **afraid of becoming a full member.**” (Member, Germany)*

*“The engagement in volunteer work is very difficult. Lots of people are as well solicited by their families and/or professional life which is more important to them than deaconry or congregational life. Therefore, **local structures have to be kept very simple with, for example, less obligatory evenings.**” (Lay leader, Switzerland)*

*“We definitely **need more volunteers** and people for the worship.” (Member, Russia)*

*“People are very disposed to work voluntarily. **But people lack of time in Russia.** Young students have no time because they have to work in their free time, just as well as the pensioners.” (Pastor, Russia)*

## Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: System**

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: System Overview

#### Importance of the Institutional Church

- The institutional church is important for many who want to feel like part of something that is larger. Some see it primarily as a place for resources to help them in their ministry. Many members find it remote. Some want the connection with the general church because it is middle-of-the-road, neither liberal nor conservative. Others consider the church to be more liberal. Identifying with the general church is attractive especially when it becomes prominent for the good things that are happening because of The United Methodist Church.

#### The Values of The United Methodist Church

- Members and leaders are dedicated to the values of the church. They appreciate the fact that the church lives by its values. Members appreciate values of openness, inclusiveness and helping. The church is seen as progressive and open; this is appealing to many.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: System Overview (cont'd)

#### The importance of openness as a value

- The openness of the church is one of its key features and an important reason for joining and remaining with the church.

#### Acceptance of homosexuals

- The issue of acceptance of homosexual people in the church is one about which most people have an opinion. There is little clarity on the issue. Many feel that the church's policy of inclusiveness should extend to homosexuals. Some are angry with the church for not accepting gays. Still others are adamantly opposed to the acceptance of gays. Many wish that the issue would become less important
- The issues surrounding the acceptance of homosexuality seem much less relevant in Europe than in the US. The issue did not surface in the Philippines in our interviews. The African countries are far from beginning a debate on the issues

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: System Overview (cont'd)

#### Importance of the social agenda of the church

- The social agenda of The United Methodist Church sets it apart and is important to its members. Its active stand on important social issues is greatly valued.

#### Small and large churches

- Many people prefer smaller churches because of the level of intimacy they provide. People get to know one another easily and well. Larger churches, however, have more resources and can attract newcomers more easily since they have more facilities to offer.
- Small churches struggle to meet their expenses. Partnering with bigger churches is welcomed by many. Some churches share or rent out facilities and, while this can sometimes cause minor problems, it helps with financial problems.

#### Politics in the church

- People wish for greater harmony and less infighting in the church.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: System Overview (cont'd)

#### Giving – preference for giving to local church

- People tend to prefer to give to causes close to home. They want a “real face” with which they can connect. They give if they are able to connect emotionally to those in need. Their first preference is to give to support their own church facilities and missions sponsored by their own church. These causes are tangible to them. Causes supported by their conference or the general church are remote, and they have little feel for them.

#### Giving – Need to know how and where money is used

- Most congregations take great pride in being able to pay their apportionments. Giving above and beyond their pledge is easier for causes to which individuals can relate. Very importantly, people want to know where and why their money is going. They also want tangible feedback on results accomplished. They feel they lack these elements from the general church.

#### Giving – understanding connectional values

- Those who understand and value the connectional aspect of United Methodism find connections to the Special Sundays causes easier to make. These people are able to overcome the remoteness of the causes and value being connected to the world.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: System Overview (cont'd)

#### The system of transferring pastors frequently

- The system of frequently transferring pastors creates some problems for both pastors and congregations. Pastors feel they do not have enough time to create strong relationships and acceptance. Members want stronger relationships with their pastors as well.

#### Pastors need downtime

- Pastors are always on call. They have very little help, and few members understand their need for time to themselves. Many pastors worry about burning out.

#### Pastor placement

- Some members are not able to relate to their pastors. Some pastors feel they are out of their element. The pastor is an extremely important part of the reason for joining or staying with a church, and some feel greater attention should be paid to matching pastors with their congregations.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: System: The General Church

*Theme: The general church is important. It is good to be part of something larger.*

The institutional church is important for many who want to feel like part of something larger. Some see it primarily as a place for resources to help them in their ministry. Many members find it remote. Some want the connection with the general church because it is middle-of-the-road, neither liberal nor conservative. Others consider the church to be more liberal. Identifying with the general church is attractive, especially when it becomes prominent for the good things that are happening because of The United Methodist Church.

*“Well, I think it’s important. **It comes into play well like at disaster times like Hurricane Katrina** and things like that. You hear more about that. I don’t know. I would be hard-pressed to express how that worldwide, citywide plays a part. I know it does, and this is part of that, this office. I think people are not aloof from it but just are comfortable with what they have.” (Member)*

*“The general church is important because it **offers resources to the local church in terms** of literature and teaching tools and things like that to help disciple people. That’s very important. The general church is capable of organizing expressions of help to disaster areas that we are not able to do as a district or as a conference. For instance, after Hurricane Katrina UMCOR; the general church sends missionaries around the world that we are not able to do fully. **So the general church has a lot to offer in terms of helping the local church be more than it could be by itself.** So in that way it is very important. Another way it is very important is everything that happens with the general church hits the news, especially if it is controversy. At that point **the general church can either be a very positive influence on the local church, if they are doing really positive things, or if they are involved in something this part of the world considers unacceptable, then it can be a detriment to the local church.**” (Pastor)*

*“If I were the local pastor depending on what was going on, you know if it were the Katrina thing, I might tell everybody: You know we are United Methodists, and UMCOR is doing this, and we can do this. People would respond maybe because they can see what is going on. On the other hand, sometimes I might downplay my connection with the general church because of the Creech situation, you know. That’s Omaha and has nothing to do with the way we do business in the Methodist Church in Oklahoma.” (District superintendent)*

# Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: System: United Methodist Values**

**Theme: The values of The United Methodist Church are superior, and it lives by these values.**

**Members and leaders are dedicated to the values of the church. They appreciate the fact that the church lives by their values. Members appreciate values of openness, inclusiveness and helping. The church is seen as progressive and open; this is appealing to many.**

*"I think the thing I like that I would never want to change would probably be kind of our statement of open hearts, open minds and open doors. I love the progressive thinking we have here." (Member)*

*"I like how the Methodist Church is very inclusive. They say you shouldn't do something, but if you do, you are still accepted. Drinking, gambling – it says you should not do that. Homosexuals, and that's a big issue for some churches, and while I don't agree with that practice, that lifestyle, I still understand God loves that person, so I think the church needs to emulate that. You don't have to agree with the person's lifestyle, but you have to love the person. I think I enjoy that about the church, and it's very open. You can discuss doctrine without fear of being kicked out or you are a terrible person and that type of thing." (Lay leader)*

*"The United Methodist Church tackled those projects where with other churches it was just about taking care of their own and feeling good about being faithful people, and I think that's who the Methodist Church is in general. We are the ones who really are willing to tackle the issues that affect people's lives and try to help those who cannot help themselves." (District superintendent)*

*"I find the Methodist Church does a good job at being politically active and taking a stance if there is some type of issue. I also love that the Methodist Church is active in the world. They are always continuing to be present when there are disasters, present when there is need and being a voice. One of my favorite stories is the bishop going to talk to President Bush when they were going into Iraq. At that time, obviously President Bush wasn't going to listen to them. He didn't want to hear them, but it did mean a lot to me that they were trying to speak to the President about his choice and just counsel him." (Young member)*

*"The difficulty about this question is, is like saying what's feminist. It's almost impossible to say what a feminist is because there are so many versions of it. My version is a liberal Methodist. I believe in inclusion of all people. All people and not just the ones I think are pretty or that smell good. All people. For me, Methodism is a place that you continue to look at the Bible as reference but it's not going to be my final word." (Member)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: System: Openness

*Theme: I love The United Methodist Church because it is open and welcoming of diverse people with diverse ideas.*

**The openness of the church is one of its key features and an important reason for joining and remaining with the church.**

*"In order to truly be a global church, I think United Methodists face **how to remain open to those different faith traditions, different backgrounds, different life styles and to remain connected** and remain at the table together. It's going to take a lot of communication and a lot of opening minds and hearts, more so than what we are doing right now." (Pastor).*

*"I like the attitude of openness and the friendly atmosphere, **the spirit of the church**." (Pastor, Norway)*

*"I like the combination of the local and the global, the ecumenical openness and the understanding that God work both for us and in us.*

*What attracts me most in my little local congregation **is openness to different people**, concentration on Sunday morning worship and freedom to serve God in our own way the rest of the week." (Member, Norway)*

*"I am enthusiastic about the Methodist Church because it is an open-minded church. I like the Wesley version to **think for yourself and you can talk about what you believe and what you don't believe** and what you think we should be doing and what you think we shouldn't be doing in the Methodist Church, and it's perfectly fine. So I guess you can say my theological beliefs have changed over the years because of reading and teaching and listening to some of these guys talk, and I just feel so good about that. That's number one, and number two is the Methodist Church cares about everybody and everything." (Member)*

*"It's a participation class dealing with very current theological views, if you will, and a variety of approaches I think we make. We used Jimmy Carter's book, and we range all over the field in things to read. We read people who are extremists and people who are very conservative, and within the group everybody feels very free to express their opinions, and we have some pretty varied opinions in there. It's interesting to think about things like that, and **the Methodist Church provides a forum like that. It provides a place where people can explore their beliefs.**" (Member)*

*"I would tell people you read the Social Principles, and I think **they are pretty liberal and I am a fan of them.**" (Member)*

*"I find one of the main reasons is a church that is open to gay, lesbian, bi and transgender people. That is always top. If they aren't, then I won't be a part of that church. Also I find it is a smaller community, and for me that works. It doesn't work for everyone, but that's why I'm there. And there is diversity in age, race and sexual orientation. So there is a lot of diversity in the community that I'm in. They are also really willing to grow. A lot of Methodist churches are stuck. **I am appreciative of this church for trying new things and working to grow.**" (Member)*

*"I look at the document for social policy. We looked at that, and we felt the church could become more inclusive of people, and this is what the Wesley the founder was all about. The pastor at our church and his style and sermons rang true to my belief that this church should provide inclusion for everyone who comes in. **For Communion, he would say this is not the Methodist table; this is everyone's table.** I felt we could actually take Communion. I believe that idea is the major premise for a means to grace. That's significant." (Member)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: System: Issues Surrounding Homosexuality

**Theme:** *The acceptance of homosexuals in the church is important to me.*

The issue of acceptance of homosexual people in the church is one about which most people have an opinion. There is little clarity on the issue. Many feel the church's policy of inclusiveness should extend to homosexuals. Some are angry with the church for not accepting gays. Still others are adamantly opposed to the acceptance of gays. Many wish that the issue would become less important

*"Of course, there are the homosexual issues. I think the root of that is **more how to remain open to each other and not become doctrinal**, creedal church but remain committed to Christ."* (Pastor)

*"The big "C" **church is about inclusion**. It's about gay and lesbian issues. That still blows my mind. That is something our church fights for a lot. One of our parishioners is the director of the reconciling ministries network. Our pastor has been active in that issue for 10 to 15 years. So that is something we are really committed to."* (Member)

*"I think the first thing is the church from the General Conference to Council of Bishops need to uphold the doctrine. Issues such as homosexuality, gay marriage are **out of keeping with our Discipline**.. If that continues, the church will become more or more irrelevant, and it needs to stand up for what they we have stood for centuries. In general the church hierarchy is more liberal than the lay members and places like **Nashville and Washington, D.C.**, tend to be liberal in political spectrum that tends to give a confusing message. The message than makes the church look like it has nothing new to say, looks like the CBS evening news."* (Pastor)

*"I wish we would settle this issue about the homosexuals. I wish we could just forget that and say people are people and we can treat them like that. We have a number of homosexuals in our church that we are very close to, and I wish they could be ordained and serve and not made an issue of in any way, shape or form."* (Member)

*"The biggest issue is the overall acceptance of GLBT people in the church. They are leaders, congregants and people in the church, and **we need to recognize them as equals and not as anything else**. That's important to me."* (Member)

*"I do not do well with bigotry. **I'm very bigoted about bigots!** I feel very extremely uncomfortable and am very unhappy with the gay issue. When we say we have open hearts, open doors, what are we saying to gay people then? Open doors to some people? What are we saying when we say gay people cannot become clergy? The only thing that keeps me from leaving this church is we have a history of working through or processing these big issues."* (Member)

*"For example, the issue of homosexuality. At our conference meetings **we have tried to spend more time in dialogue rather than in voting. That is encouraging to me**. Discouraging I think is—specifically what is think is discouraging is judicial counsels decision on supporting a pastor who bars membership from a gay man. It seems...for power in the institutional church. **That is so discouraging and very discouraging for many of our members.**"* (Pastor)

*"Well ,they fight about the gay issue, and I think that's important. I wish it would just not be an issue. **It's a non-issue with me**, but there are a lot of people with a lot of opinions in the Methodist Church."* (Member)

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: System: Issue of Homosexuality Outside United States

*Theme: Homosexuality is not a relevant problem for us.*

The issues surrounding the acceptance of homosexuality seem much less relevant in Europe than in the U.S. The issue did not surface in the Philippines in our interviews. The African countries are far from beginning a debate on the issues.

*"The society has changed a lot the last 20 years, and I think it's important for people to know they can join a Christian fellowship, even if they are homosexual". (Member, Norway)*

*"I would not say we have to be even more open. We should careful consideration of how we define our openness. To me, this is not about an ethical constituent; for example, it is not the crucial to know whether homosexuals are in our congregation or not. The crucial point is that we want to offer a life to be lived with Jesus Christ. All other is of secondary importance but often discussed as the main question. It is not the core of the Christian message." (Pastor, Germany)*

*"Homosexuality and marriage questions were largely discussed; this is not a taboo anymore." (Member, Switzerland)*

*"During the last annual conference, we discussed half the day the subject of homosexuality. I was astonished about how many people still have problems with this. I think that other subjects need more attention like social issues as poverty, relations in life, etc." (Member, Switzerland)*

*"Homosexuality is a subject, nationally and internationally controversial, discussed, but not any longer in my congregation." (Pastor, Switzerland)*

*"I would say homosexuality is so far an unknown problem for the church in Russia. Its not an issue." (Bishop, Russia)*

*"I think we can speak about the homosexuality with younger members. But we would confuse and eventually lose our older members by speaking about it." (Lay leader, Russia)*

*"Our church in DRC was not confronted to the problem of homosexuality yet. We are living in a society which is too much closed in these things." (Bishop, Democratic Republic of Congo)*

*"The homosexuality issue is secondary. We have the problem of polygamy here. In the past, the children who were born in such marriage couldn't be baptized, the polygamists even stayed out of the church, but today everything changed. Our church tries to care of actual issues." (Pastor, Democratic Republic of Congo)*

*"Homosexuality does not concern Africa. I do not think that we can will accept it in our church." (Pastor, Ivory Coast)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: System: Social Agenda

**Theme:** *The United Methodist Church doesn't only talk about helping: it is actively engaged and lets its position on important issues be known.*

**The social agenda of The United Methodist Church sets it apart and is important to its members. Its active stand on important social issues is greatly valued.**

*"The thing I think that is unique about the Methodist Church is its desire to go beyond its walls. **They don't talk about going out and helping people; they do it.** To me that is exceptionally important." (Leader)*

*"Our little bitty organizations, they have a great outreach. Half of the people in it are, they work, in human services, you know; they are in these organizations that help the poor and the street people and all these things so the church has operated programs, does operate programs, and we are breaking our humps to start a new one **This was a service to street people in our basement**, and they raised \$3 million and built a building a couple of miles away, and they are independent." (Member)*

*"Why is our church not taking a stand again the war? Why is the church not standing up and saying that gays and lesbians can be clergy? My biggest disappointment in the church is leaders have not been a more vocal moral compass for social issues. **We are supposed to take care of people.** The Mormons do a better job than we do." (Member)*

*"To be an enthusiastic Christian and to engage in social issues is a kind of connection I always appreciated. **But engagement in social work and deaconry in The UMC has always to be linked to one's personal belief; otherwise, there would be no difference to the Red Cross** (Member, Germany)*

*"The church is giving clear answers to social questions and also justifications. For example: in the next coming months Switzerland is voting on a very difficult law regarding asylum seekers. **Now the question is: how UMC is going to present themselves regarding this issue?** This is more a marketing question: what are our qualities to go public in order to be recognized and heard, but at the same time we have to make our position clear which could differentiate from other religious groups." (Member, Switzerland)*

*"**It is one of our most important tasks. In the early 90s, the people had to go through hard times. We tried to help out with groceries and some money.** People were very thankful for that help. It was also a good chance to draw attention to our church" (Superintendent, Russia)*

*"We have the widows and orphans of AIDS and war; we have the sick people, prisoners and refugees. The government does not care for its citizens who are in need. Our task is too big due to the fact that **our funds are restricted, but the world expects from the church the things it should expect from the state.**" (Bishop, Democratic Republic of Congo)*

*"We have refugees in Ivory Coast in all corners; we have attendants at all levels which are reduce in the start of their lives; we have very big needs. **Our members are involved on the support of activities** of evangelization, on training, and soon we will have 40 pastors supported by the local efforts. They make collections of clothes, foods to help their brothers and sisters in material need." (Bishop, Ivory Coast)*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: System: Small and Large Churches

*Theme: A small church gives me a sense of closeness, but we don't have the resources large churches have.*

Many people prefer smaller churches because of the level of intimacy they provide. People get to know one another easily and well. Larger churches, however, have more resources and can attract newcomers more easily since they have more facilities to offer.

*"For my wife and I, we were looking for a smaller church **where people would actually know who we were as opposed to a huge church.** This is a gorgeous church, but it's huge. It's tough. I think if we were members at this church in particular, they got different service times and such a large congregation that I'm not sure anyone would know if we were gone. If we are on vacation for a couple of weeks, people in the church know." (Member)*

*"I guess the family setting. It's not that big. **Within a couple of weeks you will get to know everybody** or everybody will get to know you. That's why I like that it is small." (Member)*

*"I also like that **it's a smaller place where I get to know people,** and when I got that responsibility, that was really attractive to me that someone would ask me to read in service within the first month. That happens a lot still, even though we are a little bigger now." (Member)*

*"We got to get more members, and we do desperately need more members. It continues to shrink. **In the last year and a half we've lost the three oldest members of the church who were quite old and quite good supporters, and we haven't replaced them.** We've had a lady join because she came to, I forgot what she came to, but she like the people and the situation and it can be very pleasant to come into that group. But people just don't come, and we can't figure out how to get them to come because we are way off there in left field in a terrible looking facility." (Lay leader)*

*"The larger churches **there are less issues because, generally speaking, they are very well run.** They have exceptional leadership, and they have lots of talent in the church to help them deal with issues and thing. It's the smaller churches that have the greater demands because they just don't have the resources that the larger churches have. Some pastors are better, and you can count on if a person is in one of the larger churches, they are there because they are very talented." (District superintendent)*

*"All of the youth are attending the bigger churches in the city. The bigger churches have more money because of more members. **Therefore, they have more money to spend on youth activities to attract families and teens.**" (Lay leader)*

## Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: System: Small and Large Churches Partnering**

*Theme: Associations and partnerships with other churches has been very beneficial to us.*

**Small churches struggle to meet their expenses. Partnering with bigger churches is welcomed by many. Some churches share or rent out facilities and, while this can sometimes cause minor problems, it helps with financial problems.**

*"I know St. James partners with a church in north Tulsa and stocks the food bank at that church so they can serve the people in their community. So if it's a partnering program with a specific church to help them, I think that would be great. Then youth could go and do the painting or whatever that needed to be done. **If there were just a partnership system set up.** I know some churches do, but maybe it needs to be a requirement almost." (Member)*

*"We are in an old, big building, **so we do a lot of space sharing with a day-care center.** They rent quite a bit of space from us. We also worship together with an African community, United Methodist worship center space on Sunday afternoons." (Lay leader)*

*"There was **a lot of hostility about it because, well, they are different.** They do a lot of singing and dancing in the aisles and drum banging, but, you know, they set up their instruments in our sanctuary. We have our church and are out of there at quarter to 11, and we are on a strict timetable. People have got so they accept it, and they start their church at 11 and go to whenever." (Leader)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: System: Politics in the Church

*Theme: Let's get rid of all the unnecessary politics and focus on our church instead.*

**People wish for greater harmony and less infighting in the church.**

*"I think that the Methodist Church **embraces too much the way politics is done outside the church**. We get our caucuses together, and we try to get our power blocks together. We really don't trust in discerning the lead of the Spirit. It's all about me getting my group of people together who see eye-to-eye with me, and you get in your group, and we see who has the most power." (District superintendent)*

*"The other challenge is the **constant concern about trying to do everything you can to prevent someone from filing suit against the church**. A district superintendent has to think all the time about the possibilities of litigation, so we do a lot of extra work to try to prevent that where we could be spending time giving some guidance, direction, support and encouragement to people who are involved in ministry. We are in a day and age where people just love to sue. It's present in the church just like it is in culture." (District superintendent)*

*"In this conference, **let's try to be less political and more spiritual**. This conference is like I'm going to stab this person behind their back so I can get more things." (Pastor)*

*"Both lay and ministerial. **I wish there were more harmony and more Christian-like attitude** without unneeded debates, name-calling, problems that come up. You hear this and that. People talk behind the back of the leaders, or leaders do the talking. As a church, it has no place to do that." (Lay leader, Philippines)*

*"**Right now we have this big issue of talking about autonomy**. Majority of the churches in the Philippines are going toward the autonomy. Autonomous conference. I don't know if you're aware of the structure of the church. We have autonomous churches and affiliated autonomous churches. We have these two distinctions. We are going for the affiliated autonomous church because it gives us an opportunity, a discipline, which is more responsive to the needs of the church in the Philippines that caters to all the local conditions and customs." (Lay leader, Philippines)*

*"There are two issues that the United Methodist or the church as a whole is facing today. The first has something to do with the issue of **autonomy and globalization in The United Methodist Church in the Philippines**. The majority of the annual conferences have opted for autonomy, simply because they want more freedom to act in accordance with the needs of the Filipino people. The second issue has something to do with the government. People want the president to come down from her position, and there are so many strategies. I feel the church should address this situation in our country." (Pastor, Philippines)*

## Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: System: Giving: Preference to Give to Local Church**

**Theme: I prefer to give money to help my local church and to support the missions sponsored by the local church.**

People tend to prefer to give to causes close to home. They want a “real face” to which they can connect. They give if they are able to connect emotionally to those in need. Their first preference is to support their own church facilities and missions sponsored by their own church. These causes are tangible to them. Causes supported by their conference or the general church are remote, and they have little feel for them

*“It’s not specific enough. I think that is more to the case. **If they knew the village that this was going to** and they had connection to that village, that would have a lot of power.” (Member)*

*“I was thinking of United Methodist Student Day. We have a young woman in our congregation who benefits from that. She’s a student at ...University which is a United Methodist college. **Having somebody in your congregation, I think, drives the point home a little bit closer. It puts a face.** I think the United Methodist Communications group does a really good job of featuring stories and people and making it very human and real. Having some person within our own congregation that I know benefits; that’s just an extra bonus.” (Pastor)*

*“They are aware of the connectional aspect of the church, and it has been explained to them. How supportive they are of it is a whole different issue because, again, in the smaller, more rural churches, **they have such a local church identity.** I think it’s because of survival mentality, but they have such a mentality that we’re here for a purpose and this is our purpose.” (Lay leader)*

*“I was very involved with the funding of that and the working on it. I am on the organ committee. **It was more personal, but I also look at it more as my own congregation,** but also I am looking at it as we’ve had some great moments in UMW. Of course, it is all women, but you could add men in there too. We’ve had some good moments in our conference, like when we have collected a lot of things for Liberia and sent boxcar loads of stuff for Liberia. That was a big celebration for us, conference-wise.” (Lay leader)*

*“I think **the younger generation really has to have a clearer, specific thing that something is going, just broad general giving, they don’t trust institutions well enough.** I think institutions have sometimes created that. The further apart and the larger it is, the less people are feeling they can give. A lot of things have happened in the general that make them feel like can I trust institutions in general? (Pastor)*

*“**If it’s national or international, they have to have a sense that they have a connection** to it really to be able to get passion for it. People sometimes do, but to have the passion, they have to have some sense of the tangible.” (Pastor)*

## Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: System: Giving: Knowing How Their Money Is Used**

**Theme: I want specific information on tangible results that were accomplished with our money.**

Most congregations take great pride in being able to pay their apportionments. Giving above and beyond their pledge is easier for causes to which individuals can relate. Very importantly, people want to know where and why their money is going. They also want tangible feedback on results accomplished. They feel they lack these elements from the general church.

*"I have found at our church our regular giving is extremely low; yet **give them a specific thing, as they were saying yesterday, I can get blood out of a turnip.** I'm on my fifth computer since January 1st that doesn't work and keep donating it. An opportunity came up through the district for a new computer. We just had to come up with \$120 for the software. There were only 20 people in church yesterday, but I have in my purse \$120 to take to the conference office next door so we can get that. I mean it's amazing." (Lay leader)*

*"I have really found communicating with people on what it is you're trying to fund, support, get done, whatever it is, **if you tell them exactly what is going to be done, they are more likely to give these days.** Unlike 10 years ago, people would just give money and give money." (Pastor)*

*"I think **people are really wanting to know how their money is being spent instead of just a general 'we'll just give it to the Red Cross.'** I think the difference between that and giving it to UMCOR is they have more knowledge about where their dollars are actually being spent. You know it's about the organization letting people know how their money is going to be spent." (Lay leader)*

*"Some **feedback on what was collected and what was able to be done with those collected** for some benchmarking. To be able to see globally how much the impact of our giving brought in this dollar amount for this cause. It's hard to know how big, and that may be my personal bias." (Lay leader)*

*"Does our money really funnel to places in the world that build connection and remind us we are interconnected with each other? **It takes some attention to make sure the giving really goes to the place where it does build connection and it makes a difference to people.**" (Lay leader)*

*"I think they like to know how their gift is making a difference. **When we can go back and tell stories of how it makes a difference,** they feel some satisfaction in giving. It is much easier to see with gifts to UMCOR than some others. I think it is getting a little better with the Peace with Justice one because we can start to be more specific with that." (Pastor)*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Frame: System: Giving: Connectional Values

*Theme: I belong to a church that values connectionalism and appreciate being able to help the world outside my own small community.*

Those who understand and value the connectional aspect of United Methodism find connections to the Special Sundays causes easier to make. These people are able to overcome the remoteness of the causes and value being connected to the world.

*"What I really appreciate the most about The UMC is its connectionalism and the fact that even though I worship in a church in Portland, Ore., my gifts are helping all around the world. That's huge to me. Because I have a very global sense of who we are. We are all connected, no matter who we are. There are no boundaries. We worship one God, and one God cares for the entire planet. **So any way I feel I can help care for those around us who can't help themselves necessarily, that's a really good thing.**" (Lay leader)*

*"**We have to reach out beyond that. Giving is one of the main ways we can do that.** The Special Sundays again communicate that as very concrete ways we are taking action beyond the local church. Sometimes that even comes back into the local church. The church I was at before has a church community developer who has been funded by national, and that's the first time in a number of years we've had one in the Portland area." (Lay leader)*

*"Our senior pastor has always conveyed the connectionalism of The UMC. **We are one church, but we are connected to all others in this bigger ministry. We are not solo in the world.** We are connected to the other churches and to the global ministries with the bigger things that we do." (Lay leader)*

*"**I like the bigger perspective. It kind of feels good.** There is more out there than what is happening right in my world. My world is important, but there are all these other things I need help to support." (Member)*

*"In my call for the offering each Sunday, I say things like 'these are ministries, locally, nationally and worldwide.' At the administrative council level, we talk about connectional. That's a word that makes sense to them. **But to the church at large, connectionalism doesn't resonate.** Maybe once in a while I might – I can't think of a time when I've ever used the word connectional or connectionalism in a sermon or in a worship context." (Pastor)*

*"I think it's hard for people sitting in the pews to feel the power of connection. I didn't understand it when I sat in the pews.*

*If you are going to **continue to get them to feel excited about paying 100% of their apportionments**, most times that's where they will feel the results when they can sense where the money goes." (Pastor)*

## Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: System: Pastoral Issues: Moving**

*Theme: Pastors come and go. I wish there were greater stability.*

**The system of frequently transferring pastors creates some problems for both pastors and congregations. Pastors feel they do not have enough time to create strong relationships and acceptance. Members want stronger relationships with their pastors as well.**

*"I am **encouraged that they are leaving pastors longer in situations**. I think that is wonderful not to be moved every two or three years. I really do. I think they have come to their senses on it and they realized leaving somebody in a place about eight years before you move them gives a chance for growth and to develop ministries and things." (Pastor)*

*"Ideally 7-12 year appointments are good. Ideally for creating bonds.. Historically speaking, pastors come in name only. You are in the office, but you aren't the pastor. You have to earn the position. **It takes most pastors 3-4 years to really becoming the pastor not only in name only**. You want to be the real "pastor." A pastor relationship with congregation is like a marriage: they need to get to know each other. Then in 12 -15 years, if the pastor isn't growing, the pastor has peaked, and then you can move on and someone else needs to come in." ( Pastor)*

*"I do think the whole model of itinerant ministry, in terms of some of the needs of present and upcoming generations of kind of the need for establishing small groups and community. I think that means I as a pastor need to stick around a little bit longer than what is usually the norm. There is talk about that in The UMC. Good talk about that and how we can change that and make that **different. Because of the trust and the amount of time that takes in such a fast-changing world. We are really looking for relationships that are going to be there for a while.**" (Pastor)*

*"We have seen that across racial lines, churches are in grief, bemoaning the loss of a prior pastor. You get to a place where they are always dealing with a pastor coming and going. You have to create a bond and get beyond personality conflicts. **The longer appointments are crucial, critical to our success, and I'm thrilled our bishop is coming in with insight.**" (Pastor)*

*"I think our church has made enormous strides in the past two years. We went through a period with very ineffective pastors. **It was a problem on how we were transferred around.**" (Member)*

*"The Methodist Church changes preachers every 1-2 years, compared to the Baptist church that only changes preachers every 50 years or so. Their preachers usually stay for a whole lifetime. **The constant change of pastors makes members not come as often because they are not comfortable with change.**" (Lay leader)*

## Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: System: Pastoral Issues: Burnout**

*Theme: We are spread so thin, burnout is a constant threat.*

**Pastors are always on call. They have very little help, and few members understand their need for time to themselves. Many pastors worry about burning out.**

*“So many **people are spread so thin**. I am spread so thin that there are a lot of things I can’t do and we need to do them for growth. I would love to be able to get a student or something like that. Things like that aren’t made available unless you have a bigger church and have the power of maybe a secretary or people to find out information or whatnot. I basically am not only pastor; I am the secretary. I have to do all the committee work. There is no one to do it. In one church right now I am trying to train, but I got to do the treasurer reports. Little things like that.” (Pastor)*

*“That would be really neat if all the churches could benefit from the students. Especially the smaller ones. You are so overextended. I’m a clean person and very organized. My office is an absolute disaster area. **That’s because I don’t have any office time besides crisis management. It’s like OK, now I’m doing the bulletin**. Now this has to be done. Both churches that I have run big food pantries. It’s a part of their ministry. There is a lot of paperwork that has to be done.” (Pastor)*

*“You know, one of the big issues I think the Methodist Church needs to get better at, this is also because I grew up with a father who is a pastor, is **taking care of their ministers spiritually, mentally and creating places that ministers can work and have downtime**. A good example, we were in a small town, and my dad chose to be the chaplain for the police and fire department. So he was getting—policemen and firemen don’t have a chance for downtime. If somebody gets shot, they still have to go to work. They don’t have the option to like cool off and grieve. My dad was spending a lot of time with these men, helping them cope or get through. Where does my dad go to get his downtime? The Methodist Church could help him, and I think they should have. It’s not a gripe as much as it is a way we could get better.” (Member)*

*“Sometimes expectations of the pastor are not normal. Some people **don’t—sometimes there is too great a demand on pastor’s time**.” (Pastor)*

*“If you don’t set it in practices of taking Sabbath, of making friends, of setting boundaries, **it would be very easy to burn out** quite quickly because there are a lot of demands placed on your life. I think in the next five years that’s probably the biggest challenge.” (Pastor).*

## Conversations Across the Church

**Frame: Future**

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Future Overview

#### Hope and optimism about the future of the church

- While some churches are dwindling and people are concerned, most people are optimistic about the future of the church. Many leaders believe changes are essential for the church to thrive.
- Many different opinions exist about the future direction of these changes, but the consensus is that the church will have to find a way to maintain its values but be more accommodating to new generations rather than expecting them to fit into the old model.
- An obstacle to progress will be resistance to change among those who have been members for a long time and are comfortable with it the way it is.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Future: Change

*Theme: I have great optimism about the future of The United Methodist Church, but it is going to have to change to be relevant to the world.*

**While some churches are dwindling and people are concerned, most people are optimistic about the future of the church. Many leaders believe changes are essential for the church to thrive. Many different opinion exist about the future direction of these changes, but the consensus is that the church will have to find a way to be more accommodating to new generations rather than expecting them to fit into the old model.**

*"I think church with a small 'c' and the whole aspect of the relationship with God and how do I get there and I want to be a part of a fellowship will be very relevant; what I don't know that will be as relevant is the building. I think we are learning that in a way delightfully so the opportunity to go back to the early church where the building wasn't necessarily relevant. The whole idea about sitting around a room and saying 'we are going to spend another \$80,000 on a roof 'when cyberally or small-group wise and so forth, I think, people will continue to find church. I think the model for church is going to be changing.'" (Pastor)*

*"I went to the big megachurch here. I walked in. I mean I didn't need a cup of coffee, but they have a cafeteria where you can socialize with people and so forth. I walk in to this wonderful information desk and 'hello,' everyone is hollering, and I walk into the sanctuary and nobody greets me. I just walk in and I see this tray of soda crackers there with a little cup. I walk in and grab one that I suppose is for Communion and I guess I've used those things before, so I grabbed a cracker and I grabbed one of those, I've been there and the worship has already started and I don't know where to put this thing. But its full, it's succeeding. They're doing something to draw people in, and we need to look at it, even if we never want to be like them." (Pastor)*

*"We are starting to see more and more first-career younger pastors, so I think the future may be a whole lot brighter than we are seeing right now. I just think sometimes we don't give God enough credit for rejuvenating the church. and we are starting to see signs" (District superintendent)*

*"We are aging as a church. I see that in my congregation every Sunday, and it's kind of like the heart patient who has been told time after time 'you need to change, you need to change,' but kept on doing the same things. I'm hoping we can literally see ourselves age and the Methodist Church and other mainline and non-mainline denominations say, 'OK, maybe these young people have something, and maybe they can help us.'" (Young pastor)*

*"We still think we are going to be a large body of faith just by where we are. Being at northwest McKinney we know there will be 100,000 people in our niche, northwest McKinney over the next seven or 10 years. If just 3 percent of the people who move in are Methodists, we are going to be a large church. Now if we continue to do what we have done, which is really reaching out to the unchurched, how big are we going to be and what is that going to look like?" (Lay leader)*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Future: Views on Changing the Church

*Theme: The world is changing rapidly, and we have to make corresponding changes in the way the church serves its people.*

**Many have views on how the church should change. Most agree it needs to be more accommodating to younger people.**

*"I think a lot of the younger people want to come into something new and alive and on the early curve of a new church where it is visionary –where they can be part of the vision and so forth. So when you take most of the United Methodist congregations as well as most of my churches, these people walk into a church and it's almost like they walk into a clique." (Pastor)*

*"I think that's why when the young couple with a family drives by an older-looking church, they probably will try the Vineyard first, like brand new lights in the parking lot and rocking chairs. I'm talking about the Sunberry Church; walks into a brightly lit, fully staffed nursery. Twelve months after they start, they are going to probably go there and try it first and maybe then find out they don't even have Communion or don't celebrate Easter like others. Maybe they'll go back and maybe try an established church, but I think when you see the Methodist churches that are growing, they are growing programmatically." (Pastor)*

*"I think that's part of the difference between the young community glitzy-looking church versus we're going to celebrate 150 years. Most young families could care less. In a way, we're going to spend probably some money celebrating history as opposed to investing in the future. That's kind of the balance we run because we are both old and –. So we're a little slower to be able to react, so I think in a lot of ways we are kind of behind, but the basic model is there." (Pastor)*

*"Yes I think the younger generation is thirsting to know God and to make it a part of their lives but looking for a plug; where can I plug in? It's like can I do this? It's sort of like it's hard to know this is not going to be instant. This is something you are going to have to invest in to discipline yourself; to put time in, and that's part of it's hard to get people." (Pastor)*

*"I don't ever want to see it change to the point of not being open to other ideas. For instance, one of the things they do here is a thing for teenagers where they travel to different churches of different religious persuasions. They will go to a Jewish temple or Buddhist temple and things like that and view other cultures and other ways of worship. I don't ever want it to get to the point where somebody would not feel like our church wasn't something that would participate in that." (Member)*

*"While I like having people who have been in the church for 50 years, honestly I think our congregation itself is seemingly a much older congregation. I don't know in 20 years how many of those people are going to be with us. I think something needs to be done to try to attract younger members or people who might be able to do more of the physical work required in the church than some of the people who have been doing it for quite some time. It would be nice to see some younger, fresh perspectives brought into the church, I think." (Member)*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Frame: Future: Resistance to Change

*Theme: I would not want to see dramatic changes.*

**An obstacle to progress is resistance to change among those who have been members for a long time.**

*"It takes a lot of prayer and a lot of patience. You have to realize you lose some people. Some are very set in their ways and just won't accept certain changes." (Pastor)*

*"The big difference is the demographics have changed in that part of Oklahoma City to the point that it is a very Hispanic community around the church. To embrace that, the church was kind of coerced into trying to start a Hispanic ministry. But the old members of the church were always resentful of that and never fully embraced that and wanted to protect their building instead of opening their arms and allowing the community to become a part of that church." (District superintendent)*

*"I think comfort is a big thing. We have moved from very strict things. We've had a lot of discussion in our church like should the preacher always stay up behind the pulpit, should he come down and should he wear a robe?" (Lay leader)*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Gaps

**Two important gaps that could fill in the picture  
we have of the people of The United Methodist Church**

## Conversations Across the Church

### Gaps

#### (A) Young People

While we were able to interview several young people, all these respondents were already involved in the church. We got many ideas about the needs of young people, but these came from older people or those already committed. There continue to be frustrations surrounding drawing young people into the church.

Our design did not call for samples of the young people that the people of the church believe should be drawn into the church.

Further, we learned there are many segments of young people, and their needs differ.

We believe serious consideration should be given to interviewing, in depth, samples of these young people to better understand their mindsets and exploring how to draw them into The United Methodist Church.

## Conversations Across the Church

### Gaps

#### **(B) Seminarians**

**There is an important need for young pastors the world over.**

**We did talk to a few young pastors. Again, however, these pastors are committed to the church.**

**While they provided good insights, we believe it is important to talk to people who have not yet committed to being pastors.**

**Data indicate a large number of seminarians select other professions following completion of their religious studies. We need to understand what would draw them to The United Methodist Church in particular.**

***The Connectional Table  
Internet Bulletin Board***

***July 27, 2006***



**MARTEC<sup>®</sup>**

## The Connectional Table: Internet Bulletin Board

# The Martec Group and United Methodist Communications developed a three-day online bulletin board focus group.

## The Connectional Table: Conversations Across the Church

### Bulletin Board Methodology

#### Phase 2: Qualitative Research

##### Bulletin Board Development:

- **The Martec Group** recruited active members of The United Methodist Church to participate in a Web-based bulletin board discussion similar to a *focus group*.
- **United Methodist Communications**, using Web-based bulletin board software developed by **Itracks**, programmed a three-day online group.
- Each day, the respondents were asked to log onto the site and respond to a series of questions.
- **The Martec Group** developed the three-day's worth of questions on various issues related to the state of The United Methodist Church and its role in the participants' lives.
- The purpose of the questions was to promote discussion and an understanding of brewing thoughts, feelings and values.
- Respondents answered questions without being biased by other respondents' answers. However; once a respondent typed an answer to a question, he or she could view the other responses.
- In addition, respondents could interact with each other by asking further questions or making comments.
- **Martec Group** and **United Methodist Communications** representatives acted as co-moderators and probed occasionally on ideas/thoughts brought up in the group.
- There was no limit to how long respondents could stay logged onto the board during the three days.

**Respondents were from a diverse group of geographic locations and included a variety of respondent types and ages.**

## **The Connectional Table: Conversations Across the Church**

### **Bulletin Board Methodology (continued)**

#### **Phase 2: Qualitative Research**

##### **Respondent Recruiting Process:**

- Respondents were recruited from a list of 600 United Methodist members provided to **The Martec Group** by **United Methodist Communications**.
- Respondents were not necessarily leaders in the church, but active to the point that they contacted The United Methodist Church regarding resources and programs.
- Respondents were from a diverse group of geographic locations, ages and ethnic backgrounds.
- **The Martec Group** made an additional effort to recruit younger participants for this portion of the research since other areas of the research had difficulty engaging younger member participation.
- Respondents were not recruited from areas where Martec conducted in-person interviews, which include: Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Columbus (Ohio), Dallas, Houston and Tulsa (Okla.).
- Respondents were not provided an incentive.

# The Martec Group recruited 28 active members to participate in an online bulletin board focus group, and 23 actively participated.

## The Connectional Table: Conversations Across the Church

### Participants in the Bulletin Board

#### Phase 2: Qualitative Research

#### Participants/Time Frame:

- **The Martec Group** recruited 28 respondents to participate in bulletin-board research.
  - Respondents were recruited via an e-mail invitation.
  - If respondents were interested in joining the group discussion, they were asked to provide the following information: name, e-mail, age, ethnicity, phone, church name, approximate number of church members.
  - 23 of the 28 respondents recruited logged in and responded to questions.
  - Respondents' ages ranged from 27 to 56 years old. (Six of the 23 (36 percent) were 35 years of age or younger.)
  - Four of the 23 respondents (17 percent) were non-Caucasian.
  - The research took place July 24-26, 2006.

**Several questions were asked each of the three days. Respondents responded to the questions and then could see other responses and interact.**

## **The Connectional Table: Conversations Across the Church**

### **Questions for the Bulletin Board**

#### **Phase 2: Qualitative Research**

##### **Question Development:**

- Questions were similar to the in-depth, in-person interview questions.
- Respondents were able to click on and view a question one at a time and respond at leisure.
- Three to 4 questions per day were asked.

##### **Day One Questions**

1. What do you like about being a United Methodist?
2. How important is The United Methodist Church to you? How important do you feel the denomination is to others in the church? (Do you think being a “denomination” is important? Why do you feel that way?)
3. What would you like to see changed in The United Methodist Church?

##### **Day Two Questions**

1. What are the major issues facing The United Methodist Church? Why do you feel they are so important?
2. How do these issues affect you?
3. How would you like to see the church address these issues?

##### **Day Three Questions**

1. How would you describe the state of the church today?
2. What ministries and missions of the church do you find to be most fulfilling?
3. What ministries and missions do you think are most fulfilling to others?
4. What energizes and brings people into the church?

In general, respondents like the church's acceptance and recognition of many diverse theological spaces, the Wesleyan tradition, connectionalism and global ministries as well as the personal, warm welcoming aspect of local churches.

## Bulletin Board Research

### Day One - Common Themes

What do you like about being a United Methodist?

- **The willingness (generally) to accept a diverse group of believers**
  - *“The theological space afforded many differing global horizons.”*
- **The “Wesleyan tradition/history” and John Wesley’s four-fold focus on Scripture, reason, tradition and experience.**
  - *“I like the theological balance Wesley forged for us between individual grace/discipleship and the social gospel.”*
- **The “connectionalism” of the church**
  - *“I like the connectionalism. We are connected to churches across the country and the world. I also like the moderate stance. We have strong social beliefs but do not exclude others because of different beliefs.”*
- **The United Methodist Church is associated with many ministries, and members are given many opportunities to be active in these ministries, not just at home but around the world**
  - *“I like the way United Methodists all around the country and Methodists around the world are connected and sharing in ministry. I also like how we are involved together in mission.”*
- **The warm, kind and welcoming local congregation**
  - *“I like the way our members make you feel like you are not only a part of the congregation, but also a part of a family.”*

Although many respondents view denomination as important because it defines shared beliefs and provides group focus and resources, many also believe denomination is becoming less relevant in today's culture—especially for newer or younger members.

## Bulletin Board Research

### Day One - Common Themes

How important is The United Methodist Church to you? How important do you feel the denomination is to others in the church? (Do you think being a “denomination” is important? Why do you feel that way?)

- **Denomination is important because it links members to each other in beliefs and provides distinctions.**
  - *“I like the denominational approach because even though there is much debate and discussion regarding doctrine, denominations strive to be up front with their focus and common beliefs.”*
  - *“Although I think there is less relevance of ‘denomination’ for the unchurched in our communities, I do think there are great potential benefits in harnessing the power of a denomination behind the local church. The connectional model still has great potential.”*
- **The culture is changing, and denomination is becoming less important as a result. The church needs to find ways to improve the structure and organization to make denomination more relevant.**
  - *“Things like proximity to home, relevance to personal life, family/friend connections (or lack), experience of an encounter with God would seem to be more determinative than a denominational label.”*
  - *“The church needs to find a way to make the denomination (and the structures and organization that go with it) relevant to a society that is increasingly less structured and formal.”*
  - *“I don't know that being labeled is important to me. Its more knowing you can fellowship with others.”*
- **Being a denomination is more important for older members (60+) and less important to younger or newer members.**
  - *My parents were both Methodists for several generations back, and my grandmother, who was very important in my life, taught me the importance of the Bible as well as the social justice important to Methodists.”*
  - *I don't think denomination is as "important as it once was to most people--especially the younger generations and to the unchurched newcomers.”*
- **Being a denomination allows the church to proceed with many important global ministries.**
  - *“I appreciate the standards for ethos and for actually making possible huge tasks, such as GBGM, UMCOR and other UMC efforts. “*

Responses varied widely on this question but could be categorized in three main areas: concerns about homosexuality/inclusions; a need to restructure, reorganize the institution church to be more flexible and responsive; and to grow the church.

## Bulletin Board Research

### Day One - Common Themes

#### What would you like to see changed in The United Methodist Church?

- **Homosexuality is a hot-button issue. Issues around homosexuality include: inclusion in church, sinful vs. not sinful, pastor authority in membership, accepting gay clergy, “open doors” policy, theology.**
  - Opinions vary widely in the group.
- **Many members would like to see changes in the organization and structure of the institutional church.**
  - **Improved communication (bottom-up).**
  - *“Communication top-down (strong feature of our polity) also calls for communication bottom-up; enhance communication flow--more of a ‘world café’ model than a hierarchical 18<sup>th</sup>-century arrangement.”*
  - *“There is some sense at all levels of the U.M. connection that boards, agencies, commissions and other entities encounter the world without consulting the ‘authentic’ congregation.”*
  - **Revisit the denominational structure.**
  - *“(Annual conferences, districts, etc.) I think the structure is increasingly irrelevant and overly bureaucratic.”*
  - **Revisit the itinerant system, appointments and ordination process.**
  - *“In a church struggling to recruit pastoral leadership, we need to look a system that facilitates people coming into pastoral ministry without harming the institution. “*
  - *“It takes years for the relationship to grow, and both congregation and pastor learn to work together effectively.”*
  - *“How about electing bishops to head a particular church focus: evangelism, national and international outreach, and administration? The problem that I am seeking to address is I believe our ordination process and who we approach about a call seem to encourage the same type of person.”*
- **Respondents are also concerned about church growth and how that growth will occur.**
  - *My congregation--being older--as most UMC churches are, believes more in what he pastor should be doing, pastoral care, rather than trying to develop new programs to bring in a group of people who may not look like them.”*
  - *“Continue to increase our social ministries, reaching beyond class and racial barriers to share the gospel.”*

**Analysis Is Ongoing...  
Day Two, Day Three and  
Follow-Up Questions to Be  
Reported On Later**

## Conversations Across the Church

**Work in Progress**

## Conversations Across the Church

### Work in Progress

- Existing research – updates
- Bulletin board – complete analysis
- Audiotape – 2 – 3 minute audiotapes to be developed from in-person interviews
- Bishop interviews – 5 scheduled; 1 to be scheduled
- Leadership report – Following bishop interviews, a separate report will be issued summarizing leadership views.
- Survey – to be discussed next
- Online survey – to be discussed next

# Conversations Across the Church

## Content Issues for Follow-up in Quantitative Survey

### Congregation Survey Issues

*General feelings/attitudes about The United Methodist Church*

*Importance of role of UMC in lives*

*Need to grow their church*

*Opinions on how to attract younger people*

*Reasons for joining/staying member of UMC: structured question; include friendships, pastor, church values, social agenda, inclusiveness, mission, size of church, types of people*

*Knowledge/understanding of church doctrine and values*

*Opinions /preferences for traditional/contemporary/blended worship and music styles*

*Attitude toward pastor of church*

*Feelings about volunteering*

*Importance of denomination*

*Attitudes toward giving to local and general church*

*Need to know how money is spent*

*Attitudes/opinions about the future of the church*

*Classification questions will be included:  
demographics, church size, lifestyle*

# Conversations Across the Church

## Content Issues for Follow-up in Quantitative Survey

### Pastor Survey Issues

*General feelings/attitudes about The United Methodist Church*

*Need to grow their church*

*Opinions on how to attract younger people*

*Reasons for joining/staying pastor of UMC: structured question; include friendships, changing lives, church values, social agenda, inclusiveness, mission, size of church, types of people*

*Opinions /preferences for traditional/contemporary/blended worship and music styles*

*Attitude toward pastor placement for current position*

*Feelings about time and burnout*

*Feelings about compensation*

*Feelings about volunteering*

*Importance of denomination for their congregation*

*Attitudes toward giving to local and general church*

*Need for their congregation to know how money is spent*

*Attitudes/opinions about the future of the church*

*Classification questions will be included:  
demographics, church size, years as pastor  
etc.*

## Conversations Across the Church

### Next Steps Today

- Update budget.
- Approve/modify questionnaire content.
- Approve/modify method of reaching respondents in Africa.
- Review and confirm samples for United States and other countries/review countries.
- Decide on “gap-filler” studies.
- Determine “View from the Outside” decisions and timing.
- Set meeting date to review next round of results.