

## **A WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL FOUNDING FOR OUR 2010 STUDY OF THE MINISTRY**

**Principle: The Study of Ministry Commission affirms our Wesleyan theological heritage as the basis for our study and recommendations.\*** [\*The document *A Wesleyan Vision for Theological Education and Leadership Formation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and the reports of previous Commissions were seen as valuable resources. We particularly build on the theological and ecclesial grounding articulated in the document *Minutes of Several Conversations* presented as the Commission report to the 2008 General Conference.] **Our theology is based in the historic Wesleyan tradition, ever mindful of the profound changes shaping our churches, communities, society and world.**

**Challenge:** In today's multi-religious and multi-ethnic culture, the nature of ordained ministry must change, as we face a totally different set of societal contexts from those of the 1960-1970's when most of our current church structures were created. We have inherited antiquated church systems that cannot respond to the leadership demands needed in our current context.

**Vision:** We have attempted to remain faithful to our biblical and theological heritage as United Methodists. At the same time, we must be responsive to the changes in our society and world. Our theological groundings themselves must reflect a transformative element that retains our core Christian truths, but makes them relevant to current and future generations.

### **Theological Foundations:**

#### I. Called by God:

- Ordained ministries are a gift of the Holy Spirit for Christ's holy church.
- All ministry is grounded in baptism: All baptized believers are gifted & called for some form of ministry in the name of Christ.
- The fullness of God's call is the resonance of the inner call (in the individual) and the outer call (as expressed & authorized by the church).
- The historic offices of deacons and elders lead the community in bringing all its ministries to focus.
- Bishops are called forth from the Order of Elders specifically for leadership in oversight of conferences and the general superintendency of the church.

- Local pastors further the mission of the connection by extending the gospel to areas and people who might not otherwise be afforded the opportunity for a church or a pastor. They incorporate the meaning of Wesley's "extra-ordinary circumstances."
- Through the offices of deacon, elder, bishop, as well as local pastors, the church has the necessary leadership to meet the challenges of a new age.

## II. Formation by grace in Community:

- Prevenient grace is the grounding for a lifelong spiritual and formational journey in the body of Christ.
- Justifying grace is a reminder to us that salvation is a gift to be claimed and shared with others.
- Sanctifying grace is the continual shaping and pruning in community through accountability, lifelong learning and spiritual growth.
- Those called to a set apart ministry move through the stages of candidacy, provisional membership, and ordination. Together, the faith community and the candidate seek to discern the presence of John Wesley's three dimensions of the call: Grace, Gifts and Fruit.

## III. Sent into the World

- The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Through baptism all of us are called to participate in that mission through the vocation of service. Some of the baptized are set apart for ordained servant leadership.
- Jesus did not wait for the disciples to come to him, but actively sought them out for service. One of the tasks of the church is to identify, call and authorize these leaders.
- The purpose of set apart ministry is to lead the church in its ministry for and with the world. The early Methodists experienced the grace of God in the world through works of mercy and justice. Class leaders gathered in communities and preachers were sent into an itinerant ministry. God continues to call people into service, which takes a variety of forms.