

## **Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters Summary report to the Connectional Table**

General Conference 2008 has established the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters in a new working structure which gives the possibility to hold two regular meetings during the quadrennium, each with three full working days, besides its meeting during General Conference. The composition of the Standing Committee has remained the same: three persons each (lay, clergy, bishop) from the seven Central conferences and five Jurisdictional conferences and from the Board of Directors of GBGM. General Conference 2008 referred a number of petitions for the creation of new Episcopal Areas to the Standing Committee. The first meeting of the Standing Committee after General Conference 2008 was held October 23-25, 2009 in Nashville. The second is scheduled for February 4-7, 2011, in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo.

At the first meeting, the main focus was on getting to know the mission and ministry of the UMC in each Central Conference. Maps with basic data on each Central Conference were created by staff of GCFA. A preliminary version given out at the first meeting was shared also with the Connectional Table. Revisions and corrections have been ongoing. At the first meeting in October 2009, a broad range of questions were discussed. They were grouped into three topics and given to three Task Groups for further consideration: (1) Episcopal Areas; (2) Central Conferences; (3) General Conference 2012. Each member of the Standing Committee works in one of the Task Groups. There has been great enthusiasm to continue working in between meetings by modern communication means. Unfortunately, it has been very challenging and difficult to establish this process of further discussion and get active participation and feed-back from members. We still hope that the Task Groups are able to prepare preliminary reports for the second meeting. The second meeting in February 2011 will have to act on the referred legislation and/or create new legislation and a report to General Conference 2012. The present budgetary process for the Episcopal Fund does not include the support for additional Bishops in Central Conferences.

The Task Group on Episcopal Areas has made some progress in its work. It has begun discussion about criteria for establishing Episcopal Areas. The listing includes: (a) square miles – time zones; (b) organized churches – circuits/charges; (c) nations – languages; (d) annual conferences; (e) active clergy; (f) membership. In the fall 2010, the Task Group is continuing its discussion about clarifying these criteria and bringing them into an order of priority. These findings will help to establish a more objective basis to the decision about the priorities in the creation of new Episcopal Areas. The Task Group is aware that further criteria, much more difficult to evaluate, influence the potential in any given Episcopal Area, for instance: the support structure in place, mission potential in a region, and principles of accountability / responsibility / self-support.

According to the present *Book of Discipline*, the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters which will meet at the site of General Conference 2012, will be composed of new membership and will have authority to decide freely on what it brings to General Conference 2012, whether it will forward or revise the petitions of the present Standing Committee or will propose new and different legislation. We hope that the nominating bodies will look at a good balance between continuity and renewal in the membership of the Standing Committee meeting at General Conference 2012.

October 11, 2010 - Bishop Patrick Streiff, chair