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PROGRAM IDEAS FOR FOUR FOCUS AREAS

The four denominational focus areas are discussed in the opening section (see pages 9-10) and are referred to several times in this handbook as strong organizing themes for mission on any level of the church: local, district, annual conference, and general.

Two or three suggestions, or ideas, are listed here for each area. They may be pursued on the annual conference level, perhaps as projects of the Conference Board of Global Ministries. Most of the proposals here will involve collaboration with other program units of the conference. None of the four areas exist in isolation from the full life and agenda of the church.



Photo: Cassandra Heller

A. NEW CHURCH STARTS

1. US CHURCH DEVELOPMENT.

Work with the Conference Board of Discipleship and any special committee on church development to determine how many new congregations have been planted within conference boundaries within the last five years. Explore these questions:

- Where are the new churches located in terms of population density, economic conditions, and ethnic/racial composition?
- How many of these churches serve poor or low-income communities?
- What factors motivated the location of, and commitment to, each new congregation?
- How has each new congregation fared since its start?
- What seem to be the major factors in: a) a new church start success; or, b) failure?

In many cases this information will be available from the conference office. In fact, many conferences have extensive data on new church starts. Use your own findings or those already available to educate the members of the Board of Global Minis-

tries or the conference membership as a whole on the conference's recent experience in new congregational development. Stress that extending the family of faith through new communities of worship and service are components of mission. Link this effort to the conference's Path One emphasis on new churches, and to efforts of Global Ministries and the ethnic/language plans (see pages 67-71) to start new congregations across the US.

2. NEW CHURCHES OUTSIDE THE US.

Through the efforts of the Conference Board of Global Ministries, organize the conference to make a commitment to take part in starting at least seven new congregations outside the US during the 2009-2012 quadrennium. A new mission program through Global Ministries has set a goal of 400 new congregations across the globe, outside the US, in that four-year span. Many of these are being developed through the Mission Initiatives. (See pages 52-59.) They are also being developed through such earlier efforts as In Mission Together (in Eastern Europe) and Mission Partner Churches in Latin America and the Caribbean. The 400 Fund of The Advance (see pages 93-96) challenges United Methodists to contribute anywhere from a penny to an unlimited amount for each new church. The fund was initiated by a gift of \$1,000 for each church from Mary Watson, an Atlanta, Georgia, businesswoman. "Even children can participate," she said in announcing her gift and her challenge to other church members to do likewise. "It is what God wants us to do."



B. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

1. ACADEMY OF MISSION RENEWAL.

Build a conference mission coalition to sponsor an Academy of Mission Renewal in every district during the quadrennium (see pages 30-31). The Conference Board of Global Ministries could take the lead, involving the resident bishop, the district superintendents, United Methodist Women, the Conference Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the Conference Board of Discipleship, and United Methodist Men in the planning and implementation. Use *Faithful Witnesses* as a basic resource and seek other materials and consultation from the General Board of Global Ministries. Ask the Conference Commission on Communications and the Conference Communicator to assist in both promoting and reporting on the academies.

2. ENCOURAGE MISSION SERVICE.

How many missionaries, and how many deaconesses or home missionaries have the conference produced in the last decade? How many young adults have entered the Mission Intern or US-2 service programs (see pages 45-46)? How many Global Ministries-related persons in mission service are currently within the conference boundaries? Find out by research conducted through the Conference Board of Global Ministries or the Committee on Mission Personnel. If the numbers are impressive, find out why. If they are low, discover the reasons. Use these findings to call attention to the church's continuing need of mission professionals for service around the world, in-



cluding in many US communities. Work with the conference United Methodist youth organization to bring short-term professional mission service to the attention of the young adults in the conference. Invite missionaries, deaconesses, or US-2s to speak at conference and district events.

3. PROMOTE COVENANT RELATIONSHIPS.

These special relationships are mutually rewarding for congregations and missionaries (see pages 49-51). Missionaries are among the most significant leaders in the global church and their numbers need to be increased and replenished. At present, only five percent of United Methodist congregations support a missionary through a Covenant Relationship. Several conferences at the end of the 2005-2008 quadrennium have accepted an Advance challenge to increase covenants by at least 10. If every conference in the US achieved this goal, 630 new covenants would be established. The Conference Board of Global Ministries can spearhead this effort, which will be strengthened by soliciting the endorsement of the resident bishop, the district superintendent, and the conference lay leader. For assistance, contact The Advance (see page 93).

C. MINISTRY WITH THE POOR

1. EXPLORE THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE CONTEXT.

Christians need to keep up with the economic realities in the immediate region and globally. This is in part because ministry with the poor, as discussed in the opening chapter, is both a biblical and a United Methodist mandate. Ministry with the poor is not just a matter of responding to poverty through charitable deeds, such as contributing money. Ministry with the poor also means respecting the poor as children of God, including people of all economic standings in the life of the church, and sharing available material resources. It means celebrating and receiving the grace of God as brothers and sisters in the human family.

One conference activity could begin with a survey of economic realities within the geographical area of the conference. Find out which counties, cities, or townships (depending on the civic organization) have the highest rate of persons living below the poverty level. Gather data on homelessness and hunger. Then find out how many United Methodist congregations exist in that area and what kind of ministries with the poor take place there. If The United Methodist Church is not represented in the target zone, what steps can be taken to enter into a holistic ministry with that population? A holistic ministry would incorporate spiritual and material dimensions and involve interactions that respect families and individuals regardless of their economic condition. What concrete ministries could help to improve the economic prospects of the poorest of the poor in the conference territory?

2. VOLUNTEER TEAMS AND POVERTY.

Many teams organized under the banner of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission encounter acute poverty in many parts of the world. Take advantage of this first-hand experience to highlight ministries with the poor throughout the annual conference. The conference coordinator of volunteers will likely know of recent examples where construction or medical teams have worked in poverty zones in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, or Latin America. Through interviews, collect accounts of responses to poverty from both youth and adult participants on representative teams. Include the following questions in the data gathering:

- Does poverty seem more acceptable outside the US than within it?
- How many people on the teams remember the names of individuals in the places visited? How many developed sustained friendships with those visited?
- Have members of the volunteer teams maintained contact with those persons visited? How are these contacts viewed?

Use the information gathered to prepare a presentation or display for an annual conference session or for meetings of United Methodist Women or United Methodist Men.



D. GLOBAL HEALTH

1. CONGREGATION-BASED HEALTH MINISTRIES.

Increasing numbers of US congregations are engaged in health ministries involving their own, often aging, congregations. Sometimes these ministries are in communities in which the congregations are located, or they may be in other areas where there are communities of need. Such ministries often involve parish nurses; most engage in health education and screening rather than offering direct health services, although there are many patterns of congregation-based health ministry. Congregation-based free clinics are emerging in some areas.

Explore and foster congregation-based health ministries through the conference organization. Conduct a congregation-based health census in the conference. Explore these questions:

- Where are these ministries focused? On members of congregations? Congregation and community? Primarily communities of need?
- Where emphasis is on members, are there also opportunities to expand into local or regional communities of need?
- Are there congregation-sponsored free health clinics in the conference? If so, how are they staffed and supported? Can they use partners?
- How many congregational health ministries assist persons to access public health or other low-cost health systems?

This data can be used to educate other congrega-

tions on the values of congregation-based health ministries. UMCOR Health at Global Ministries can be a resource in this project (see page 81).

2. GLOBAL HEALTH OUTREACH.

The connectional nature of The United Methodist Church offers almost unlimited opportunities for US congregations to become involved in global health ministries, particularly those that tackle the diseases of poverty, such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis. Education and action campaigns on the conference level can be organized around one or more of the following on an annual or quadrennial basis:

- United Methodist hospital and clinic revitalization—there are 16 hospitals and more than 50 clinics outside of the US related to the denomination.
- Malaria prevention and treatment—not only providing mosquito nets but also the training that is required to make the use of nets effective.
- AIDS education and treatment—notably through the Global AIDS Fund.





Photo: Mike DuBose

- Child nutrition and health care—particular commitments of United Methodist Women.
- Ministries with persons with handicapping conditions—both domestic and international

Enlist conference organizations of United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, and youth and young adult groups in health-related campaigns that both provide education and support particular projects. Seek assistance in planning from UM-

COR Health or other units of Global Ministries such as Women's Division.

3. MINISTRIES FOR THE DEAF AND DISABLED.

a. Deaf, Late-Deafened, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind Ministry.

A committee concerned about this population was formed in 2004 by action of the General Confer-

ence and works to encourage the use of interpreters, listening devices, and/or real time captioning in congregations. Advocacy of such outreach could be a strong ministry on the annual conference level. The committee also awards grants that affirm and enrich the work by funding equipment, camp scholarships, vocational skills training, educational materials, and other needs deemed appropriate. The vision of the committee is to create inclusiveness for all to worship in the church community. Conduct an assessment of the deaf ministry in the annual conference by exploring these questions:

- How many congregations have interpreters and or assistive listening devices available so that those that are hard of hearing, deaf or deaf-blind are able to participate in worship?
- Are efforts made to allow members of this group to participate in summer camps and retreats?
- Are conference meetings and activities inclusive so that all may worship and participate in business proceedings?
- Are leadership positions open to the deaf, late-deafened, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind?

Develop an action agenda to address what was learned in the study.

4. DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY MINISTRY.

The United Methodist Task Force on Developmental Disabilities was formed in 1992 and works primarily in an advocacy role for those with disabilities. Up to 20 percent of all persons have a disability and many times are excluded from the local church because of physical and attitudinal barriers. Disabil-

ity Concerns Chairpersons work in the annual conference to advocate and educate the local church. Conduct an assessment of the annual conference and its congregations to determine the degrees of inclusiveness. Pertinent questions include:

- Do congregations in the conference conduct accessibility audits and act on results?
- Are local churches and conference offices accessible to persons with all types of disabilities?
- Are persons with intellectual disabilities welcomed and encouraged to participate in the Sunday schools of the conference?
- Is training given on language and terminology appropriate for use in referring to persons with disabilities?
- Are persons with disabilities included in worship during annual conference sessions?
- Does the conference provide information to congregations on group homes and other facilities that serve the handicapped, who may be in need of ministry?