



Area of Focus of the UMC

Ministry with the Poor Guiding Principles and Foundations

Answering Jesus' Call to Discipleship in God's Mission of Love and Justice

M*inistry with the Poor* involves ministries of love and justice, where appropriate action is defined and taken in *right relationship* with, among, and by those who are impoverished — materially, spiritually, or otherwise. One way or another, all experience suffering and poverty, all are in need of grace, and all are called to minister to and show grace to others. Guided by love and grace, **Ministry with the Poor** requires *mutuality of relationship with, by, and of the poor*.

Ministry with the Poor is fundamental to our Wesleyan and pietistic roots and integral to the Church's mission *"to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by proclaiming the good news of God's grace and by exemplifying Jesus' command to love God and neighbor, thus seeking the fulfillment of God's reign and realm in this world"* (*The United Methodist Book of Discipline 2008, par. 121*). Indeed, **Ministry with the Poor** is a biblical imperative—as much for everyone today as it was for Jesus when he proclaimed: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* (*Luke 4:18-19; see Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6-10; Leviticus 25:8-55; Galatians 2:10*).

Followers of Jesus too are "anointed"—anointed to serve as disciples of Jesus, to be his "witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth" (*Acts 1:8*), and to serve as God's co-creators in bringing about the Kingdom of God on earth. But being "anointed" as disciples for the transformation of the world does not imply superiority; in fact, quite the opposite is true.

Disciples of Jesus are all called to be **ministers with the poor**. As such, disciples are called not only to be prophets, liberators, healers, equalizers, and justice-makers, but also to be hospitable and caring brothers and sisters in Christ, who break bread with each other, nurture community, and work together to make this world a place of justice, mercy, and love. (*Romans 12:13*)

Jesus explicitly told us "the Way" to do this: each person must love and treat others as he or she would want to be treated (*Matthew 22: 35-40*). Jesus also modeled how to be in **ministry with** one another, including widows, orphans, "the little children" (*Luke 18: 15-17*), prisoners, the homeless, the outcast, the foreigner, the sick and disabled, the debtor, the oppressed, the occupying soldier — and even our enemies (see *Matthew 5:43-47*) — *but especially* society's most marginalized, "the least of these" (*Matthew 25: 45*), with whom Jesus equated himself. (*Matthew 25:35-40*) Jesus showed us that **ministry with** means **being with**, being a caring presence, being in loving relationship with, standing with, standing in the shoes of, being in solidarity with, listening to, learning from, caring about, and respectfully responding to others as we would have them respond to us (see *1 Thessalonians 2:8* on sharing our lives; *Romans 12:9-21*).

In accepting the call to be in the service of God's Kingdom of love and justice, disciples of Jesus strive to transcend boundaries that divide people from one another (see *Galatians 3:28-29*) and embrace the call to overcome the us/them, self/other dichotomies that humans have created and perpetuated: the divisions between "haves" and





Area of Focus of the UMC

"have not's," rich and poor, superior and inferior, and empowered and marginalized.

Transcending boundaries and living "in ministry with" others requires intentionality and does not happen automatically. Living out one's faith in this manner means taking on the attitude of Christ Jesus. Doing so requires spiritual commitment and discipline. Cultivating an attitude of Jesus requires the practice of self-emptying — getting beyond one's own point of view and social location, letting go of self-centeredness, self-interest, self-importance, and the urge to control or dominate (Philippians 2:5-7a). For those who enjoy more privilege, being in intentional ministry with others may require a conscious effort to resist the tendency to see "the poor" as a problem to be fixed by the not-so-poor. By making all of us — the poor or marginalized and the not-so-poor or marginalized — more receptive to patiently and attentively listening to, learning from, and sharing and partnering with each other, the practice of self-emptying enables deeper engagement in **Ministry with the Poor**, in service of God's mission of love and justice.

With these principles in mind, it is important to recognize that poverty is complex, multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, and highly contextual. For that reason, **Ministry with the Poor** must also be multi-faceted and multi-dimensional, including works of mercy as well as acts of justice in our Christian responses to poverty. **Ministry with the Poor** certainly includes philanthropy and ministries of mercy and generosity. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. . . . Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Romans 12:10, 13; see, e.g., 2 Corinthians 9:5-14; Luke 12: 33-34). And yet, **Ministry with the Poor** is more than a handout, more than an anti-poverty program, and more than a problem to be fixed. "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body

to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13: 3).

In service of God's mission of love and justice, disciples of Jesus must acknowledge that works of mercy and generosity — even when coupled with governmental interventions — have neither dealt with the root causes of poverty nor addressed the systems and structures that can trap people in poverty. Consequently, **Ministry with the Poor** must not only continue to include ministries of mercy that mitigate immediate symptoms of poverty and injustice; **Ministry with the Poor** must also seek to understand and address root causes of systemic injustice and come to terms with the insatiable human hunger for money, possessions, power and status that competes with love of God and neighbor and contributes to economic disparities. Jesus warned us: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. . . . No one can serve two masters. . . . You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6: 21, 24; see Luke 12: 15-21, 32-34; 1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Approved by the Interagency Task Force on **Ministry with the Poor, October 29, 2010**

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