

Town Hall Meeting, April 17, 2007

Remarks by The Rev. Dr. Jerome King Del Pino, General Secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

JEROME KING DEL PINO

Good afternoon. My name is Jerome King Del Pino, and I'm the General Secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

I've been asked to speak to you today about Leadership Development which is the first of the four Provocative Propositions.

I believe that the key challenge facing The United Methodist Church today is the kind and quality of our leadership. Preparing a new generation of Christian leaders is GBHEM's mission; however, every general agency, annual conference, and local church has a vital stake in the task of forming, nurturing, and deploying Spirit-led, creative, and faithful leaders for the future of our local churches, our educational institutions, and our ministries of outreach.

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry is committed to nothing less than a covenant that binds the boards and agencies in a common vision for clergy and lay leadership, a set of shared commitments to outcome-based collaboration, and a concrete plan for turning this vision and these commitments into reality.

In 2005, research done by Lovett Weems showed there were only 850 commissioned and ordained clergy aged 35 or younger in the whole United Methodist Church in the United States. This is only 4.69 percent of current elders and reflects a decline from 15.05 percent of the elders serving in 1985. These young people need to be seen as the foundation for building a future church based on their leadership. Therefore, the church needs to invest in their development as leaders.

The Millennial Generation has demonstrated interest in and desire for developing their spiritual lives. However, The United Methodist Church has not been able to connect to this generation in relevant, authentic ways that address this generation's needs.

The church must build a streamlined structure for the development of young leaders that will result in doubling the number of young people in positions of leadership as pastors, and specialized clergy and lay ministries. We must provide a system of support for young clergypersons as well as for mid-career persons who bring experience and wisdom to ordained and lay ministry.

GBHEM, in cooperation with GBOD and in consultation with other agencies, has a plan of action that provides a concrete way for the general agencies to address the leadership crisis in the denomination forthrightly and creatively. For example, first begun in 1990, we are now reaping the benefits of the EXPLORATION events for youth and college students for discerning God's call. And the renewal of the UM Student Movement and the annual Student Forum for college and university students are helping to feed into the EXPLORATION process. GBHEM's campus ministry, student ministries, vocation, and enlistment staff and GBOD's Division on Ministry with Young People are looking at ways to partner on future programs.

I do not believe it is hyperbole to say that The United Methodist Church finds itself in a crucial moment in history, when seismic demographic, social, cultural, and religious shifts are redefining our global reality. Guiding the church amid these momentous changes requires nothing less than global leaders for a global church, whose vision for the church's ministry is as expansive as the connection itself. Such leaders will be marked by three principal characteristics.

1. They are guardians of the United Methodist connection. Our emerging global village also harbors fragmentation, misunderstanding, fear, and suspicion that can undermine our desire for a global church. The United Methodist connection, committed to unity in diversity, is an extraordinary gift to our world and to the emerging Christianity. Global leaders for a global church guard the connection with a combination of spiritual maturity, theological dexterity, and practical innovation.
2. They are bearers of a renewed vision of the church. Global leaders for a global church refuse the temptation to substitute survival for renewal in addressing the church's malaise. Thus, they brook no self-interested denominational naval gazing or anxious preoccupation with institutional maintenance. Amid the upheaval, uncertainty, and insecurity of our day and the social, spiritual, and intellectual confusion in our churches, such leaders uphold a vision of a United Methodist Church as a community of hospitality that welcomes in holy love the stranger and the different and that rejects barriers between insiders and outsiders, erected out of suspicion and fear.
3. Global leaders for a global church are advocates for a learned leadership. Global leaders for a global church advocate for an educated and educating leadership. They know that healing the divisions and rancor that characterize so much of our communal discourse as a church calls for leaders with skill, insight, and wisdom possible only through rigorous, wide-ranging, and ongoing learning. They also realize that leading the church in faithful ministry in our rapidly changing times requires a company of leaders as diverse as the world itself and trained, able, and willing to serve wherever and whenever needed. And so, global leaders for a global church actively advocate the revitalization of an education pipeline that stretches around the world, providing access to education to all people, particularly the poor and the underserved. Affirmed at the 2004 General Conference, GBHEM's Methodist Global Education Fund for Leadership Development will provide assistance to scholar leaders in Africa, Latin America, Europe, Asia, and the U.S.

GBHEM's Strategic Plan contains our Vision Statement that states: "A new generation of Christian leaders who commit boldly to Jesus Christ and are characterized by intellectual excellence, moral integrity, spiritual courage, and holiness of heart and life." I invite each of you to join us in making this vision a reality for our church.

Thank you.