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To ponder the state of The United Methodist Church today is not simply to inquire about its current condition but also to ask about the community we need to be to be faithful to Jesus and about the leaders we need to lead us in faithful ministry in the twenty-first century. Responding to such issues with integrity requires that we attend to the key challenge facing The United Methodist Church: the kind and quality of our leadership.

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. Continued immigration, migration, and exponential population growth are creating an astonishingly diverse world, especially in the United States. Further, the center of gravity of Christianity is moving south, with Africa, Latin America, and Asia emerging as the new heartlands of Christianity. Moreover, North America is facing a post-Christendom era, marked by the dominance of consumerist capitalism, individualism, and the decline and cultural marginalization of religious institutions.¹

To guide The United Methodist 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

¹ Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing in the Bible in the Global South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.9; Douglas John Hall, *The Future of the Church: Where Are We Headed* (The United Church Publishing House, 1989), p. 12.

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 envision an education pipeline that stretches around the world, providing access to education to all people, particularly the poor and the underserved.

The United Methodist Church today needs Spirit-filled leaders who can guide us in discerning our unique vocation as a church. Living this God-given vocation calls for the kind of hope, faith, and courage possible only through the power of the Holy Spirit. And so United Methodists face the future knowing that God is not above us or behind us but is in the midst of the tumult, beckoning us to follow. Our only fitting response is to follow with faith-filled abandon.