

## **TRANSFORMATIONAL DIRECTIONS FOR THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

The 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church established the Connectional Process Team to manage, guide and promote a transformational direction for The United Methodist Church to continue the work begun by the Connectional Issues Study of the General Council on Ministries and the Global Nature of the Church Study of the Council of Bishops." (For additional information, see Appendix.)

The key phrase in this mandate is "transformational direction." What transforms-radically, redeemingly, completely, fulfillingly? For the Christian community it is the love of God; God who creates, sustains, guides, redeems, and perfects. In each act of divine love, God transforms-from chaos to order, from darkness to light, from deprivation to fullness, from non-life to life, from sinner to saint, from mortality to immortality.

God loves the world, demonstrating that love throughout human history. There is no clearer sign of God's love for the world than the life, ministry, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God pours out perfect love upon the world in the person of Christ, through him in the Holy Spirit redeeming the world and beginning the process of restoring, renewing, and perfecting it in the fullness of God's love.

The Church is the community of those who have responded to God's love, becoming a redeemed and redeeming fellowship in which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments administered. Through the working of the Holy Spirit the church reaches out to others. For United Methodists there is no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness. The church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world, seeking its redemption. As United Methodists our connectional polity binds us together in faith and service in our global witness, enabling faith to become active in love and intensifying our desire for peace and justice in the world.

In the dawning of a new century with its many challenges, we believe that God is calling the entire United Methodist Church to institutional and personal transformation. Our transformation must continue as we invite all persons to become followers of Jesus Christ, be transformed by grace through faith, and go out into the world to manifest God's reign in their lives.

In the light of our study, conversations, and prayer, we have examined all of the activities, functions, and structures of the church today by asking one simple but central question:

**Will this help us invite, nurture, and empower disciples of Jesus Christ through local churches and faith communities throughout the world?**

The report we present with its recommended directions and changes has been guided by this question.

We believe that we have been led by the Holy Spirit to recommend to The United Methodist Church the following transformational directions:

### **1. Center on Christian Formation**

- 2. Call Forth Covenant Leadership**
- 3. Empower the Connection for Ministry**
- 4. Strengthen Our Global Connection and Ecumenical Relationships**
- 5. Encourage Doctrinal and Theological Discourse**

## **TRANSFORMATIONAL DIRECTIONS**

### **1. Center on Christian Formation**

As United Methodists, our understanding of Christian formation and faith development is grounded in God's grace. We are saved by God's grace and justified through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Empowered by God's Grace, we participate in God's transforming acts and in the ongoing process of sanctification. The moment when we surrender our lives to Christ and are redeemed does not, however, complete our journey of faith or God's gracious activity in our lives. God's grace continues to work in us to make us fit and able disciples of Jesus Christ.

It is the church's responsibility to assist disciples of Jesus Christ to grow in their Christian formation by helping them to discern the movement of God's Spirit in their lives and respond to God's sanctifying grace. Through Christian formation, persons develop and nurture the practices that shape them into the image of Christ. The church must help persons individually and in covenant relationships to practice the spiritual disciplines that have sustained Christians throughout the ages.

This ongoing process includes seeking personal and social holiness in our daily lives. The word "Methodist" was applied to our forebears because of the methodical practices that helped to shape their lives. John Wesley called his followers to regular disciplines. Some of these were personal and private: acts of devotion (prayer, Bible reading, inward examination) and acts of compassion (the simple things we do out of kindness to our neighbor). Some were public and social: acts of worship (the ministries of word and sacrament that we exercise together) and acts of justice (ministries that implement God's righteousness and denounce injustice).

A transformed church must help persons individually and in covenant relationships to develop and nurture the practices that help to form them in the image of Christ. Placing Christian formation at the center of our life will help us become a people who love and serve God and neighbor and who, through our witness, bring others to Christian faith. All of the other transformational directions and all of our recommendations flow from this transcendent direction.

***In order to place Christian formation at the center of our life, we recommend the following:***

- **Emphasize Christian formation in local churches**

A changed heart that comes from accepting Christ as Savior marks Christian identity. Having proclaimed the saving love of Christ, the local church must then prepare disciples of Jesus Christ by providing a nurturing, supportive environment for Christian formation or faith development. Christian formation is not only for the sake of the individual nor only for the sake of the local church, but also for the sake of the world. The witness and service that flow from Christian formation are a visible sign of God's reign in the world.

United Methodist local churches provide opportunities for persons to participate in

private and public worship, prayer groups, and Bible study groups. We affirm these fundamental aspects of our ministry, but call upon every local church to an even deeper commitment to the task of directing the spiritual pilgrimage of every member and constituent. Continuous growth in Christian formation enables Christian discipleship. We call upon all local churches to organize cluster groups, and classes that provide mutual support and accountability in ministry. Like the members of John Wesley's class meetings, participants must diligently inquire about the well being of each other's souls and bodies, asking and responding to such questions as "Is it well with your soul?" "Are you engaged in fasting and prayer?" "What are you doing to reach out to others?" "How are you witnessing in your home and workplace?" "Are you well economically?" "Are you without work?" "Are you hungry?" "Are you facing a crisis?" Our response and concern for each other in our needs will also strengthen us for ministry.

- **Form Covenant Communities of churches and covenant groups of laity and clergy within districts**

Strong relationships between and among United Methodist churches can be an important arena for Christian formation. We encourage the formation of Covenant Communities, a loose affiliation of churches that fall within geographic boundaries and have other common concerns as they carry out the core task of making disciples for the sake of the world. This may also include churches from other denominations. Within these Covenant Communities, we encourage covenant groups of laity and clergy. Some groups might consist of both laity and clergy and form around common interests. Others might be covenant groups of pastors or laity for mutual care and support. If a congregation should not have an ordained pastor, these covenant groups may help to prepare the lay leadership of local churches to provide vital spiritual leadership.

All of these groups will provide opportunities for Christian formation, spiritual growth, and mutual support. They are the points at which local churches and clergy will join together to explore common concerns, needs, program initiatives, and other possibilities. The sharing of programmatic endeavors, leadership, and financial responsibility can derive from those shared experiences.

- **Develop a network of covenant leaders**

In order to coordinate the activities between the churches in the Covenant Communities, a person drawn from one of the participating churches will provide leadership. We recommend including both clergy and laity in this network of covenant leaders. The covenant leader will be designated by the district superintendent and will work with him/her in developing a climate within the Covenant Communities that encourages the growth of the participants. Leadership will normally rotate on a periodic basis.

- **Support and enrich Elders, Deacons, and others in pastoral leadership**

The *Book of Discipline* indicates that there shall be an Order of Deacons and an Order of Elders in each annual conference. All clergy who are full members of the annual conference are members of and participate in an order. These orders "seek to respond to the spiritual hunger among clergy for a fulfilling sense of vocation, for support among peers during this stressful time of change in the Church, and for a deepening relationship with God" (1996 *Book of Discipline*). In a United Methodist Church being transformed these gatherings can

play a vital role in ongoing clergy formation, especially as clergy seek to understand and live out their role as spiritual servant leaders. Participating in common Bible study and prayer, sharing both good and difficult experiences, responding to current challenges, and exercising mutual accountability may be useful tools for the life of persons in these orders. We encourage similar fellowships among local pastors and others in ministry for the church.

## **2. Call Forth Covenant Leadership**

Making disciples requires lay and clergy servant leaders who come together with one another and God in covenant to use their gifts as they prepare local churches and the whole church for God's mission in the world. Developing a servant leadership will require that The United Methodist Church move away from being a clergy-dependent church to one where ministry is shared among clergy and laity. Some United Methodist churches today are too dependent on the leadership of appointed clergy and staff. In the Wesleyan spiritual formation model, laity and clergy alike are ministers and share in the calling to make disciples of Christ. A transforming church will enable us to truly live out our belief in the ministry of all Christians. An emphasis on building spiritual leadership will engage the talents and energies of leaders throughout the church. It will energize and nurture local congregations and faith communities and build a sense of shared spiritual accountability.

Some men and women among us have special gifts as spiritual leaders, including the capacity to hold before the community of faith God's vision for the church. Spiritual leaders are disciples among us who practice the disciplines, point to God's saving grace, gather persons for the study of scripture, teach and model the teachings of Jesus Christ, help persons discover their potential to serve in the name of Jesus Christ, and walk with others on their journeys.

A transforming United Methodist Church needs spiritual leaders who will come together in covenant with God and with one another to hear the call of Christ, discern the will of God for our ministry in the world, nourish each other spiritually, and support each other in carrying Christ's message into the world. This spirituality is not just an inward spirituality that provides answers to personal problems but it is an outward spirituality that is expressed in work with the poor, the refugees, the prisoners, the dispossessed, and the broken-hearted. It is a spirituality for the healing of all people and of our nations.

Whether these leaders are leaders in local churches, annual conferences, central conferences, or the general church, they will be accountable to one another in covenant relationships, seeking God's direction and purpose rather than their own. Covenant undergirds how they organize, meet, conference, connect, and minister to the needs of the world as followers of Jesus Christ.

***In order to call forth spiritual leaders who are grounded in covenant relationships, we recommend the following:***

- **Develop lay servant leaders in local churches**

A spiritual servant leader, through God's love, brings the hope of transformation to people's lives and then walks with them on their journey. Spiritual leaders reach out to persons in the servant spirit of Jesus whose love knows no barrier of race, culture, gender, class, or other human circumstance. These covenant leaders are open and listening to God and to all with whom they connect, calling upon us to see God's direction and purpose rather than our own.

The local church is the beginning point for covenant leaders. Every local church has members with the capacity for covenant leadership who must be identified and invited to share fully in the ministry of the church. They must also be empowered to discern new missions and ministries and be supported as these new visions are carried out. Some will teach; some will visit the sick; some will preach; some will do works of compassion and justice; some will prophesy the vision of God's reign; all will be sharing in ministry.

- **Appoint clergy as servant leaders to various ministries**

Visionary pastoral leadership is essential to the transformation of The United Methodist Church. The covenant relationship between clergy and the annual conference is the foundation for that kind of leadership. The appointment of clergy to local churches and mission outposts should always be done for the purpose of carrying out the vision, mission, and ministry of God. Effective appointment-making is one of the most important responsibilities of the resident bishop and the process shall include prayerful consultation with both the clergy person and the local church through its staff-parish relations committee. District superintendents have a special role in ensuring that this collaboration occurs and that all parties are meaningfully involved.

The ongoing effectiveness of clergy requires a commitment to lifelong learning and continual transformation on the part of the clergy, and it requires support and nurture from the local church as part of the covenant relationship. This includes adequate compensation and housing, opportunities for rest and renewal, and resources and time for ongoing education and retooling.

Occasionally circumstances require that a clergy person be relieved of responsibilities for a period of time. In such cases, the bishop must have both flexibility and alternative choices in making appointments. The pastoral role of the bishop and district superintendent is an important part of their spiritual leadership in such situations. Opportunities for counseling and personal leave give the bishop and the clergy person important options in difficult circumstances.

In order to deal effectively and compassionately with clergy who need to move on to other vocational calls, careful attention must be given to the procedures, conditions, and requirements established to accomplish this. The covenant related to annual appointments must be lived out in ways that support the appointment of effective spiritual leaders.

- **Enable the district superintendent to be a spiritual servant leader**

The district will be a key place for connecting clergy and lay leaders in communities of covenant relationships, in relatively small geographical areas within districts (see Covenant Communities, p.4). These communities will be concerned primarily with Christian formation and mutual accountability and will connect people from several United Methodist churches. The district superintendent will bear the central responsibility for the development of these Covenant Communities.

This transformed role of the district superintendent will require relief from a substantial portion of the administrative and programmatic responsibilities that the

superintendent carries today. If the principle duty is to be an active spiritual leader with local churches and Covenant Communities, the superintendent will need to reprioritize time, energy, and resources. Programmatic efforts and other missional tasks should be generated or continued by local churches around areas of mutual interest. The district will not normally be the source of programming, except to the extent that it nourishes Covenant Communities, facilitates local programming, and serves as a channel for bringing the resources of the general church to support local initiatives.

The district superintendent will encourage conversations among local churches as they are linked in a rich variety of groups that sustain and nurture the growth and discipleship of all. He/she will have a pivotal role in working with pastors and laity in discerning and training new leadership.

- **Elect spiritual servant leaders as bishops for the church**

Since the institutionalization of the office of bishop in American Methodism, bishops have carried responsibility for guarding the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the church. They have provided prophetic spiritual leadership, gathered the community of faith for worship and the sacraments, and led the church to seek Christian unity and justice for all people. They bear special responsibility for preparing leaders for the church, particularly ordained clergy.

Episcopal leaders for the church, whose vision and discipleship equips them to serve, will be elected by central and jurisdictional conferences. In a transformed church, this election process should foster open, thoughtful deliberation, a broad sense of participation, and the creation of a shared vision. Each annual conference will be encouraged to nominate candidates who may become important spiritual leaders in the church. Persons elected to the episcopacy are elected to serve as bishops of the whole church. As a visible sign of this affirmation we recommend that bishops be consecrated at the Global Conference.

Bishops will model shared servant ministry by focusing their time and energy on spiritual and prophetic leadership within their annual conferences and in the world. Spiritual leadership is supported by the disciplines of prayer, scripture study, private and public worship, fasting, and Christian conferencing. Prophetic leadership includes listening to the world, to human suffering and sin, and raising the voice of justice and hope.

Bishops strive to provide this kind of visionary leadership, but we are concerned that this is made more difficult by increased administrative workloads, lack of support for the individual offices and for the Colleges and Council of Bishops, and the time and energy needed to deal with legal issues. We recommend that bishops reduce the responsibilities they have assumed in general agencies and other connectional bodies and that the annual conferences and the general church provide more support for the work of the bishops.

X **Educate servant leaders**

United Methodist educational institutions will play a special role in the development of spiritual servant leaders. These institutions are important repositories of our doctrinal, theological, and Wesleyan roots, and they help people expand their knowledge of Christian faith. We affirm the ministry of many institutions of higher learning that have maintained a close and complementary relationship with The United Methodist Church. They stress piety

and learning in their mission/vision statements and in their curricula. This has been their distinctive feature in the communities where they serve.

We call upon the seminaries to emphasize Christ-centered preaching and dynamic worship and upon the institutions of higher education to emphasize a broad educational foundation with a high level of moral and ethical values. Seminaries could be particularly helpful in assisting the church in the development of theological thought and language effective for the mission of the church in the twenty-first century.

Pastors trained through the Course of Study are very valuable to The United Methodist Church. This program is a vital source of educational opportunity for aspiring leaders, especially for those whose life circumstances or country of origin does not permit a seminary education. Seminaries and the church must work closely together to assure that the Course of Study includes the vital educational opportunities and challenges that will prepare effective spiritual leaders.

- **Create Covenant Councils**

Covenant is a biblical word describing the relationship initiated by God's love for creation and all persons. Undeservedly, all persons are called by God into a community of transformation where persons are continually challenged to respond and grow into and serve the coming fullness of God's love being manifest in the world.

This covenant is made firm through baptism in Christ. The Holy Spirit leads and reforms the life of this covenanted people. Their grateful response to God's unmerited love and mighty acts in history is one of praise and thanksgiving to God and the full dedication of one's life in service to God's ongoing transformation of persons and the world.

A Covenant Council is a table of spiritual and prophetic lay and clergy leaders who will gather for discernment, discussion, decision-making, and disciple-making. Together these leaders will seek to know God's vision for the church, set priorities for the ministry that support the vision, and allocate resources. The Covenant Council will consider all of ministry through a holistic interactive process where everyone's participation is encouraged and valued. As visionaries for the church, stewards of its resources, and transformational leaders, Covenant Council members will work in mutual trust and respect, the style of which will be collegial, Spirit-driven, and responsive to the common purpose of making disciples and serving God's world.

Covenant Councils will model relational community, and practice the spiritual disciplines and Christian conferencing. Members of Covenant Councils will seek to grow in Christian faith and discipleship and enable and support the Christian formation and discipleship of others.

We recommend that a Covenant Council be established in each local church, annual conference, central conference, and the United Methodist Global Conference. These councils will be the main forums of Christian conferencing in each part of the church. They will provide a networked order for our relationship and life together as a "connectional" people.

Each Covenant Council will be made up of clergy and laity. It is recommended that the membership of the Annual Conference Covenant Council include 1/3 clergy, 1/3 lay men, and 1/3 lay women. In a local church, a lay person elected by the body will chair the council. In other parts of the church, the council will elect the chair from its membership. The chair may be lay or clergy. The membership of all Covenant Councils will be inclusive of all persons, without regard to race, color, national origin, status, economic condition, age, gender, or disability and yet not so large as to make Christian conferencing and covenant relationships difficult. (It will be inclusive in the spirit of ¶117 of *The Book of Discipline*.) The Covenant Council will be responsible for assuring that the church's ministries of nurture, outreach, witness, administration, finance, leadership, and the elimination of racism and sexism are adequately cared for.

**Local Church Covenant Council:** The Covenant Council may replace all of the committees and other entities that are currently responsible for the life of the local church. All members of the council will share in discerning God's will and will be accountable to one another. Our current model of specialized committees with discrete responsibilities may be efficient, but it is not an effective arena for listening for the call of Christ, discerning the will of God, and nourishing each other spiritually. The council may delegate work to smaller groups whenever appropriate without losing sight of the overall mission and ministry of the church.

**Annual Conference Covenant Council:** The primary function of the Annual Conference Covenant Council will be to facilitate and coordinate the mission and ministry of the annual conference. It will lead the conference in its ministries of nurture, outreach, witness, leadership development, fiscal management, the elimination of racism and sexism, and the administration of its organizational and temporal life; this may replace the various boards, councils, and committees that currently oversee the work of the annual conference. The Covenant Council will be composed of spiritual and prophetic leaders drawn from the local churches and faith communities of the annual conference. The resident bishop will be a member. The actual number of members is to be determined by the ministry and mission needs of the conference. The Covenant Council will be collegial and will work at building consensus. The duties of discerning, prioritizing, articulating, providing resources, and implementing the full array of conference responsibilities will be entrusted to the council. It will have decision-making authority, determine staffing needs, and oversee the unified annual conference budget. It will be accountable to the annual conference.

**Central Conference Covenant Councils:** Central conferences, with the exception of the U.S. Central Conference, will be encouraged, but not required, to establish Covenant Councils to oversee their ministry and mission. The U.S. Central Conference will organize a Covenant Council. Like other Covenant Councils, it will guide the U.S. Central Conference in discerning God's vision for its ministry and mission. It will help the U.S. Central Conference focus on five functional areas: nurture, outreach, and witness ministries; leadership development; congregational development; administration and finances; and communication and interpretation. This will enable the annual conferences to work together in fulfilling their mission. The energy of the Covenant Council will call us to work together in the new way to make disciples of Jesus Christ. It will help us see the church as a whole, call us to respond to God's Spirit in shaping the ministries of the church, and lead us into deeper relationships as a



Christ-centered community. The Central Conference Covenant Councils would be implemented in 2004.

**Covenant Council for Global Ministry and Mission:** In a transformed church, Covenant Councils at the local church, the annual conference, the central conference, and the Global Conference will guide the denomination in discerning God's will for mission and ministry. The Global Conference no less than the local church must model a new way of being the church. A Covenant Council for Global Ministry and Mission will guide the church in its global work of nurture, outreach, witness, and leadership development. It will also be responsible for administrative and fiscal matters that undergird the church's global work and for continued work on the elimination of racism and sexism. The Covenant Council for Global Ministry and Mission will serve as a forum for theological discourse that promotes the ongoing spiritual formation and discipleship of all members of the church. The Covenant Council for Global Ministry and Mission would be implemented in 2004.

### **3. Empower the Connection for Ministry**

Ministry is the vital work of Christians. Ministries of the church are the things we do individually and together that bring into reality the mission of the church. This work is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and is the inevitable response to Christian experience. Ministries include proclaiming the gospel, worshiping, teaching, studying, and nurturing. Disciples are sent to share the Good News, to be present with the poor and marginalized, to care for the creation, and to work for peace and justice.

Local churches and faith communities are the most significant places for proclaiming the gospel and carrying out the mission of the church. In a transforming United Methodist Church, the local church must play a central role in determining the church's ministry and mission and in assessing and deploying resources, both material and human.

The annual conference continues to be the basic body of the church. It connects local churches with one another and with the global church. Its purpose is to facilitate making disciples of Jesus Christ. Its primary task is to discover, recruit, train, certify, appoint, supervise, sustain, and support accountable spiritual leaders for local churches and unique settings of ministry and to offer resources for the mission of local churches.

In the early Methodist movement, the annual conference session was the place where members of the Wesleyan movement gathered for accountable discipleship, fellowship, and exhortation. Wesley's memorable dictum, "I look upon the world as my parish," served as a reminder that one's discipleship is ultimately lived out in the context of global community.

Local churches and faith communities, expressions of the body of Christ in particular places, are not isolated entities. They undertake connectional and global activities that are consistent with their particular calling to mission and ministry. Together they will identify the larger concerns that require resources and coordination beyond the local church and even worldwide.

The interactive process affirmed by the 1996 General Conference as a new style of work for the church, calls all persons to come together to listen, to discern, and to respond, enabling them to move toward a common decision. When individuals led by the Holy Spirit are working together in this way, they

create a community. Such a community lives by the participation of all,

- learns and grows through diversity,
- asks for mutual understanding,
- builds ever-increasing energy and joy through interdependence, and
- serves as the body of Christ in the world.

Organizationally this new style of work brings all church leaders to the decision-making table known as the Covenant Council. God's vision as discerned by those leaders informs and guides the ministry and the mission of the church and the use of all its resources. How the church's ministry and mission goals are implemented is determined by the church's leaders participating together in the Covenant Council.

***In order to empower the connection for ministry, we recommend the following:***

- **Communicate the good news and build new faith communities**

In a transforming United Methodist Church, local churches will focus on spreading the good news of the gospel message to the people and places around them. The information pathways of cyberspace and the freeways and airways of modern society are analogous to the dusty roads of Galilee where the first disciples carried the gospel to all who would hear it and gather in Christ's name. In our day, local churches are the catalysts for making new disciples and spawning new faith communities. They are to be communities that actively and intentionally invite others. We must replace the image of the local church as a self-contained group of members identified with a physical place with the vision of dynamic twenty-first-century disciples proclaiming good news to all persons and inviting others to follow Jesus.

The annual conference bears responsibility for identifying and providing resources for places that need new congregations and faith communities. It needs to motivate and collaborate with local churches that want to start new communities of faith and then encourage and support the development of spiritual leaders who can give guidance to these new ministries. Leadership may take different forms in developing congregations than it does in well-established ones, and flexibility should be used to accommodate those differences.

- **Affirm central conferences**

We affirm the need to retain central conferences to bring together United Methodists in geographic areas for the support of mission and ministry. We further affirm the central conference structure as one that is relevant for the entire United Methodist Church and not just for those annual conferences located outside of the United States. Therefore we recommend that The United Methodist Church in the U.S. be structured as a central conference. In doing so, the church in the United States would be reaffirming that it is not the main channel of God's revelation and mercy to those called United Methodist nor is it self-sufficient. It is only one member of the family equally in need of God's grace and direction and of the witness, the prayers, the exhortations, and the nurture and care of our sisters and brothers from other places in the world.

- **Retain current jurisdictional conferences in the U.S. Central Conference**

The U.S. Central Conference will initially retain the current jurisdictional conferences (North Central, Northeastern, South Central, Southeastern, and Western) for the election and

assignment of bishops and any related work it so determines. Where necessary for its effective witness in its own geographic area, a jurisdictional conference may engage in promoting evangelistic, educational, missionary, and benevolent interests of the church and providing for other interests and institutions within its boundaries.

- **Redesign and align the work of general agencies**

Local churches, districts, and annual conferences work toward witness and service locally and regionally, but we also need a structure that can respond on behalf of the entire church. The general agencies of the church have enabled us to do that. Individually and collectively they have rendered a great service to the church and the world.

As we enter the twenty-first century there is need to examine how the services of the general agencies may be more effectively provided. They were formed at a time when the flow of communication and division of work were understood in an entirely different way. We are now experiencing an explosion of information and technology. Leaders in conferences and churches expect easy and direct access to information, resources, and services. United Methodists do not experience others ministering on their behalf in the same way as they once did; they want to be personally involved in their communities and beyond. Communities are rapidly becoming more globally connected. People increasingly view themselves as global citizens with responsibilities as well as opportunities for discipleship beyond their local communities. Increasingly the ability of our general agencies to provide access to essential information and to network and connect people across local churches and conferences in partnership for ministries and mission will be a measure of their effectiveness.

There are areas of work that extend beyond annual conferences that are essential for our mission to be fulfilled. These areas, because of our structure, have been divided and responsibility for portions of the work resides in various agencies with little connection. It is time to bring focus to these areas and develop means through which the agencies can coalesce and integrate their work through collaboration at the Covenant Council. This process is intended to identify, focus, and align all resources related to these areas: 1. Nurture, Outreach, and Witness Ministries; 2. Leadership Development; 3. Congregational Development; 4. Administration and Finances; 5. Communication and Interpretation. Presently these are located in the several general agencies. The agencies will need to come together cooperatively to serve, empower, and facilitate the ministries of annual conferences, districts, and local churches.

The intention of naming these areas is not to create super agencies or to try to fit present agencies into these categories, but rather to outline the areas in which collaboration and merging of work is necessary. To fulfill the vision this process will require collaboration to identify, focus, and align all resources related to the five areas of ministry located in the several agencies, so that they come together cooperatively to serve, empower, and facilitate ministries of annual conferences, districts, and local congregations and lead the church in what we must do together. As this collaborative work proceeds, an organizational structure for the agencies will emerge based on the work needing to be done in the future rather than past methods of organizing.

- 1. Nurture, Outreach, and Witness Ministries**

**Nurture Ministries:** These ministries focus on the formation and nurture of all who seek to know God. The biblical foundations of the Christian faith, our Wesleyan/Evangelical heritage, and acts of piety and devotion are central to this area. The nurturing ministries of the church shall give attention to the educational, worship, and stewardship components of ministry.

**Outreach Ministries in and to the World:** Through combined resources and leadership beyond annual conferences, United Methodists respond to crises, relieve suffering, educate children and adults, provide health services, challenge oppressive systems, and respond in other ways beyond what we can do in our local areas. These efforts powerfully express our connection. Acts of mercy and compassion and social holiness are central to this area and include local and larger community ministries of compassion and advocacy, church and societal issues, global ministries concerns, health and welfare ministries, Christian unity and interreligious concerns, religion and race, and status and role of women.

**Witness Ministries:** Fully living out our discipleship by embracing the stewardship of all of life, proclaiming the good news of Christ to the world, and providing hospitality to all persons is central to this area. It includes evangelistic outreach to persons, membership care, spiritual formation, communications, lay speaking ministries, and witnessing through the sharing of personal and congregational stories of Christian experience, faith, and service.

2. **Leadership Development:** Spiritual leaders are essential to fulfill the mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. The general agencies connect with clergy, district superintendents, bishops, students and staff of seminaries and universities, lay pastors, lay professionals, lay leaders, lay speakers, conference staffs, leaders of UMW and UMM, youth and young adult leaders. Our connectional system will ensure that our church has spiritual leaders in every place to hold the vision and guide the mission.
3. **Congregational Development:** Growing opportunities and contexts for making new disciples of Jesus Christ present a window of great opportunity for God's people called United Methodist. New communities of diverse persons, cultures, and language groups offer hospitality through intentional processes for new church development. This would embrace comprehensive supportive resources of demographics, planting processes, new creative models, working principles for birthing and leading new congregations, and development of abundant fiscal resources.
4. **Administration and Finances:** We must explore various ways to combine resources and make decisions together about financial and administrative issues. Systems that insure efficiency and wise use of resources need to be developed and taught across the church. We must energetically seek resources from a variety of places to empower our common ministries and mission.
5. **Communication and Interpretation:** We recommend that we make efforts to remove the barriers that prevent information from easy access and flow throughout the church. We must recognize and seize new opportunities for networking across

geographic boundaries, develop interactive electronic learning systems for different ages and languages, and develop a common data-gathering center for the church. We must find ways to tell the story of our Wesleyan heritage and its shaping power as we share the good news. Local churches and annual conferences need ways to learn from one another and the general agencies need to hear the concerns and hopes of the church and make known opportunities for mission and ministry.

#### **4. Strengthen Our Global Connection and Ecumenical Relationships**

The global nature of The United Methodist Church is seen most clearly in the location of its members. The United Methodist family represents the great human diversity of God's creation-it is multiracial and multicultural, and its members live and serve throughout the world. We believe that all persons are made in God's image and that God's salvation has come equally for all. Such a belief gives rise to the vision of a church that reflects the diversity of the communities where it serves, includes a leadership that is representative of that diversity, and calls upon society to be inclusive of all persons.

We affirm local flexibility in organization and increased independence for United Methodists to structure themselves for effective ministry within their own context. The structure of the church should affirm our doctrinal and theological roots and provide a network of covenant and relational opportunities for us.

As we work to strengthen the global connections among United Methodists, we also affirm the work of the World Methodist Council and give thanks for the important ways they link The United Methodist Church with other Methodist bodies around the globe. We welcome their leadership as we join in conversation and in relationships with the greater Methodist family without whom our efforts to be faithful in the world would be incomplete.

In the same spirit, the historic tradition of our church has consistently affirmed and we are called to strengthen our commitment to the unity of the church of Jesus Christ at the local, national, continental, and world levels. Christians also share with persons of other living faiths concerns that are basic to human life and dignity and knowing the Creator. With Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and others who seek to live in peace with the Creator and all of creation, we must address issues related to social justice, the human condition, the environment, and other social concerns.

*In order to strengthen our global connection and ecumenical relationships, we recommend the following:*

- **Reconstitute the General Conference as the United Methodist Global Conference**

We seek new ways to be The United Methodist Church in the world-a church where the connection is expressed globally through interdependent relationships. This transformation requires a shift from a model in which the United States' perspective dominates a highly structured organization to one where the global perspective supports a rich variety of United Methodist ministries and missions around the world. We strive to give new meaning to Wesley's historic global vision of relationships that connect local churches and people in a forum for Christian conferencing centered on essential matters of faith and practice that bind us as United Methodists.

In constituting the United Methodist Global Conference we recommend:

1. that the Global Conference be made up of 500 delegates and meet quadrennially. Because annual conferences are the fundamental link in the connection, we recommend that each annual and provisional conference be allowed to send two delegates (one clergy and one lay). The remainder of the 500 delegates will be apportioned to the annual conferences on the basis of membership.
2. that the United States Central Conference meet immediately following the Global Conference at the same site. The membership of the U.S. Central Conference shall be no more than 1000 delegates.
3. that the initial session of the Global Conference be held in 2008 and last for six days and the initial session of the U.S. Central Conference for six days. The length of the succeeding sessions will be determined by each conference.
4. that the U.S. jurisdictional conferences and all central conferences except the U.S. be held prior to the Global Conference and that all newly elected bishops be consecrated at the Global Conference.
5. that the current legislative functions of the General Conference be assigned to the Global Conference and the central conferences. Although not an exhaustive list, the following legislative functions have implications both globally and regionally. In consultation with all general agencies, the Covenant Council will review and make recommendations to the 2004 General Conference as to the division of responsibilities regarding which legislative functions would be global and which legislative functions would be the responsibility of the respective central conferences.

Constitution  
Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task  
Mission statements and global missional initiatives  
Global social principles  
General ministry of all Christians  
Clergy orders  
Episcopacy  
Global financial matters  
Global administrative order  
Global judicial order  
Formal ecumenical and interreligious relationships  
Definition or requirements for church membership

Central conferences will have authority to establish the sections of *The Book of Discipline* on legislative matters except those specifically delegated to the Global Conference.

6. that the majority of plenary time at the Global Conference be devoted to the

celebration of mission and ministry, global disciple-making concerns, Christian formation, theological and doctrinal conversation, and the consecration of newly elected bishops. The Global Conference should facilitate Christian conferencing, providing an opportunity for dialogue, discussion, and debate about the doctrinal and theological ties that bind us together without becoming overloaded with legislative agenda.

7. that continental meetings for consultative purposes be held during the meeting of the Global Conference. Each continent where The United Methodist Church is constituted would hold such a meeting (North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia).

We urge The United Methodist Church to continue working toward the vision of an inclusive church that denies every semblance of discrimination (see ¶117 of *The Book of Discipline*). The rise of hate crimes and genocide in the world makes the call for a clear witness to the goodness of the diversity of God's people even more urgent. In the spirit of this commitment we would recommend that annual conferences intentionally work toward the election of inclusive delegations to the conferences of the church.

- **Determine funding sources**

We recommend that the 2000 General Conference request GCFA to arrange funding for the 2008 Global Conference and U.S. Central Conference and also recommend funding patterns that would enable the implementation of this report.

- **Strengthen bishops as spiritual leaders**

The bishops are elected and consecrated as spiritual leaders of the church. As the Council of Bishops, they are to articulate the vision for and mission of the church and function as leaders to provide oversight to the church. They serve as the connecting links between their annual conferences in giving witness to God's transforming power in the world, and they help to connect local churches globally.

- **Strengthen global connections among educational institutions**

In a transforming church, the church and church-related educational institutions will continue to serve as partners in the preparation and ongoing development of church leaders. We recommend that United Methodist seminaries and other educational institutions around the world engage in intentional efforts to share faculty, students, library resources, and campus facilities with each other, with other Methodist institutions, and where possible and helpful with the institutions of other denominations. We also recommend that The United Methodist Church encourage the development of global cross-cultural experiences, support the development of extension courses for wide global availability using the new technology, and facilitate other global learning opportunities.

- **Explore relationships with autonomous and affiliated churches**

Autonomous and affiliated churches are churches that had their beginnings in the work of what is now The United Methodist Church. Their relationship to The United Methodist Church is different from that of the Central Conferences. We seek more faithful relationships with these churches and wish to expand mutual dialogue about the future.

The same understanding must be exercised in determining our future relationships with Affiliated United, Covenanting, and Concordat Churches through the central conferences.

- **Strengthen ecumenical relationships**

Scripture clearly states that Christians are to strive for unity as members of the one body of Christ. The divisions in that body are a sign of the reconciliation still needed. As United Methodists we affirm our commitment to healing the body of Christ. We encourage every local church to reach out to congregations and faith communities of other denominations for joint fellowship, witness, and service.

The Global Conference has the unique responsibility of leading all United Methodists at every place in the church (local, regional, national, and global) to practice our ecumenical commitment.

#### **X Explore interreligious dialogue**

We recommend that the Global Conference create a forum for ongoing conversation with other living faiths of the world. The purpose of interreligious dialogue with Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and others will be to strengthen our mutual understanding that we might live in peace with each other and together discern the mystery of God.

### **5. Encourage Doctrinal and Theological Discourse**

United Methodists around the world are connected by a rich array of doctrinal and theological understandings. Listening to views that differ from our own is possible when we are in covenantal relationships that are intellectually honest where we strive together to seek common ground. The practice of Christian conferencing includes connecting and renewing, discerning and deciding. Annual conference sessions, as well as other places, can provide opportunities for the discourse, debate, and consideration of these doctrinal and theological ties that bind us.

The United Methodist concern for the education of all persons is faithfully manifested through the academic institutions that have been established for different purposes and constituencies. Seminaries in particular provide vital training and support for theological and doctrinal training and discussion that furthers our understanding of our faith. They prepare leaders who articulate our faith, who are able to invite and engage others in conversations of faith that enable and enrich Christian discipleship. The ability to do these tasks effectively requires that seminaries, as well as other institutions of learning, be in relationship and conversation with the whole church—true partners in a Wesleyan mission to the world.

*In order to encourage doctrinal and theological discourse, we recommend the following:*

- **Engage local churches and faith communities**

Local churches and faith communities are the primary places where most United Methodists have the opportunity to engage in biblical and theological discourse. Throughout our journey toward Christian perfection there is a vital need to learn about United Methodist theological foundations, to use faith language in discussions, and to develop biblical and theological foundations for personal and social ethics. These learning opportunities may include:



- Christian educational opportunities for all ages;
  - > partnerships with seminaries and institutions of higher education which offer on-campus and community-based classes and seminars;
  - > ecumenical dialogue groups; and
  - > Covenant study groups combining biblical and theological discourse with spiritual and moral accountability.
  
- **Refocus the annual charge conference**

The visioning and planning for mission and ministry for which the charge conference of a local church is responsible would be infused with doctrinal and theological conversation. Such conversation would strive to know God's call for the life and work of the congregation in its community and in the world. The charge conference would continue to have responsibility for examining and recommending candidates for the ordained ministry and lay speakers, approving the compensation for its pastor and others appointed by the bishop, and other matters pertaining to property and finances. It would, however, be refocused to give greater attention to doctrinal and theological conversation in the spirit of Christian conferencing.
  
- **Refocus the annual conference session**

The annual conference session will be a place where its members can engage in honest and faithful reflection on doctrinal and theological issues. The session should be designed collaboratively by the Annual Conference Covenant Council and the resident bishop and should provide opportunities for Christian formation, theological reflection, celebration of local mission and ministry, and the ordination, consecration, and commissioning of leaders. Legislative matters should be limited in amount and confined to a well-defined period during the annual conference. Christian conferencing should flourish at the annual conference session.
  
- **Practice Christian conferencing at the Global Conference**

Christian conferencing will be a vital component of the new Global Conference where United Methodists from around the world consider and celebrate our common doctrine and our mission and ministry. This gathering will be a place that fosters visioning, deliberating, celebrating, and lifting up the prophetic voice of the church.

In our tradition, the practice of Christian conferencing is an important part of the way disciples are formed in the image of Christ. It includes connecting, renewing, discerning, and deciding. It is an integral component of a transformed church.
  
- **Affirm bishops as leaders in Christian conferencing**

In a transformed church, Christian conferencing will have renewed importance, especially in the context of the Covenant Councils whose members are responsible for the ministry and mission of the church in that place. The bishops in a transformed church will model, and encourage others to practice, a covenantal style of leadership that involves openness and a willingness to listen to others and to God as we seek God's direction and purpose rather than our own. Their purposeful and sustained attention to this style of leadership is essential to establishing effective Covenant Councils, which are key to the

transformation of the church. The bishops will also insure that a variety of intentional, nonlegislative settings are provided for the discourse, debate, and consideration of doctrinal and theological issues.

## CONCLUSION

The Connectional Process Team has studied the work of the General Council on Ministries Connectional Issues Study and the Global Nature of the Church Study of the Council of Bishops with great care. We have formed listening groups to try to hear as many voices of United Methodists in diverse locations and positions as was possible within time and budgetary constraints. We have also participated in other forums at the invitation of United Methodist constituencies as well as ecumenical partners, sharing with them the work of the CPT and listening to their response. As a result of our work during the first three years of this quadrennium, we believe that the call for transformation throughout The United Methodist Church is resounding and urgent. The consensus about the transformational directions that the CPT has discerned from its study, listening, debate, and prayer centers on Jesus' great commission to his disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20, NRSV). Our Wesleyan tradition helps us to understand that the Great Commission calls faithful disciples to witness to God's call to repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ and to carry out a ministry of service to a world in need of God's justice and redemption. We believe that The United Methodist Church will best respond to God's claim upon its life by refocusing the church on the spiritual formation of its members, the preparation and sending forth of spiritual and prophetic leaders, the commitment to live in covenant relationship with God and with each other, and the reclaiming of a connectional identity that builds disciples around the world who are able to witness and serve in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

The Connectional Process Team places these transformational directions and recommendations before the General Conference of The United Methodist Church in the covenantal spirit of open and vigorous analysis and deliberation. We ask that you prayerfully consider this report as a whole, for the transformational directions build upon one another. We believe that these directions can open us, The United Methodist Church, to greater awareness of and attentiveness to God's guidance.

We present this report with humility and an open understanding and hope that the report will stimulate thoughtful, prayerful, Spirit-filled consideration. We have been privileged to be a part of this important process, and we recognize that this report will not be what it needs to be without the many responses that we look forward to receiving from across the church.

As we consider these challenging but exciting changes for the church, let us remember: Our connection is based on trust

- trust that the risen Christ has transformed and is transforming the church and the world
  - trust that the Holy Spirit is leading the transformational process
  - trust that people and structures at all places in the church can be and should be vested with authority as well as responsibility
  - trust that making disciples of Jesus Christ is done most effectively when decisions are made in the place where ministry is done.

Grace and peace be with all of you.

## LIVING INTO THE FUTURE

Upon adoption of the foregoing document, "Transformational Directions for The United Methodist Church for the Twenty-First Century," we recommend that a **Covenant Council** be created to lead in modeling Christian conferencing and covenant relationships, and to enable The United Methodist Church to act upon the transformational directions.

During the 2001-2004 quadrennium, the Covenant Council will replace the current General Council on Ministries and will help us move toward collaborative work among the Global and Central Conferences. It will model the new style of leadership of Covenant Councils, guiding The United Methodist Church in discerning God's vision for its ministry and mission by providing an holistic process that focuses the work of all the parts. This vision enables the council to clarify responsibilities, to call for accountability to the vision and mission goals, and to provide for focused, shared resourcing for ministry and mission in a changing, complex environment. The Covenant Council will call us to work together in a new way to make disciples of Jesus Christ. It will help us see the church as a whole, call us to respond to God's Spirit in shaping the ministries of the church, and lead us into deeper relationships as a Christ-centered community. Discerning God's vision for the church is a continuous process since our God is a living God.

The Covenant Council will be assigned the following tasks:

1. To lead The United Methodist Church in knowing God's will for its work, and living as biblical people in the Wesleyan tradition through a style of leadership where all members of the Covenant Council are equals around the table with voice and vote. The Covenant Council will strive to live and work together in a manner that is collegial, cooperative and inclusive, and that actively practices hospitality.
2. To guide The United Methodist Church in articulating a clear and compelling ministry vision through a holistic process that focuses the work of all the parts.
3. To prepare appropriate legislation to implement the Global Conference and Central Conferences as envisioned in the transformational directions. A preliminary draft of this legislation shall be shared with the Church by July 1, 2002. A final draft shall be presented to the 2004 General Conference.
4. To redesign and align the work of the general agencies and to provide implementing legislation to the 2004 General Conference.
  - developing specific ways for agencies to integrate work in the areas described on pp. 12-13, including the number and size of agencies and the size and configuration of elected agency boards for the most effective use of combined resources;
  - determining how the work of agencies will be assigned to the Global and Central Conference Covenant Councils after 2004;
  - determining how agencies will provide resources for annual conferences and local churches;

- recommending to the 2004 General Conference the best way to staff the work beyond the annual conferences and determining where the responsibility for personnel should be vested; and
- developing ways of evaluating the results of the work that is financed.

5. The present membership of the General Council on Ministries shall complete its work by September 1, 2000. For purposes of transition, the GCOM Conciliar Forum will continue to function until July 1, 2001, in order to complete any necessary administrative, legal and personnel responsibilities in cooperation with the Covenant Council. Staff necessary to the transitional work of the Conciliar Forum will also continue until July 1, 2001. This necessary staff will be determined by the Council of Bishops, in consultation with the GCOM Conciliar Forum.

6. To assure and execute in transformational ways any further essential responsibilities *presently assigned to the GCOM as per the 1996 Book of Discipline of The UMC*, including:

- modeling, teaching, and practicing our identity as United Methodist Christians;
- clearly stating and communicating missional objectives and faith stories;
- engaging in leadership development and training and ensuring inclusiveness of participation.

The Covenant Council, in consultation with the GCOM Conciliar Forum, will determine the essential functions that must be continued beyond 2004 and those that should be discontinued, and will make the appropriate recommendations to the 2004 General Conference.

7. To propose to the 2004 General Conference the next steps for implementing the Covenant Councils throughout the connection and at all times to be guided by the transformational directions.

8. To relate to annual conferences and build mutual relationships with annual conference leadership.

9. The Council of Bishops will convene the Covenant Council as soon as possible but no later than December 1, 2000, and choose from among its retired membership a bishop to staff the Covenant Council through the 2004 General Conference.

10. The membership of the Covenant Council will include:

- ! one bishop from each jurisdiction and the secretary of the Council of Bishops and three bishops from the Central Conferences (one each from Europe, the Philippines, and Africa) elected by the Council of Bishops 9
- ! three representatives from each jurisdiction (15) (one clergy, two lay) recommended by the colleges of bishops and elected by the Council of Bishops, and one lay person from each central conference (7), recommended by the bishops of the central conferences and elected by the Council of Bishops 22

!	the general secretary of each general agency	13
!	one elected member from each general agency (lay if general secretary is clergy), elected by the general agency	13
!	two representatives from the affiliated autonomous churches in Asia and two representatives from the affiliated autonomous churches in Latin America, designated by the appropriate fraternal organization in the region	4
●	two representatives from the affiliated autonomous Methodist Church of Puerto Rico	2
!	additional members for inclusiveness, diversity, and proportionality, with particular attention to including a variety of ethnic/racial persons and youth and young adults, elected by the Council of Bishops, not to exceed 15	15
	TOTAL	78

It is recommended that the membership include 60% laity and 40% clergy.

11. The Covenant Council will be provided funding at the level of the funding allocated to the General Council on Ministries for the 1997-2000 quadrennium.

12. The Covenant Council will be accountable to the 2004 General Conference, and will report back on each of the tasks listed above. During the 2001-2004 quadrennium, the Covenant Council will make annual progress reports to the Council of Bishops and the annual conferences.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Bishop Sharon A. Brown Christopher, Chairperson

## Appendix I

### THE WORK OF THE CONNECTIONAL PROCESS TEAM

The 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church established the Connectional Process Team to “manage, guide and promote a transformational direction for The United Methodist Church to continue the work begun by the Connectional Issues Study of the General Council on Ministries and the Global Nature of the Church Study of the Council of Bishops.”

The specific purposes of CPT outlined by the General Conference were to:

- 1. Enable The United Methodist Church more faithfully to carry out its mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ.*
- 2. Support local churches as the primary locus of mission and ministry within The United Methodist Church.*
- 3. Review the summarized data collected by the General Council on Ministries Connectional Issues Study, the Council of Bishops Global Nature Study, and other pertinent studies and responses, to assess the missional and structural needs of The United Methodist Church, and to facilitate the ongoing process of renewal throughout the Church.*
- 4. Consider recommendations received by the General Conference related to the General Council on Ministries Connectional Issues Study and the Council of Bishops Global Nature Study.*
- 5. Arrange for communication and training in the interactive organizational process for implementation by local churches and annual conferences, using the resources of appropriate church agencies.*
- 6. Establish methods to receive feedback from local churches, annual conferences, jurisdictional conferences, and central conferences that are using the interactive organizational process, and share with the Church those models being developed.*
- 7. Establish methods for evaluation and refinement of the interactive organizational process.*
- 8. Facilitate an interactive organizational process with the general agencies, boards and the Council of Bishops that will clarify the mission of the general church agencies in supporting and resourcing the Church. The second step in the discerning and interactive process will be to define and recommend the most faithful structure to enable the ministries of the local church, conferences and institutions of the Church.*
- 9. Hold periodic hearings across the Church to continue discerning God's vision for the Church.*
- 10. Develop basic organizational forms to enable the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church.*
- 11. Consider the advisability of regional and global conferences and propose and further*

*elaborate upon their nature, work and composition.*

*12. Invite the affiliate and autonomous churches into dialogue regarding the Global Nature of the Church and the interactive organizational process, and encourage their ongoing feedback and participation in this process.*

*13. Report to The United Methodist Church no later than January 1999. Based on feedback and responses, make a final report and bring recommendations to the General Conference in the year 2000.*

In addition, the Connectional Process Team was asked to collaborate with the Council of Bishops, the General Council on Ministries, and the General Council on Finance and Administration as its work developed as well as engage in dialogue with other general agencies of the Church. The General Commission on the Role and Status of Women and the General Commission on Religion and Race were asked by the 1996 General Conference to monitor the implementation of the CPT to ensure racial and ethnic participation and the participation of women. The GCOM provided staffing for the CPT and the GCFA provided the necessary funding for the CPT's work.

All United Methodists were asked to discern and articulate God's vision for ministry as guided by the Holy Spirit. The 1996 General Conference declared that "the vision for each part of the United Methodist Church should be consistent with God's vision for the whole United Methodist Church."