

Provocative Propositions Executive Summary

This is an executive summary of the Provocative Propositions developed by the general agencies and commissions. It is a working document. It will be revised as general secretaries move these propositions forward.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

(Romans 8:22,23 NRSV)

In yearning for fulfillment and hoping for redemption through the grace of God as revealed by Jesus Christ, the ministry of the people of The United Methodist Church is shaped and disciples called forth.

In order to identify emerging needs in the world, and to express ministry aligned with the Vision Pathways of the Council of Bishops, and listening to the State of the Church conversation, the general program boards and appropriate commissions are planning together and working collaboratively to give form to new expressions of shared mission and ministry, in partnership with the whole church.

This collaboration is not new. We collaborate in shared mission and ministry now, and have historically. But new challenges call for new ways of doing ministry collaboratively as these proposals for shared ministry illustrate.

Through careful research and listening to the church, four provocative proposals have emerged:

- To enable our clergy and laity to develop the skills necessary for ministry in the 21st. century through leadership education and development, with focus on the United States;
- To extend the outreach of the church's ministry and grow the church by energetically starting new congregations;
- To partner with the poor to seek justice and address the causes of human suffering that result from poverty;
- And to bring healing, health and wholeness through a concerted effort to end preventable diseases of poverty such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.

Each is deeply rooted in the Wesleyan Movement that values Scripture, tradition, experience and reason. And each anticipates deep collaboration at every level of the church.

We are a global church and the people of The United Methodist Church face different challenges for ministry in different parts of the world and this is reflected in these proposals.

No matter the context, the challenges for ministry in our various places are great:

- Globally 3 billion subsist on less than \$2.00 per day;
- Every 30 seconds a child dies of malaria, 3,000 children a day under age 5;
- 38.6 million persons were estimated to be infected with AIDS at the end of 2006, and the pandemic in Africa has been widely documented;
- And we face challenges within The United Methodist Church as well:
- We are an aging community, the average United Methodist is 57 years old;
- In some countries, notably the United States, we are not effectively reaching youth and young adults; United Methodists under age 18 account for 4.6% of church membership;
- The number of ordained and commissioned elders under age 35 is a mere 850 in the United States;
- Membership globally is increasing, but in the United States membership has slipped below 8 million for the first time since the 1930s.

To be sure, there are reasons to hope and places where ministry and outreach flourish.

- More than 130,000 people volunteered through the Volunteers in Mission program last year, and many others volunteered through other channels;
- United Methodists gave in unprecedented \$42 million for tsunami relief and \$66 million for hurricane devastation, and per family giving has shown a steady increase over many years;

In discussion groups in the United States, we've heard people say they seek deeper connection to God and an understanding of life through faith.

They spoke of:

Deep spiritual hunger—a search for meaning and purpose
Deep disillusionment with the church's use of resources and priorities
A desire to be accepted, not judged
A need to explore and question—but they don't want easy answers
A desire for active involvement
And to be challenged to live the faith.

In Africa people value the church as a worshipping community and emphasize Bible study, prayer and worship, but they also speak of the church helping to develop society, voicing concern for the poor and vulnerable, empowering women, combating disease and addressing the causes of war, poverty and injustice.

In the Philippines, The United Methodist Church, along with other Protestant communions is a minority religious community in a multicultural society. The entire religious community is seeking to address economic inequity, injustice and the killing of lay and clergy who work for human rights and who are partners with the poor.

In eastern and central Europe the church also faces minority status and many United Methodists live in societies that are just now emerging from years of oppression and exclusion. Despite limited resources and widespread poverty, United Methodists in these countries worship, witness, study and pray in ways that have not been possible in many years.

In Western Europe and Scandinavia the church contends not only with minority status but also with secularism that challenges the hearing of the gospel message and calls for mission and ministry in new and uncharted ways.

These lead to four provocative propositions:

Facing the Crisis of Leadership in The United Methodist Church in the United States

The issues, challenges, and opportunities confronting United Methodism in its myriad cultural expressions around the world are simply too complex and varied for one-size-fits-all approaches. Each context demands—and deserves—careful, patient analysis and interpretation on its own terms in order to contribute with integrity to the global conversation. In this spirit this proposal focuses attention on the crisis in leadership in the United Methodist Church in the United States.

It rests on two shared convictions:

1. If The United Methodist Church in the United States continues on its current path, it faces continual decline;
2. The denomination in the United States faces a crisis in clergy and lay leadership.

This proposition addresses how the general agencies can make common cause to affect the quality of leadership in local churches in a positive way. This involves every general agency, annual conference and local church and we believe it will require us to radically and innovatively rethink the way the church recruits, trains, nurtures, and supports clergy and lay leadership.

The proposal calls for **A Covenant for Collaborative Action** in which each of the general program agencies and appropriate commissions are called to covenant to address the leadership crisis in the church in the United States through fundamental commitments of time, money and staff.

The proposal has six goals:

1. To build a system of leadership development to share effective practices for making disciples and evaluating outcomes;
 - a. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry will develop systems of accountability with the United Methodist college, universities, seminaries and the historically Black colleges and universities for their task of forming clergy and lay leaders who are prepared to lead the church amid the complexities of the 21st. Century;
2. To stream-line the structure for developing young leaders and double the number of young people in positions of leadership as pastors, specialized clergy and lay ministries;

3. To create new models for leadership development including training for District Superintendents and Directors of Connectional Ministries in consultation with the Council of Bishops;
4. To engage young people in the church to help transform the church into a faithful expression of the body of Christ in the Twenty-first century.
5. To provide a support system for every young clergyperson.
6. To complete a program of retraining lay and clergy to equip local church leaders with effective practices to transform The United Methodist Church.

A National Strategy for New Congregational Development

Where the church is growing in Africa, Asia, Europe and the United States it is also reaching out to people through evangelism with energy and purpose. The church in the United States faces a process of decline. Yet, we inherit from the Wesleyan Movement an expansive commitment to reach souls for Christ and to make disciples to transform the world. We propose to re-cast a vision for evangelism in the United States by reaching out to urban, rural, and ethnic groups; youth and young adults, and newly arriving immigrants.

A task group including the Plan Team of the Council of Bishops, The General Board of Discipleship, General Board of Global Ministries, the network of conference congregational developers and the racial ethnic national plans is already meeting and will bring requests to General Conference 2008.

To accomplish this we will:

- Create a national strategy team to create a strategy to develop new congregations including partnerships between the general agencies of the church, annual conferences, local churches and the network of congregational developers;
- Staff the national team with a senior level position within the General Board of Discipleship;
- Change the institutional culture to encourage congregational development;
- Under gird our vision biblically, theologically and with our Wesleyan heritage and prayer;
- resource this vision;
- engage in research to support the vision;
- develop an attitude of risk-taking and freedom-giving within our connectional system;
- creatively communicate the vision;
- align our resources to make the vision reality, including the alignment of responsibilities and the creation of new resources and services.

We intend to create an authentic Christian movement that renews our faith and leads us to passionately share the Good News.

We propose:

- to plant 350 new churches a year in the United States (up from an estimated 75 per year currently);
(a “new congregation” is defined as any new faith community that includes regular community worship, a system for making disciples, and an outreach to its community)
- at least 80% of those churches will be averaging 250 people in worship within 5 years of their launch;
- and after 5 years of implementation The United Methodist Church will welcome 87,500 new people into the community known as the people of The United Methodist Church.

United Methodist Ministry with the Poor: Wesleyan Foundations, Current Practices, And Future Possibilities

The Gospel of Jesus Christ requires ministries with and on behalf of the poor. The Wesleyan foundations of Methodism rest upon this Gospel mandate and its practical application.

Our Social Principles, actions of General Conferences and the Vision Pathways of the Council of Bishops underscore the spiritual values of ministry with the poor.

Wesley led early Methodists to seek more lasting benefits for the poor than begging could afford. They supported:

- Employment, especially for poor women sewing collectives;
- loans to enable the poor to acquire tools and materials for small businesses;
- Free health care;
- Houses for destitute widows and children, in which Methodist preachers also lived, thereby maintaining solidarity with the poor;
- Schools for children of poor preachers.

John Wesley wrote that “solidarity with the poor includes not only a positive concern for their welfare but a protest against concrete forms of injustice as well.”

In our time injustice is not lessened and our Wesleyan heritage seems even more relevant:

- Approximately 790 million people in the developing world are chronically undernourished, almost two-thirds of whom reside in Africa and Asia;
- 1.5 billion, the vast majority of whom are women, live on \$1.00 a day;
- About 210,000 children die each week, just under 11 million children each year, from poverty and the diseases of poverty;

This proposition rests upon five action steps requiring additional resources and personnel:

- **Discovery.** Each general agency will survey its work to determine how it is currently serving the poor, taking into account Disciplinary responsibilities and general conference assignment, and prepare a report with a target date of January 15, 2007;
- **Review of Findings.** Each general agency will name one executive staff member to a team to review findings and plan collaborative initiatives going forward;
- **General Conference Consideration.** The team and the agencies will develop an early 21st. century affirmation of ministry with the poor for consideration by the 2008 General Conference.
- **Pilot Project Development.** During the 2008-2012 quadrennium, the team will develop six contextual, holistic pilot projects for ministry with the poor in collaboration with jurisdictional and central conferences in East Africa, the Philippines, Eastern Europe, Honduras, a U.S. annual conference with a large vulnerable urban population, and annual conference in Appalachia. Progress on these will be reported to the subsequent general conference;
- **Education for United Methodist Action.** The task force will work with appropriate general agency staff to develop multilingual education resources in electronic and audio-visual formats with major emphasis on the importance of advocating for public policies that empower the impoverished and address and alleviate conditions that compromise human dignity and quality of life.

An Initiative on Global Health

Health and wholeness are deeply rooted in United Methodist history and tradition. From the publication of his *Primitive Physick* in 1741, to his emphasis on establishing local health dispensaries in Methodist meeting houses, John Wesley focused the attention of Methodists on health and wholeness as a matter of spiritual concern.

General Conferences of the church have affirmed church-wide advocacy for health policies and global approaches to promote health and wholeness. Local churches employ parish nurses and operate neighborhood clinics. The church places volunteers and medical mission staff in places lacking health care delivery systems, and builds hospitals.

For more than two years an interagency working group on health and wholeness has coordinated efforts to create awareness of health within the church and the world. This proposition will move that work to another level.

- It proposes a global health initiative that will engage the agencies and members of The United Methodist Church in a sustained effort to prevent and treat the killer diseases of poverty, with particular emphasis on saving 3 million lives by eradicating malaria, addressing HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis through community-based primary health care.
- malaria affects 300 million persons a year, causing millions of deaths, especially among children under age 5, education will increase awareness of malaria and its toll around the world;
- Similarly, HIV/AIDS is pandemic in Africa, affecting 36 million persons globally, destroying families, leaving children without parents, disrupting economies and overwhelming health systems.

Action steps:

- An informal advisory meeting of key leaders of the whole church will convene in Washington in December to consider global health issues, with particular emphasis on the diseases of poverty, and how The United Methodist Church might respond effectively;
- The General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Communications, and the Youth Division of the Board of Discipleship are partnering with the United Nations Foundation, the Millennium Promise, the Measles Initiative, Sports Illustrated, and the National Basketball Association in the Nothing But Nets campaign to provide bednets around the globe to prevent malaria. (This campaign is designed to reach out to

United Methodist youth and mobilize them to become aware of global health needs and raise funds for bednets.)

- The Interagency Health and Wholeness Working Group is bringing health education and good health practices to General Conference 2008, including a run for health led by the local host committee and a major display on health with take home materials for delegates;
- Collaborating agencies and willing leaders are in dialogue about a global health initiative to strengthen community based primary health care and community based empowerment through radio and other communications tools for affirmation at general conference 2008;
- United Methodists will be invited to volunteer time, contribute money, and advocate for public policies that assist the poor and those outside the global health system to receive information about preventing disease and getting treatment through strengthened health systems.
- Collaborating agencies will address rising health care costs affecting local churches, annual conferences, general agencies and the growing number of people who are not covered by health insurance in the U. S.