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Photo: Paul Jeffrey

## GOD'S MISSION TODAY

The biblical story, which continues in the church, tells of God's effort to establish a realm of justice, mercy, peace, and love. For Christians, the divine initiative becomes living flesh in Jesus Christ, who both defines God's realm and is the entrance into it for those who believe. Faith is the response of disciples—followers of Jesus Christ—and disciples use the gifts of hope and love to foster God's realm. Christians respond to and accept God's mission as their mission. Mission starts with “theology”—the knowledge of God. Disciples proclaim in word and deed the “gospel”—good news—of the possibility of God's realm of justice, mercy, peace, and love.

A major responsibility of the church, the community of faith, in any given age or place is to understand God's mission and organize faithful responses. For United Methodists, one family within the Christian community, the task of understanding and organizing mission takes place in the many venues of the “connection.” Methodism is a kind of tapestry of faith whose parts make up a vivid portrait. The United Methodist network of congregations, conferences, and institutions makes collective decisions, finally, through the General Conference, which meets every four years, and records its theological understanding and vision of mission in *The Book of Discipline*—the rule for life together in the United Methodist community of faith.



Photo: Johnathan Slaughter

## A. MISSION: ITS MEANING AND MANDATES

“To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” is the mission statement of The United Methodist Church as stated by the 2008 General Conference. The church seeks to extend the community of faith for the sake of moving the world toward the realm God desires.

Through the General Conference, the church has set up a network of agencies that foster the goal of the mission statement in a variety of ways. One such agency is the General Board of Global Ministries. It has a broad range of mission mandates which it pursues on behalf of the entire church and in collaboration with the many expressions of the United Methodist connection.

*The Book of Discipline, 2008*, states that the mission of Global Ministries is “to discern those places where the gospel has not been heard or heeded and to witness to its meaning throughout the world, inviting all persons to newness of life in Jesus Christ through a program of global ministries” (*The Book of Discipline, 2008*, ¶1302.1).

### “SIGN OF GOD’S PRESENCE”

The *Discipline* states that the Board is “a missional instrument of The United Methodist Church, its annual conferences, missionary conferences, and local congregations in the context of a global setting.” It further affirms that “The church in mission is a sign of God’s presence in the world. By the authority of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church:

- Joins God’s mission to reclaim, restore, and redeem the life of all creation to its divine intention;
- Confesses by word and deed the redeeming activity of God in Christ among the whole human family;
- Seeks to embody and realize the potential of new life in Christ among all human beings; and
- Looks forward in faith and hope for the fulfillment of God’s reign and the completion of God’s mission.” (¶1301, in part).

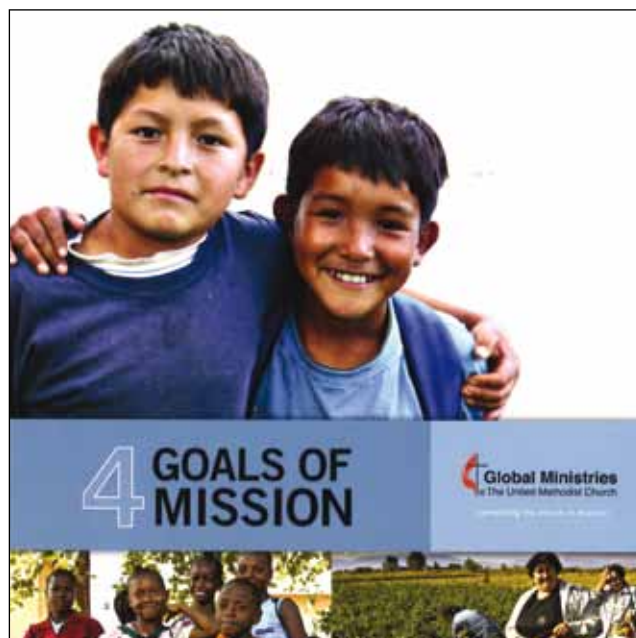


Photo: Mike DuBose

## MANDATES

It is important to note that these mandates, or assignments, are given to the whole church, with Global Ministries having the special responsibility of keeping them before the membership. The General Board of Global Ministries is then given specific duties—work to promote among the faithful (*The Book of Discipline, 2008*, ¶1302). These include:

- Invite persons to newness of life in Jesus Christ. “To discern those places where the gospel has not been heard or heeded and to witness to its meaning throughout the world, inviting all persons to newness of life in Jesus Christ through a program of global ministries.”
- Support and develop leadership for mission. “To encourage and support the development of leadership in mission for both the Church and society.”
- Challenge United Methodists with the Great Commission. “To challenge all United Methodists with the New Testament imperative to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth, expressing the mission of the Church, and to recruit, send, and receive missionaries, enabling them to dedicate all or a portion of their lives in service across racial, cultural, national, and political boundaries.”
- Establish and strengthen congregations. “To plan with others and to establish and strengthen Christian congregations where opportunities and needs are found, so that these congregations may be units of mission in their places and partners with others in the worldwide mission of the Christian church.”
- Work for the unity of Christ’s church. “To advocate and work for the unity of Christ’s church through witness and service with other Christian churches and through ecumenical councils.”



- Engage in an interfaith dialogue. “To engage in dialogue with all persons, including those of other faiths, and to join with them where possible in action on common concerns.”
- Facilitate global mission through congregations and annual conferences. “To assist local congregations and annual conferences in mission both in their own communities and across the globe by raising awareness of the claims of global mission and by providing channels for participation.”
- Support and equip women in mission. “To express the concerns of women organized for mission and to help equip women for full participation both locally and globally in the Church and the world.”
- Engage in direct ministries to human need. “To engage in direct ministries to human need, emergency and continuing, institutional and noninstitutional, however caused.”
- Work for transformation and liberation. To work within societies and systems so that full human

potential is liberated and to work toward the transformation of demonic forces which distort life.

- Identify with the oppressed. “To identify with all who are alienated and dispossessed and to assist them in achieving their full human development—body, mind, and spirit.”
- Engage in imaginative new forms of mission. “To envision and engage in imaginative new forms of mission appropriate to changing human needs and to share the results of experimentation with the entire Church.”
- Develop cooperative models of ministry. “To facilitate the development of cooperative patterns of ministry so that the unified strength of local congregations and other units of the Church in designated areas can respond with more effective ministries of justice, advocacy, compassion, and nurture.”
- Facilitate Volunteers in Mission. “To affirm the concept of Volunteers in Mission (short-term) as an authentic form of personal missionary involvement and devise appropriate structures to interpret and implement such opportunities for short-term volunteers in the global community.”
- Facilitate deployment of missionaries from outside the United States. “To facilitate the receiving and assignment of missionaries from churches in nations other than the United States. This may include other general agencies and annual conferences of The United Methodist Church.”

## THE FOUR GOALS

These responsibilities and objectives are summarized for operational purposes as the Four Goals of the General Board of Global Ministries. They are to:

- Make Disciples of Jesus Christ. —We will witness by word and deed among those who haven’t heard or heeded the gospel of Jesus Christ. We will initiate, facilitate, and support the creation and development of communities of faith that seek, welcome, and gather persons into the body of Christ and challenge them to Christian discipleship. Where direct proclamation is not permitted, a caring presence becomes the means of Christian witness;
- Strengthen, Develop, and Renew Christian Congregations and Communities. —We will work mutually with mission partners in common growth and development of spiritual life, worship, witness, and service;
- Alleviate Human Suffering. —We will help to initiate, strengthen, and support ministries to the spiritual, physical, emotional, and social needs of people; and,
- Seek Justice, Freedom, and Peace. —We will participate with people oppressed by unjust economic, political, and social systems in programs that seek to build just, free, and peaceful societies.

## B. CONNECTED IN MISSION

A major responsibility of the General Board of Global Ministries is to connect the various parts of the church as United Methodists engage in global mission. It builds on its heritage, adapting its approach and structure to remain engaged in and relevant to the opportunities God brings as people of faith move into the future.



Photo: Mike DuBose/UJMS

The objective of any mission organizational pattern is to provide a framework and mechanisms through which the church responds to and proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ. The aim of the General Board of Global Ministries is to be a biblically rooted, historically informed, and organizationally flexible means of spreading the good news.

### **PARTNERSHIPS**

Connected in mission means collaboration and interaction in the areas of theological reflection and action. A significant experience in broad-based theological reflection took place in the late 1980s through the process of an international hearing that produced a benchmark paper on “Partnership in God’s Mission: Theology of Mission Statement.”

Revised a dozen years ago and still relevant, this paper offers the theological reflection and operational considerations on the disciplinary provisions cited above. It provides helpful guidance in understanding how United Methodists link to God’s mission in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The emphases on partnership and the understanding that God’s mission is contextual are indelible parts of the Global Ministries’ reality.

The statement’s theological affirmation of the powerful love of God in Jesus Christ is central to all Christian thought. One summary passage in the document speaks to

United Methodist mission in any decade:

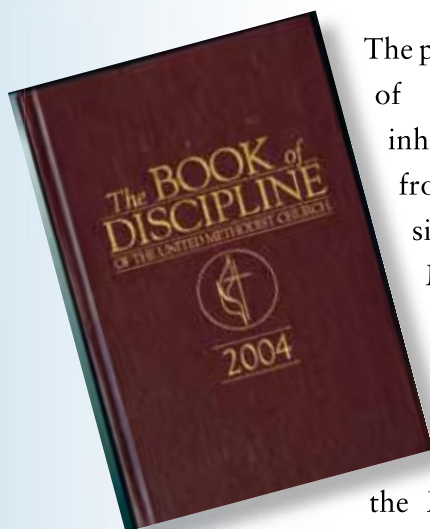
God's light shines in every corner of the earth, and God's mission extends to all creation. There are no places in the world where God is not present, only places where God in Christ is not known, acknowledged, served or heeded.

Partnership in God's mission means being in mission as God is in mission. It is global in focus and local in expression. In the United Methodist tradition it is also connectional in representation.

The church in mission with God is the community of the new covenant which bears unique witness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ, confessing in word and deed the good news of salvation from God. The church continues the revelation of God in Christ by telling the story of salvation and by seeking to embody and extend the transformed existence of new life in Christ.

### CONNECTED TO THE MISSION PAST

Maintaining links to the history and heritage of Methodist and United Methodist work is important work because that heritage is strong and instructive.



The present General Board of Global ministries inherited a rich legacy from predecessor mission agencies of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. The Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal

Church, begun in 1820, was among the earliest of those agencies and focused on mission both within and outside the United States. It sent its first missionary, Melville Cox, to Liberia in 1832. In 1855 the Evangelical Association, representing one stream of the Evangelical United Brethren, sent its first missionaries to West Africa.

The issue of slavery divided the Methodist Episcopal Church in the 1840s and the newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church, South, formed its own mission agency with offices in Nashville. Mission outreach flourished in both “northern” and “southern” churches. Also, in both, in the late 19th century women began to form their own freestanding societies for home and foreign missions and to send women missionaries, who were responsible for starting numerous educational, medical, and childcare institutions. Women became firmly established as important players in Methodist mission.

In 1939-1940, the Methodist Church was formed by reunification of the two branches that separated prior to the Civil War, with the addition of the Methodist Protestant Church, a small denomination with a “republican” outlook that did not include the office of bishop. The new church established a Board of Missions and located it in New York City in a building owned by the Methodist Publishing House at 150 Fifth Avenue. The Board brought together eleven mission organizations. Its structure included Home and Foreign Mission Divisions, the Women's Division of Christian Service, and a Joint Division of Education and Cultivation—each headed by its own general secretary. For nearly a quarter of a century, until 1964, the Board remained in the same location, with the same organization and the same president.



In 1946, the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church joined to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church. The new denomination formed a Board of Missions.

The Board of Missions of the Methodist Church underwent a major reorganization in 1964, by then located in The Interchurch Center at 475 Riverside Drive, New York City. The new plan lodged the administration of institutions and personnel in the newly named World and National Divisions. Institutions, missionaries, and deaconesses that formerly related only to the Women's Division became the responsibilities of those divisions. Work by the Women's Division in mission resource preparation and distribution became part of a single Joint Commission on Education and Cultivation. The Women's Division came to focus primarily on providing resources for mission and organizing local units and creating programs for what is today United Methodist Women. The women were guaranteed a minimum of 40 percent of the staff positions in the new structure and equal Board representation in the other units. For the first time, the Board had a single general secretary and general treasurer.

In 1968, the creation of The United Methodist Church brought about the merger of the Methodist and

Evangelical United Brethren Mission Boards. The Evangelical United Brethren's mission staff, along with its magazines, resources, and administrative functions, joined the operation at 475 Riverside Drive, New York City.

For the current structure of Global Ministries, see pages 12-19.

### CONNECTING TO CURRENT UNITED METHODIST PRIORITIES

In the latter part of the 2005-2008 quadrennium, the Connectional Table and the Council of Bishops endorsed four focus areas around which all of the general agencies were mandated to collaborate and also to organize major parts of their budgets. One hope is that annual conferences and congregations will also begin to organize their ministries around the four goals.

Global Ministries welcomed this opportunity for greater connection with other agencies on the four areas, all of which are essential parts of the mission agenda, as is evident by comparing the items below with the mission mandates above. The four focus areas are:

- Creating new places for new people and revitalizing existing congregations.
- Developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world.
- Engaging in ministry with the poor.
- Combating the diseases of poverty by improving health globally.

**New Congregations:** The United Methodist Church is growing in some parts of the world while experiencing continuing decline in many parts of the

United States. This program priority recognizes this reality, seeks to understand it, and is devoted to finding successful ways to continue the growth outside the US and also developing a culture of church growth in the US. Planting new churches and faith communities as well as the revitalization of existing churches is an effective strategy for overall membership growth. Global Ministries projects 400 new congregations outside the US in 2009-2012 as well as the development of new racial and ethnic congregations in the US.

**Leadership Development:** The church cannot fulfill its mandates from Jesus Christ without the continual development of lay and clergy leaders for its work. Effective leadership must be fully committed, contextually relevant, appropriately trained, and called by God for their work. Global Ministries is committed through its 2009-2012 budgets to clergy and lay leadership development on a global scale and to a range of responsibilities within the church and society.

**Ministry with the Poor:** The gospel of Jesus Christ requires ministries with and on behalf of the poor; the Wesleyan foundations of Methodism illustrate both gospel mandate and its practical applications, and current United Methodist theology and human needs call the church, its people, and agencies to strengthen such existing ministries. The Social Principles, actions of the General Conference, and vision of the Council of Bishops, underscore the spiritual and social values of ministry with the poor. This concern is deeply rooted in the church's practice of providing services to the poor through the establishment of healthcare facilities, orphanages, schools, and colleges. Overseas mission work also reflected this concern, especially

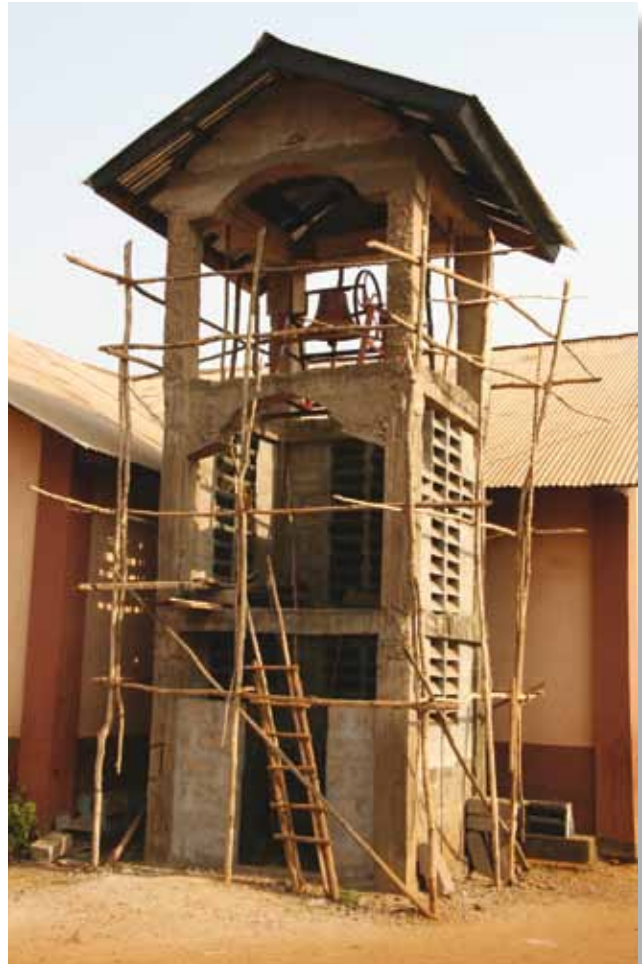


Photo: Christopher Heckert

for poor women and children. Increased program focus will be global in nature, including the US. It will augment and complement work in Area 4.

**Global Health:** This initiative seeks to enhance and expand local and global health and wholeness ministries, especially with respect to the control of preventable diseases and the reduction of health challenges caused by poverty. Incidences of malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, bacterial infections, and health issues related to malnutrition are particularly high among the poor, children, and the elderly. The church, from its earliest beginnings, has had a remarkable interest in, and concern about, global health. A far-reaching initiative involving advocacy, prevention, treatment, research, and action would make a significant difference.