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The United Methodist Church is today in a period of inevitable transition—transition that is global in scope and can lead us to renewed reliance on God’s grace in Jesus Christ and new, vigorous expressions of Christ-like mission in the world.

Signs of the transition include:

- an expanding global vision in Christian mission and service;
- increasing appreciation of the ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity within the world, the body of Christ, and the United Methodist connection;
- a shift in the membership profile, marked by a younger, growing membership in Africa and some parts of Asia and Eastern Europe, and an aging, yet vital constituency in the United States, where an increasingly diverse population invites culturally relevant ministries;
- a re-appreciation of Wesleyan theology, strongly visible in areas of church growth, including its emphases on outreach to the poor, the marginalized, and the vulnerable, such as children, the elderly, and the sick; and
- a grassroots resurgence in action for mission—evangelism, global health, and ministries among persons in crisis.

This inevitable transition requires the church to make choices having immediate and far-reaching implications for United Methodism.

Are we as a people of God ready to meet the challenges of change:

- to look at our image in the gospel mirror and to name and pursue priorities in keeping with the inclusive love of God for all people;
- to evaluate our system of clerical and lay leadership with respect to national, cultural, gender, social, and linguistic realities;
- to test our styles of mission, worship, evangelism, and education for global implications; and
- to study our utilization of resources?

These are not easy tasks; they require honest self-examination and decisive action. Take an example: The numerical center of Christianity and Methodism is gradually shifting from the Global North to the Global South. We welcome—yet are worried by—a trend that raises questions of organizational power, cultural dominance, and use of funds. While the younger churches of the South were mission founded, they are maturing and vigorous even though not economically strong. They need financial assistance to take full advantage of the gospel opportunities being offered through the Holy Spirit. The still-affluent church of the North hopes and prays for revival, and wonders how to invest its revenues: in younger, growing missional churches or on self-revitalization? Or, are there ways through which vigor, resources, and regional ministries can be enhanced through mutual interaction and sharing?

This inevitable transition affecting the church today brings us face to face with issues of mission, expectation, and attitude. They beckon all United Methodists to receive with thanksgiving the expanding vision of our faith community, to instruct our children in the wideness of God's mercy, and to rely upon God's grace in times of change.

Transition calls us to see new ways to increase love of God and neighbor. It prepares us to put into practice St. Paul's prayer that Christians will "abound in love for one another, and for all [people]" so that hearts will be strong in holiness (1 Thessalonians 3:12). Transition calls us back to the Wesleyan insistence on the bond between scriptural *and* social holiness. "The gospel of Christ," said John Wesley, "knows no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness." He also said: "You cannot be holy except as you engage in making the world a better place."

The United Methodist Church in 2008 has the theology and capacity and, we believe, the will, to become a more holy and loving global community as we experience transition, and thereby make the world a better place.