

Remarks to the Stewardship Summit

**Thomas S. Yow III
President/CEO
United Methodist Higher Education Foundation
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It is an honor to be asked to share my thoughts and hear yours, as well. As with Bishop Gregory Palmer, I did not volunteer for this assignment and I actually do not recall having been asked if I would make this presentation. I think it was a phone call from Byrd telling me that I will be leading the session at the Stewardship Summit, but I am glad he called. And then later I learned that the topic . . . in fact I learned what the topic was when I got here. It is an interesting one and I wish I had prepared something along those lines.

Before beginning my more formal remarks, it is important that I bring a word from our sponsor, who in my case is the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation. We are associated closely with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Our mission is to provide scholarship support to United Methodist students attending United Methodist-related colleges, universities, and seminaries. We also work closely with the Office of Loans and Scholarships of GBHEM. We are grateful for all the ways they help us achieve our mission. We do not receive any apportionment dollars. We have the advantage of never having to raise operating money. We only raise endowment funds. I think it is a tremendous freedom being able to say to donors, whether you give us \$5 or \$5 million (and we haven't received that gift yet), your gift will go to a permanent endowment fund, the return is used to support students and enhance the lives of people, and will be used in a transformational ministry.

It is also important that you know about me. I am a product of connectionalism. My mother was orphaned at a young age and grew up in the Methodist Orphanage in Raleigh, North Carolina. My dad lived across the street, and that is how they actually met. As a child I was brought up in a Methodist church. My mother was always grateful for the fact that she was provided a place to live and food to eat as a result of the connected ministry of Methodist congregations in eastern North Carolina, and we supported our local church. I came through the MYF process, attended a United Methodist college, went to a United Methodist seminary, and received a graduate degree from a United Methodist-related university. I served briefly as a pastor at a United Methodist church, then was institutionalized early in my ministry, was sent back to the campus and have spent my career in United Methodist-related institutions. I am in every way the product of the connected church. So nothing I will say today is unbiased because I understand the importance of being connected. I believe in connectionalism.

As I said, I really did not know my topic until I got here yesterday. Therefore, I want us to move beyond the stated topic, “Are We Afraid to Be Successful?” I suggest that we remember that God does not call us to be successful, God calls us to be faithful, and God calls us to be obedient. So perhaps we might revise the topic a little to say, let’s not be afraid of faithfulness, let’s not be afraid of obedience, and let’s all acknowledge that ultimately we are called to faithfulness.

For me, there have been five primary learnings from this Summit:

1. We are not the proprietors.
2. We are here temporarily as the stewards.

3. We are people of stories. As United Methodist Christians, we have a story to tell to the nations. We also have a story to tell to each other, and we have a story to tell to ourselves.
4. We need to get out of God's way. God calls us to what we can do.
5. We need to move beyond silos. We need to have an open-sum mentality because the open-sum mentality creates an opportunity for faithfulness.

Later I will distribute questions we may discuss in smaller groups.

As a child I grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina. My father thought it was important occasionally go to the country and get a sense of things because, apparently in his view, rural life is better than city life. We would visit my great-grandmother, because I really did not have any grandparents. My mother, as I stated before, was an orphan and grew up in a Methodist orphanage in North Carolina, and my dad's mom died when I was very young. Anyway, we would visit my great-grandmother in Guilford County, North Carolina, near Greensboro. She had a farm, and my uncle managed it for her. They grew tobacco, corn, and wheat. In fact, I was seven or eight years old before I knew the letters "t-o" came before "bacco." There were silos where the grain was stored, a barn that housed the animals that were used to work the farm, and there was a gigantic haystack in the barn. I remember as a child what a great thrill it was to climb on top of that haystack and slide down. As I began to think about silos and reflect upon what Bishop Palmer discussed yesterday about silos, I also began to think about haystacks. Haystacks and silos are exact opposites of each other. Silos stand independent, and haystacks are all pulled together. Haystacks are connected, they are not individual strands of straw, but they are straws that are meshed and intertwined. The straw is piled randomly, and there is strength when those pieces of straw lay across and intertwine with each other. I suggest to us today that we need to

move to a haystack kind of mentality. We need a perspective that copies the straw, lies across each other and intertwines with other pieces of straw. There is strength in being disorganized, as we rely on each other. There is strength in not being a part of a silo, but in being a part of a haystack and being there for strength and security and to help other pieces of straw. We need to think in terms, I suggest, of haystacks.

It seems to me that the Council of Finance and Administration is endeavoring, at least, to raise the question of whether agencies should be involved in individual fundraising. This is a new way of generating agency income. The suggestion is what on campus we would call a paradigm shift. That is a good faculty word to say we are not going to do things as we did previously. There seems to me that these are at least two appropriate questions; does there need to be a paradigm shift and what other shifts does this shift make necessary?

I think we can look at this in two different ways. Will this shift create within us a silo mentality or a haystack mentality?

There is a story told about a young lad who comes upon a wise gentleman. The boy catches a bird in his hand and decides he is going to trick the wise man. The lad says, "Tell me, sir, is this bird in my hand alive or dead?" The young man thinks to himself, if he says it is alive, I will just squeeze the bird, and it will be dead. If the man says it is dead I'll just open my hand, the bird will be alive and fly away." So the boy says, "Tell me is this bird dead or alive?" The old man responds, "It is as you will it." May I suggest to us that whether we have a haystack or silo mentality, is as we will it. We will determine how this is approached. There are opportunities for developing haystacks and there are challenges for avoiding silos.

We can ask questions several different ways. How will this new paradigm help us work together? Or we can say, how can this paradigm help us work together? It is all in how we choose to approach the question. It is as we will it. We might ask how can we work together as agencies of the church in a haystack mentality as we go about generating gifts for our agencies? There also is a question, how will it engender a sense of cooperation and community among agencies? Conversely, there is the question, how can it engender a sense of cooperation in community among agencies? Again, I will suggest it is how we will it. And there is the question, how will it connect us to each other? How will it connect us to the local church? And we can also ask the question, how can it connect us to each other? How can it connect us to the local church? We must, I suggest, approach things from the opportunity—how can we find ways to work together? How can we find ways to cooperate? How can we find ways to be connected?

After having said those positive things . . . let me rant for a minute. If we are going to think in terms of major change, paradigm shifts, we ought also to think about the changes this shift may necessitate. I would suggest to us that one of those things that with this proposed paradigm shift we also ought to be discussing is the concept of the apportionment covenant. The apportionment covenant states the churches will pay their apportionments and agencies will receive those funds and not bother those churches, that we will stay away and not seek additional funding. The problem with that, I suggest, is that many churches do not pay their apportionments. In my view, one primary reason that occurs is not because United Methodist folk do not want to give, it is because nobody has come to those churches and told the story. We are a people of stories. I believe strongly, that if our United Methodist folk in the pews understood the ministries we are about as a church, they would respond. We, as connected United Methodists, have the

opportunity to be about ministry around the world, from the cradle to the grave. We will touch the lives of people we will never know. We will transform the lives of people we will never know. I believe United Methodists in the pews want to do that. I believe if we have the opportunity to tell that story to the Methodist folk in our local churches, that they would respond. Anything that keeps our story from our congregations, I suggest, is a silo mentality. In my view, what happens in too many cases is that those who need to hear the story never have the opportunity to hear the story. Do we now provide for the people called United Methodist the opportunity to understand what it means to be involved in touching and transforming lives, witnessing the gospel of Jesus Christ, offering the gospel of Jesus to people from the cradle to the grave around the world? Is that story being told in local United Methodist churches? I would suggest, from my perspective, that the apportionment covenant stands in the way of that actually happening. It is a system designed to protect people from hearing the story. I understand that is probably an overstatement. But, I wonder how much of one?

May I suggest, we are not in the business of protecting people's pocketbooks. We are about the business of calling people to faithfulness, and we need to be open for the faithfulness to occur. So, perhaps we need to rethink the apportionment covenant.

We are a story people. We have an important story to tell. We have a story to tell that changes people's lives. None of us is in management. We are all in sales. But if we are going to tell the story, we have to get in the front door. So if we are about the business of trying to be interpreters for our agencies and raise money for our agencies, I would suggest we have to find ways to get into the front door. The question Bishop Palmer raised yesterday is an important question for us, what is the uppercase value of our denomination? Is that uppercase value protection of

something? Or is it an opening to something? Is it an open-sum mentality or a closed-sum mentality? Do we endeavor to stand in the way of God's actions, or do we endeavor to pave the way for God's actions, to be obedient and faithful to God's calling?

These are all questions we must face with truth telling. Therefore, we must at least put them on the table. The answer may very well be that what we are doing with the apportionment covenant is right and an appropriate thing to do. It just seems to me that if there is going to be a paradigm shift that says agencies have to be about the business of generating their own income in addition to the apportionment, then there also has to be a way of finding ways for the agencies to be about that ministry. So it seems to me to be a double-edged sword that we should consider. The question becomes, what engenders the open-sum game? There is a reason why all the automobile dealerships are together . . . it's an open-sum mentality. The Dodge dealer may create in you the desire to buy the car, but the Toyota dealer is the one that ultimately sells you the car. That also is going to reverse itself. We need to think in those terms. What is an open-sum kind of mentality for the church? What are the many ways we can give persons the opportunity to get involved in ministry? It is truly an open-sum game, open-sum mentality.

We need to be careful, I think, that the uppercase value of The United Methodist Church does not become the protection of the pastor's salary. I think one of our uppercase values must become providing for God's people the opportunity to be about God's ministry in God's world as we endeavor to transform lives from the cradle to the grave around the world. It is appropriate to think in terms of how does that happen? How does that begin to occur? As we are thinking about that this morning, we need to get out of God's way and let God's ministry work.

We have a story to tell. We need to find ways to tell the story. We've got to move beyond our silos and move to a haystack; an open-sum mentality for an open-sum people. We always have to remember that none of us is the Proprietor.

So with that in mind, I'd like for us to work as agencies for a few moments, to look at what kind of paradigm shifts do we need to work on in our agencies? What kind of questions do we need to grapple with?

Questions

1. What are the responsibilities of the directors of general boards and agencies?
2. What are the strategic responsibilities of staff of general boards and agencies?
3. What is the appropriate role of fund development in your agency?
4. How is that role to be implemented?
5. What is currently being done by general church board and agency directors and staff in fund development?
6. What should be the responsibilities of general church board and agency directors and staff in fund development?
7. How can directors and staff be bridge builders and friend raisers for respective agencies?
For United Methodism?
8. How can bishops and general secretaries be involved in friend raising and fund development for general church boards and agencies?
9. How do we encourage people in the pew to see beyond local church and local interest?

Stewardship

1. What is the role of board and agency directors and staff in stewardship of resources?

2. Has your agency determined who constitutes its constituency? Primary/Secondary?
3. Who are your constituents?
4. Has your agency done any prioritizing in how it serves its constituencies?
5. How are those constituents served?
6. What can we do to make better use of our resources: financial and personnel?
7. Who is watching out for the “poor ole cash customer?”

We also must be good stewards of the resources we have been given. I think about how we use our resources in terms of my mother. My mother is 87 and a retired school secretary. My dad died fairly young, worked on a railroad, so she has limited sources. My mother lives on less than \$20,000 a year and is a tither. Every Sunday she tithes. So my approach to stewardship is how are we using my mother's tithe? How well are we spending that money because every gift from her is a sacrificial gift? Also, as we approach the concept of our stewardship, we must grapple with the question, who are our constituents? Who do our agencies serve?

My favorite restaurant is Waffle House. You get cholesterol in all known forms, and they fry it. And it's really good. One of the founders of Waffle House is an alumnus of Young Harris College, and so I would often go to the Waffle House headquarters to try to help him with some tax problems. That's a positive view of fund development. All across the corporate headquarters of Waffle House, there's a question: Who is watching out for the poor ol' cash customer? And so I ask the question as we are about our ministries and if we're about the business of fund development: Who is watching out for that person in the pew? Who's watching out for that donor? Who is watching out for my mother's tithe? How accountable are we to United Methodist

people for how we use what they voluntarily entrust to us? That is our question as we consider how we are about the business of stewardship.

I hope that you will also look at my concluding questions on the handout because they impact each of us. How can we use what we've learned here to enhance what we do? How can we as an agency use this Summit to enhance our ministry? Individually, how can I, as a denominational leader or as a board agency staff person or a director, use this opportunity to enhance my ministry, my faithfulness?

Before we conclude, pray with me:

Set us afire, Lord!

Stir us we pray.

While the world perishes, we go on our way . . .

Passionless, purposeless day after day.

Set us afire, Lord!

Stir us we pray.

Amen.