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The United Methodist Church strives to bring the gospel to the world and to tackle the world's development issues in a holistic manner. This is the reason why I think the church is playing an important role in the world.

The United Methodist Church has a holistic approach to the gospel. This is in keeping with the teachings of John Wesley, who fought against alcoholism, poverty, and slavery, and this approach is very important for us.

In Cote d'Ivoire, we have been trying to translate the gospel into action. That is why we opened the Methodist Hospital in the '60s in Dabou, not too far from Abidjan. We have many primary and secondary schools throughout Cote d'Ivoire, and just last January we opened a university. We have also opened a center to fight against alcoholism in Abidjan and we have an orphanage in Dabou. Before the civil war — which started in 2002 and by the grace of God is ending now — we had a program to help prostitutes get out of prostitution, which helped a great number of people.

In fighting against poverty, we are trying to push all our local churches to develop some initiatives — like having a church farm — to help people help themselves.

The fact that ministry with people in poverty is one of The United Methodist Church's four mission initiatives for the coming quadrennium is welcome. The major axis of the missionary vision of the church in Cote d'Ivoire is to evangelize by word, works, and deeds. Evangelizing by works means following Matthew 25 and providing help to the young and to widows, and responding to social cases. When we speak about deeds, we mean the behavioral aspect — how we live what we preach, how the church can take an ethical position on societal issues.

What I find remarkable is the degree to which The United Methodist Church involves itself in fighting against poverty and also responding to catastrophes worldwide.

For example, in Maputo, Mozambique, during the Council of Bishops' meeting last November, there was a testimony of what The United Methodist Church did during the civil war there. The Mozambican president himself reported what the church did for Mozambique during the war. What was very important was the United Methodist Committee on Relief's initiative for taking out all the landmines throughout the country, which impressed me. The president of Mozambique was very grateful for this initiative.

In Africa, with evangelization, we try to help people feel that the church responds to their concerns. Sometimes the church finds solutions to their everyday problems. So we practice evangelization not just by preaching but also by acts. That is why the church in Africa is growing. People see that evangelization is accompanied by deeds or by works that are helpful in their daily lives.

The churches in Africa will always require some funding. Churches in Africa need eventually to identify areas where they can, by massive investment, generate resources sufficient to put into movement programs and initiatives that help people.

We have to give hope to people, and with Jesus Christ there is hope. We try to translate this hope into action.

What is important for me is to see our church be a real family — that there be no divisions of Africans, Europeans, Americans, Asians. We should go beyond our specific cultures and see to what extent we feel ourselves members of one large Methodist family.

Each one of us should work toward that. We should share more and visit one another and meet more people.

We have to see how we can help so the churches in Europe and in America also grow. In Africa and Asia, there are growing churches, which is not always the case in Europe and the U.S.A. As an African, I am concerned. While we receive funding in Africa, what can we give in return so that these churches in Europe and the USA see growth?

I am already seeing actions such as evangelization by African pastors, but there are other initiatives that require a lot of thinking. The entire church must join in a common reflection to see what can be done.

Despite all the problems that we might feel, it is important to keep hope alive in our church. We should be very happy and proud to be Christians and especially Methodist Christians who have a holistic approach to evangelization because this is part of the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Let's be engaged all together — lay and pastors, men and women, people of all ages. We should discover all the talents that God has bestowed on each category of mankind. If we could see all this talent express itself, we could see to what extent the church is going to evolve positively.

May God bless this large family which we form, and let God continue to bless the whole world with salvation through Jesus Christ.