A Wesleyan Vision for Theological Education and Leadership Formation for the 21st Century

A Working Document prepared by

The Task Force on Theological Education and Leadership Formation

of

The Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church

The United Methodist General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

and

The Association of United Methodist Theological Schools

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Pulpit & Pew
Research on Pastoral Leadership

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DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A meeting in 1998 of deans and presidents from the Association of United Methodist Theological Schools and the Sub-Committee on Theological Education of the Council of Bishops included a lively discussion of the leadership needs in The United Methodist Church and the role of seminaries and theology schools in meeting the needs. The absence of a clearly identified and articulated vision for leadership and theological education became evident. Those gathered agreed that without such a vision, the calling forth, forming, deploying, and supporting of leaders is left to the fragmented approaches of various institutions of the church.

The leaders of the seminaries and schools of theology and the bishops concluded that the development of a Wesleyan vision for theological education and leadership development merited immediate attention. With the full support and involvement of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the Council of Bishops and the Association of United Methodist Theological Schools embarked on a process of determining such a vision. A task force was formed consisting of the following persons:

Bishop Kenneth L. Carder, Chairperson
Bishop Daniel Arichea
Bishop William Dew
Bishop Sharon Brown Christopher
Bishop Susan Hassinger
Bishop Alfred Norris
Bishop Joseph Humper
Bishop Rudiger Minor
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President Philip Amerson, Claremont School of Theology
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Reverend Robert Kohler, Staff, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry
Reverend Mary Ann Moman, Staff, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry
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With the financial assistance of the Pulpit and Pew Project of the Ormond Center at Duke University, Dr. Richard Heitzenrater and Dr. Randy Maddox prepared papers for the task force and served as consultants.

The following working document is presented with the goal of facilitating continuing dialogue within the church. It has been revised following responses to an initial draft from seminaries, the Council of Bishops, the Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and other groups and individuals involved in calling forth, forming, deploying, and supporting leaders in The United Methodist Church.

PREAMBLE

Methodism originated as a renewal movement within the church. Central to our identity is the importance of regularly assessing the church's effectiveness in the role that has been entrusted to it within God's redemptive work in our world. We have also typically recognized that one-sided positive or negative assessments of this effectiveness are seldom either faithful or adequate. While it is composed of fallible human beings, the church is grounded in the gracious call and promised the sufficient aid of the Triune God. As such, authentic assessment of the present structures and practices of the church must seek both 1) to identify and preserve the strengths that are present, and 2) to discern and address the areas of current weakness.

Significant ferment exists in The United Methodist Church today calling for assessment specifically of our structures and practices for theological education and leadership formation. In its appeal for strategies that enable the people called Methodists to participate more effectively in God's redemptive work in the world, and its reminder of the wealth of resources in our midst that remain untapped, this ferment can serve as a source of renewal. But it will achieve this end only as we focus on underlying issues rather than mere symptoms, on systemic challenges rather than anecdotal impressions. It is also vital that we address these deeper issues and challenges in light of a vision that draws deeply from our convictions and heritage and provides clear direction and hope for the future.

THE CHURCH'S MISSION

Sharing in God's Mission in the World

Evaluation of the effectiveness of particular expressions of the church requires a standard of measurement—the defining task of the church. The consistent witness of Christian Scripture is that this task is derived from and participates in God's redemptive mission in the world. This divine mission took definitive expression in Jesus Christ, who came proclaiming that the long-promised Reign of God was beginning, and inviting all to enter this Reign as reconciled children of God. But Christ made clear in both his teachings and his actions that this new relationship involved more than simply an individual sense of forgiveness and peace with God; the truly good news of salvation is that God's ultimate mission is to heal, reconcile, and transform the whole of creation in its overlapping relational dimensions. When we respond to God's reconciling work in Christ, we begin to experience true *Shalom* with God, within ourselves, among our fellow human beings, and towards the broader created order.

As the Greek term *ecclesia* ("called-out ones") suggests, the church is the community called into existence by God's transforming and reconciling mission, a community composed of and providing support for all who are responding to God's overture in Christ and seeking to grow in likeness to Christ. As Paul reminds us, God has also entrusted to this community a share in the mission to those still estranged, urging us to serve as ambassadors of Christ inviting all to be reconciled with God (see 2 Cor. 5:18–20). In keeping with Christ's model, this is an invitation best offered by embodiment in deed as well as in word. And those who respond should be ushered themselves into the community that can offer encouragement and support for their journey of taking on the "mind of Christ" and the "fruit of the Spirit."

The church participates in God's redemptive mission in the world, then, by faithfully cultivating such holistic evangelism and spiritual formation, as well as by witnessing to God's desire for *Shalom* in the whole of creation. In Matthew 28:18–20 the risen Christ summarized this participatory mission in the charge to go forth and "make disciples" of all nations. When the *Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church picks up this phrase to describe the mission of the church (¶120), it is with recognition of the full range of its dimensions.

WESLEYAN WISDOM

ABOUT EFFECTIVENESS IN THE CHURCH'S MISSION

The most insightful and reliable evaluations are not only clear about their standard of measurement, they bring to their assessment the accumulated experience of previous related cases. They bear in mind particularly the hard-won "wisdom" of these cases. Thus, assessment of present theological education and leadership formation in The United Methodist Church should ideally be informed by insights about effectiveness in fulfilling the church's mission gained over the range of the prior history and the various cultural contexts of the church. This ideal is at best a long-term goal, since American Methodists have historically not been very attentive even to our own heritage. But this is beginning to change. In particular, there has been a renewal of interest in John and Charles Wesley and the early Wesleyan movement in recent years, shaped by a growing awareness that the Wesleys might have wisdom to offer the present people called Methodists. Since Wesley drew upon a wide range of the church's teaching and witness in seeking insights for leading the early Methodist movement, focus on the wisdom that he gained through his ministry is an appropriate beginning point for orienting the present assessment.

While John Wesley positioned early Methodism as only a movement within the church, his ultimate concern was for the full range of the mission of the church. When he and Charles set out to awaken nominal Christians, calling them to experience the life-changing grace of God, it was on the understanding that those renewed could turn to their parish churches for nurture of this new life. The structures of class meeting, band, and society that soon defined Methodism developed over time as it became clear that the effect of their evangelistic effort was short-lived unless those responding were ushered into corporate settings of spiritual accountability and support, settings absent in most churches. But these new structures were meant to supplement, not supplant, the role of churches in God's redemptive mission. This is why Wesley was so concerned to ensure that his Methodist followers in the American colonies were not left without the crucial contributions of sacrament, liturgy, and order to Christian life after the departure of Anglican clergy that accompanied American independence. It is also why Wesley's exhortations for greater effectiveness in Christian mission were not restricted to those in his movement, but included as well parish life in his British context.

Near the end of his long involvement in Christian ministry Wesley gathered his seasoned insights about what contributes most to churches fulfilling their role within God's redemptive work in a sermon titled "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity."[1] The sermon opens with Wesley's insistence that Christian communities will have the transforming impact on the world around us that God desires only to the degree that we are communities of *real Christians*. By this latter term he meant mature disciples of Christ who support one another in the shared journey of realizing God's love, taking on the mind of Christ, and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. While the possibility of such transformation is grounded solely in God's grace, Wesley recognized that God has chosen to involve humanity cooperatively in the process of salvation. We must put to work what God is working in us (Phil. 2:12–13) if we hope to experience the fullness of renewal that is offered. So Wesley focused his diagnosis of the inefficacy of Christianity's participation in God's redemptive mission on some crucial deficiencies he discerned in many churches of his day. He highlighted three factors in particular that are central to effective awakening and nurture of Christian life, and were too broadly being neglected: doctrine, discipline, and self-denial.

1 For extended analysis of this sermon and its implications for today, on which this summary draws, see Randy L. Maddox, "Wesley's Prescription for Making Disciples of Jesus Christ: Insights for the 21st Century Church" (at www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu under publications).

The concern for "doctrine" that Wesley was identifying here as essential to effectiveness in the church's mission is not primarily a matter of defending creedal formulations, important though they are. Wesley was primarily concerned with the more basic—and crucial—task of cultivating a biblically grounded, doctrinally nourished, and theologically balanced sense of what it means to live as Christians. This orienting "mind of Christ" is not simply infused by God in the faithful, it must be nurtured. Given the numerous influences in our world seeking to inculcate convictions quite different from those modeled by Christ, Wesley recognized that "knowledge must be united with vital piety," that those who respond to the gospel must also have their lives shaped deeply by the pattern of God's love revealed in Christ. As a practical theologian, he appreciated how central such regular practices as worship, singing, bible study, and devotional reading can be to shaping believers in keeping with the Christ story. By corollary, he warned that churches will be ineffective in their participatory role within God's redemptive mission if they neglect these practices, or fail to recognize the importance of assessing the theological adequacy and balance of the materials used in these practices.

For all of its importance, Wesley would never suggest that concern for doctrine was sufficient to insure effectiveness in the church's mission. His mature wisdom stressed the need for this concern to be connected with a concern for "discipline," by which he meant the provision of structure, support, and accountability in spiritual formation. Wesley understood that humans are holistic beings, needing holistic formation. He often affirmed this with a proverb from the early church: "Just as the soul and the body make a human; the Spirit and discipline make a Christian." Accordingly, he devoted considerable attention to providing his people with—and encouraging them to participate in—a well-rounded and balanced set of practices that both opened them to the empowering experience of God's grace and guided them in nurturing Christ-like character. One of Wesley's distinctive concerns was that the Methodist people appreciate the irreplaceable role of works of mercy within this set of practices; we cannot hope to take on the full character of Christ while ignoring the integral connection of love of God with love of neighbor that Christ stressed and embodied. More broadly, Wesley saw no hope that churches which fail to appreciate the role of discipline per se can be effective in nurturing responsive participation in God's redemptive mission in the world.

The third factor that the seasoned Wesley identified as essential for effective participation in God's redemptive mission is willingness to practice "self-denial." In making this identification he stressed that authentic self-denial has nothing to do with impairing bodily health, deprecating our true human nature, or surrendering our personal integrity. Rather, it consists in an openness to recognize, and a willingness to resist, distorted inclinations that have come to characterize our lives through various influences. The value of such self-denial for Christian life is not only that it lessens the expression of our distorted inclinations, but that it provides greater opportunity for alternative Christ-like inclinations to take form. As such, churches where the progressive journey of becoming sensitive to and resisting our distorted dispositions is both modeled and supported will be more likely to see many in their midst "attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Those that neglect or dismiss the vital role of self-denial will be much less effective.

It would be a major mistake to view Wesley's emphasis on doctrine, discipline, and self-denial in his diagnostic sermon as exhausting his wisdom about nurturing Christian maturity. In particular, one of his central insights was that "there is no holiness, but social holiness," that holiness "cannot subsist at all without society." He came to recognize early that the journey of growth in Christ-likeness requires not only the empowerment of God's grace but also the support of a small intentional community of fellow pilgrims. The interlaced set of such small groups that Wesley created were key to the effectiveness of the early Methodist movement.

The contribution of intentional community to a person's spiritual journey is more than just camaraderie and encouragement. Equally important are the opportunities that connection with others provides for mentoring, for spiritual advice, for admonition, and the like. But these opportunities carry with them a worry: it is crucial that appropriate persons are providing the admonition and advice. In this worry we see the necessity of leadership in the church. We also see the need for care in selecting, preparing, and monitoring leaders.

This is another area where Wesley's hard-won wisdom is instructive for those seeking to enhance the effectiveness of the church in its mission. He came to recognize the vital role of leaders at *every level* in the interconnected life of the church. Indeed, his distinctive concern to empower and equip lay leaders for Methodist class meetings and society gatherings was central to the success of the early movement. But Wesley appreciated as well the importance of some being set apart as clergy for leadership in word, sacrament, and order within the church. In fact, he repeatedly called for more adequate clergy leadership in his Anglican setting, offering a detailed sense of the proper expectations for this role in *An Address to the Clergy*.[2] Elsewhere he indicates parallel expectations for the various other leadership roles in the church.

The foundational expectation that Wesley identified as essential for effective clergy, as for all leaders, was that they be people of *grace*. Not only must they have an assurance of God's justifying grace, they should be actively cultivating God's sanctifying grace through spiritual disciplines and self-denial. Their character should be marked by an eminent measure of Christ-like love of God and neighbor, and their practices should be exemplary.

Clergy, like other leaders in the church, also need *gifts* appropriate to their role. Wesley distinguished two types of requisite gifts—natural and acquired. Among the natural gifts would be adequate mental faculties, intellectual interest, and organizational abilities. The acquired gifts are the knowledge and skills essential for fulfilling one's leadership role in the church. For clergy, who have a special responsibility in the concerns for doctrine, discipline, and witness, Wesley stressed that these gifts include not only a confident knowledge of Scripture and

2 For a survey of Wesley's convictions about the necessary qualifications and expectations of clergy leadership, upon which this summary draws, see Richard P. Heitzenrater, "'Take Thou Authority': Ministerial Leadership in the Wesleyan Heritage" (at www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu under publications).

the history of Christian teachings and practices, but also a competent sense of the settings in which the church is serving—obtained through study of science, cultural history, and the like. Since lay leaders share in the concerns for doctrine, discipline, and witness, Wesley held parallel (though less intense) expectations for them, and devoted much of his time to providing materials to help educate them across the range of these topics.

The final point that Wesley emphasized in seeking effective leaders in the church was the importance of monitoring the *fruit* of their ministry. Specifically, are they actually able to lead others into and nurture them in an awareness and experience of God's justifying and sanctifying grace? Taking this point more broadly, Wesley stressed that just as accountability is important for Christian life, it is crucial for Christian leaders. All who are in leadership positions in the church should have some concrete setting for their own support and accountability.

These insights suggest that The United Methodist Church needs a missionary zeal for calling people to the experience of God's grace and for nurturing them as disciples who are marked by a commitment to doctrine, discipline, and self-denial. In order to give shape and structure to that missionary zeal, we need leaders who manifest grace, who have the appropriate gifts, and whose ministry bears significant fruit. From a Wesleyan perspective, the stakes are very high in providing education and formation for all Christians, and especially for those set aside to equip all the people of God as pastoral leaders.

While John Wesley is not the only mentor for guiding United Methodists in discerning our mission, it should be clear by now that he has significant theological and practical wisdom to offer us. Hopefully, it is also clear that the best way to honor his wisdom is not by replicating the eighteenth century but by allowing our engagement with our own setting to be informed by insights that animated Wesley's leadership of the original people called Methodists.

CURRENT CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP FORMATION

We noted at the beginning the need to bring together a clear sense of our heritage and convictions with a perceptive analysis of the underlying challenges and opportunities in addressing the present ferment in United Methodism about theological education and leadership formation. It is time to switch focus to the latter analysis—to identifying some central challenges that contribute to the present ferment.

At the broadest level, the fundamental challenge we face is clear: the world continues to fall woefully short of God's intention for it. Poverty and disease, terrorism and war, crime and immorality, racial and national and religious conflicts, economic and sexual exploitation, the scarring and depletion of the earth's resources, weakened personal character and social fragmentation are only a few of the symptoms of sin's continuing grip on humanity. People and systems need the gospel of God's salvation made known in Jesus Christ! Through science and technology, God has made available unparalleled resources to address needless suffering and untimely death among the world's people; global communication and transportation networks have made possible new resources for the proclamation of the gospel of God's reign in Jesus Christ; and yet reform of the church and the nations and the spread of Scriptural holiness over the lands remains an unfulfilled vision.

Given the urgency of the task and the abundance of God's grace in Jesus Christ, why have we in The United Methodist Church not been more faithful and effective in "making disciples of Jesus Christ" and "reforming the nations and spreading Scriptural holiness throughout the lands"? Our real challenge is not just the membership decline in the United States. More serious and threatening is the weakness of the denomination's witness as a sign, foretaste, and instrument of God's reign in the world—in Wesley's terms, our failure to produce more "real Christians." This weakness is reflected in a lack of ongoing catechesis for all Christians, a failure to claim the power of Christian conversion, the absence of covenantal community within the church—among laity, among clergy, and between laity and clergy—our willingness to let economic or market issues triumph over mission, and the dearth of theological reflection and critique in both the church and society. Transformation of such dynamics will come only as there is a renewed sense of God's Reign and of the church's mission in its service.

This renewed sense of God's Reign and the church's mission requires that we attend to the dynamics by which congregations and their leadership have too often failed one another. At their best, congregations and pastoral leaders are sustained and enriched by mutual support, deepening vocations, faithful practices, and holy friendships. But at their worst they spiral downward into unresolved

conflicts, mutual antagonism, institutionalized maintenance, and isolation and loneliness. We have too often failed to sustain that strong relationship between the ministry of all Christians and the ministry of ordained leaders. Our focus is on the need for strong and faithful pastoral leadership, but that will also require vital and faithful congregations shaped by God's Reign.

Clear vision and missional focus require leaders who know Scripture and the tradition, claim God's work in their own lives, perceive a new future, and make themselves available as visible signs and devoted instruments of God's victory over the principalities and powers of the old world. Leadership in the Christian community emerges from a life of discipleship; therefore, appropriately understood, making disciples of Jesus Christ is a central means by which the Church addresses the need for leaders who live Christ's mission in the church and the world.

How can we, the people called Methodists, do a better job of raising up leaders who can articulate a clear vision, cultivate a missional commitment, and mobilize people to shape faithful discipleship? What kind of theological education and leadership formation do we need to be more faithful in fulfilling the church's mandate? In order to answer these questions, we identify six challenges that can help us discover significant opportunities for revitalization of our mission of participating in God's redemptive work in the world—opportunities that will require us to become more proactive in raising up and supporting lay and ordained pastoral leaders, to be more attentive to our Wesleyan identity, to recommit to the importance of lifelong learning, to develop deeper theological understanding of ordination, to reestablish stronger connections across the church, and to have our economic commitments serve our common mission. We note that parts of the challenges and opportunities we describe are shared across our global church, while other parts are specific to our different cultural contexts.

Our first challenge is to give immediate attention to the number, quality, commitment, education, and support of lay and ordained pastoral leaders in The United Methodist Church.

We need to attend more carefully to the grace, gifts, and fruit of the people raised up as leaders in the church. In recent years The United Methodist Church has been too passive in raising up and supporting the leaders we need. Statistical trends reveal concern about the availability of ordained elders for local congregations, and there is a broad sense that we have not raised up the quality of persons we need, nor have we educated and formed them appropriately. On the other hand, there are signs that the church is not providing the support—financially, emotionally, or structurally—to enable talented people to flourish in ordained ministry. This begins with indebtedness incurred for their college and seminary education, and extends to diminished financial support for many clergy, and structures that seem to increase loneliness and isolation rather than collegiality and holy friendships. There are worrisome indications of increasing numbers of people dropping-out from full-time ministry, especially due to an erosion of clergy

covenant and its supportive community. We have an opportunity to raise people up for an exciting adventure of leading God's people in mission and ministry. But how can we improve the number, quality, commitment, education, and support of lay and ordained pastoral leaders?

A second challenge we face is to articulate and nurture a coherent sense of our identity that also embraces diversity.

There is a widespread sense that we have a fragmented, or at least insufficient, sense of our identity as the people called Methodists and how that calls us to form "real Christians." This takes diverse forms, including: a lack of biblical literacy, poor patterns of initiation and ongoing formation through disciplined living, a lack of a "Wesleyan ethos," a confusion of cultural norms with Christian faith, a refusal to celebrate and honor the multi-ethnic, inter-cultural, global character of the church, and a lack of attentiveness to ecumenical and interfaith concerns. Our lack of clarity about our identity has spawned fragmentation, conflicting expectations and images of pastoral leaders, and competing visions for ministry. These issues of identity are particularly important for persons who become pastoral leaders from other denominations, especially for those who come from immigrant populations in the United States, and for those cultural contexts in which the church is a small minority. How can we educate and form leaders who will be as articulate and passionate about Scriptural holiness and the church's witness on the one hand, yet open to engagement with diverse peoples and traditions on the other? What kind of "Wesleyan ethos" needs to be a part of the education and formation that we provide, especially for those set aside to be pastoral leaders?

A third challenge is to foster and claim a shared commitment to the centrality of education and formation for the whole church.

We have not maintained an adequate commitment to Christ's injunction that we are to love the Lord our God with our mind as well as heart, soul, and strength. This includes education of the laity for faithful discipleship, rigorous education and formation for clergy, lifelong learning for laity and clergy alike, and structures of accountability for doing so. We have networks on which we can build, especially the impressive work of the church in establishing and supporting colleges and universities as well as seminaries. But we have allowed this support to wane in recent years. The church and its educational institutions need reinvigorated financial, institutional, and programmatic support and accountability. We

need from our colleges and seminaries genuine educational excellence shaped by God's mission in Christ, and we need to offer structural and financial support for them to do so. Our colleges are crucial to educating and forming lay leaders, and seminaries are crucial for educating and forming clergy. Throughout the church, we need to reclaim a commitment to lifelong learning. How can the church claim the urgent importance of education and formation, and equip leaders faithfully for bearing witness to God's mission in the world?

A fourth challenge is to discern and articulate a coherent theological understanding of ordination that identifies more clearly the relationship between the general ministry of all Christians and the ordained ministry for which some are set aside.

This challenge is posed in part by the fact that Methodism began as a movement that, in some sense, "accidentally" became a church. As a result, we have struggled to understand and articulate who we are as a church and how we relate to other Christian traditions. Another contributing factor is the strong democratic strand of Wesleyan thought, embracing all as equal, which has sometimes fostered a suspicion of expectations of special giftedness or special requirements—despite the example of Wesley's own high educational standards for clergy leaders. In other words, the lack of theological clarity about ordination in United Methodism is linked to our uncertainty about the legitimacy of raising up men and women to serve as ordained ministers, about the level of education and formation they need, and about how they ought to be supported, deployed, and held accountable. Our lack of clarity is compounded as persons experience different routes to pastoral leadership (e.g., the course of study route for local pastors, the seminary route for elders, a modified seminary education for deacons, and so on) and encounter confusing interpretations of the types of ministry for which ordination might be relevant or crucial. It is unclear to many people why certain educational expectations exist for one route to ordination as an elder but not for another. Persons considering ordained ministry often conclude that these are bureaucratic rules rather than an articulated understanding of how they need to be educated and formed to serve as clergy leaders in the church. How can the church articulate an understanding of ordination in relation to the education, formation, sustenance, and deployment of leaders that will more faithfully equip leaders for the church's mission?

A fifth challenge is to foster new and renewed connections in the church that support theological education and leadership formation.

We have too often allowed those connectional relationships that are designed to support and enrich one another in the church to become disconnected. As a result, a sense of cumbersome bureaucracy has replaced mutual discernment and support, and it becomes too easy to look for scapegoats rather than working together to strengthen the education and formation that the church needs. This disconnection exists in multiple ways among such bodies as colleges, (United Methodist and non-United Methodist) seminaries, annual conferences, district and conference boards of ordained ministry, general agencies, and course of study programs. Too many students experience the process leading to ordination as a series of hoops to be jumped through, rather than mutual discernment leading to faithful leadership in service to the church's mission. Further, seminary faculties, once composed primarily of ordained United Methodist clergy with advanced academic degrees, now have fewer such members. Seminaries (and colleges) are finding it more difficult to identify such faculty, especially because clergy candidates who feel called to a teaching ministry report difficulties in being approved by boards of ordained ministry. There is ecclesiological ambivalence about the relationship between ordination and the teaching ministry of the church. How can the church support connectional relationships that articulate a strong and coherent process for theologically educating and forming leaders for the church's mission?

Our sixth challenge is to discover ways for economic issues to serve the church's common mission.

These economic issues vary tremendously in diverse cultural contexts, especially in parts of the world where finding resources to provide education and to support pastoral leaders is difficult. Many resources that are taken for granted by schools in the United States, such as trained faculty, facilities, and books, are scarcely available in areas such as the Philippines, Africa, Russia, and parts of Europe. In the United States, United Methodists have too often been driven by market logic rather than having our economic resources serve the church's mission. We have too often allowed economic understandings and resources to determine the calling, formation, deployment, and morale of our leaders, and as a result the church's mission and presence among those who live in poverty and on the margins of society have too often been lost. This contrasts sharply with Wesley's own commitment to and presence with the poor.

Fewer economic resources are weakening the church's mission, especially in the United States, in important ways. For example, the cost of seminary education charged to individual students has risen dramatically in recent years and more students are choosing seminary on the basis of proximity to home and the availability of student appointments. Cabinet members in a number of annual conferences are reported to be encouraging students to make decisions about seminary based on

short-term conference needs, and too many seminaries are compromising academic standards in an effort to make seminary convenient for persons. Such judgments subtly undermine principles of itinerancy on the one hand, and the importance of rigorous education on the other. Further, clergy deployment is too often determined by salary ladders, creating inequities among clergy. While most laity attend churches where clergy are well-paid, most clergy serve churches that are small and accept salaries that are not adequate to repay educational debt, save for their children's education, or prepare for their retirement. As documented in the Pulpit and Pew Study, financial support for clergy has, on average, declined in recent years in relation to other vocations. Yet at the same time, we need to acknowledge that our members have—taken as a whole—tremendous financial resources that could and should be used for the advancement of God's Reign. Perhaps we have not called one another to those patterns of discipline and self-denial that are crucial to the formation of real Christians. How, then, can we cultivate patterns of leadership, stewardship, and understandings of our economic resources, that are more focused on the church's mission and enhancing the commitment to the centrality of education and formation for the whole church?

These challenges must be addressed by the whole church in strategic ways if we are to implement and sustain a Wesleyan vision for theological education and leadership formation. The weakness of the church's influence is both a symptom and a cause of the challenges we face in pastoral leadership. If there is not a sense that gifted persons can make a real difference in their vocations, it will remain difficult to cultivate a sense of calling among our people to enter into ordained pastoral leadership. Further, candidates for pastoral leadership who observe or experience destructive dynamics within congregations too often opt for other vocations, drop out early, or become discouraged and less effective than they might otherwise be.

Moreover, the continued prevalence of immoral personal and corporate conduct, racism, sexism, violence, terrorism, poverty, religiously inspired hatred, needless suffering, and premature death points to a failure in evangelization and mission by the church. The decline in church membership, the loss of an emphasis on personal conversion, and the failure of the church to be an alternative community shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ testify to the leadership crisis among the people called United Methodists and represent a call to action as we enter the 21st century.

John Wesley set a high bar of expectations for discipleship and leadership among the people called Methodists. We need to foster a similarly high bar for the sake of equipping people for faithfulness in serving and leading the church's mission. We call on the whole church to develop strategic plans to address the challenges we describe above and to nurture a Wesleyan vision of theological education and leadership formation. In order to facilitate conversation among different bodies, we conclude with the following general directions, correlated to the challenges we face, for continuing development and implementation of such a Wesleyan vision to guide us into the future.

AGENDA ITEMS

IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP FORMATION

In order to strengthen our effectiveness in fulfilling the church's mission by confronting current challenges in theological education and leadership formation with the wisdom gained from our Wesleyan tradition, we offer the following six agenda items for the church's consideration and action. The Council of Bishops, the Association of United Methodist Theology Schools, and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry are strategically positioned to lead the church in calling forth and forming leaders who are deeply rooted in Christian doctrine, disciplined practices, and holy living and who are able to shape congregations into communities of reconciliation and transformation. Therefore, the following are offered as general directions for continuing collaborative work by the COB, AUMTS, and GBHEM:

1. **We call upon the church to develop strategies to identify and assess, articulate and embody, nurture and sustain pastoral excellence that is faithful and effective in shaping communities that are signs, foretastes, and instruments of God's reign.**

We believe that the number, quality, commitment, education, and support of lay and ordained pastoral leaders in the United Methodist Church will be addressed most effectively if we are focused on the church's mission, currently specified as "making disciples of Jesus Christ," and how that mission participates in God's reign. We call upon the Council of Bishops and our seminaries to lead the church in deepening and clarifying the church's mission in the context of the complex, pluralistic, and challenging world of the 21st century. We further call upon the church to develop greater passion at all levels for the central task of raising up, educating and forming well, and sustaining leaders who manifest the grace, gifts, and fruit necessary for pastoral leadership in the church.

2. **We call upon the church to develop a commitment to catechesis for all Christians, especially through attention to the distinctive witness of our Wesleyan tradition.**

Evidence abounds that congregations and leaders lack basic knowledge of the Bible, Christian doctrine, and history. Yet such knowledge is crucial; it is both formative and transformative. Without a firm grounding in the Bible, Christian doctrine, and tradition, the church is unable to engage the culture critically and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. Further, our Wesleyan tradition offers rich ways to shape a coherent identity and embrace our diversity as a global church. It also emphasizes the centrality of spiritual formation, lifelong learning, and faithful disciple-

ship in an integrated vision of Christian life. Such a vision also involves people more clearly in discerning their diverse gifts and how they might best be developed in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We recommend that the Council of Bishops lead the recovery of the teaching office at all levels of the denomination and challenge all boards and agencies, seminaries, colleges, and universities to join in the effort to ground and shape the church in accordance with our Wesleyan theology, doctrine, and mission.

3. We call upon the church to emphasize and reinvigorate its financial, institutional, and programmatic support and accountability for the networks that prepare laity and clergy alike for leadership roles in the church.

This includes the crucial role of educating laity through colleges, universities, and other settings, and it also includes a clear emphasis on shaping a learned and learning clergy through the seminaries. Central to this education and formation of leaders in the Wesleyan tradition is engagement with those on the margins of societies, especially the poor, and a recognition that ministry occurs in a variety of sites and contexts. We request that the church, through the Council of Bishops and the relevant Boards and Agencies (including Boards of Ordained Ministry, General Board of Discipleship, and Conference Boards of Laity), develop clear and effective strategies both to challenge persons to consider ministry in its varied contexts as vocation and to strengthen institutions in their capacity to equip persons to do so through study, worship, and service – especially with the poor.

4. We call upon the church to develop a more clearly articulated, widely understood, and coherent theology of ordination that identifies the distinctive yet complementary roles of laity and clergy.

Since Methodism began as a movement within an established church, and since providing pastoral leadership in a variety of contexts has always been a priority and a challenge, appropriate credentials for those who serve as pastors have varied. What is the theological distinction between ordination and licensing? Is ordination primarily for local church pastors or are persons called appropriately as elders to teaching ministry and other settings? What is the relationship between ordained elders and local pastors? What is the relationship between those ordained as elders and those ordained as deacons? Can ordination be distinguished from conference membership and/or guaranteed appointment? How can new forms of ministry be developed experimentally, while retaining a coherent understanding of ordination? We recommend that the Board of Higher Education and Ministry and the Council of Bishops, with the assistance of appropriate scholars, lead in clarifying, articulating, and deepening the theology of ministry with particular attention to ordination, the ordering of ministry more generally, and current requirements for credentialing the various expressions of ministry. We also strongly recommend that this process include evaluating and then improving processes whereby grace, gifts, and the fruit of ministry are initially assessed and recurrently evaluated.

5. We call upon the church to commit to strengthening the relationships among all those bodies that are crucial for calling forth, educating and equipping, and deploying leaders in the church.

All of these activities require mutually supportive relationships between, for example, the church and the academy, and more specifically between annual conferences and church-related schools and seminaries. Annual conferences play a critical role in the lifelong formation and support of pastoral leaders. The training of leaders cannot be left exclusively to the colleges and seminaries; nor can the colleges and seminaries fulfill their roles without support and input from the annual conferences. New cooperative and collaborative strategies are needed. We recommend that ongoing, systematic, and strategic dialogue take place between our seminaries, the various Colleges of Bishops, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and annual conference Boards of Ministry. The goal of this dialogue is the development of true partnerships in which all those involved in calling, forming, supporting, and deploying church leaders can maximize their contribution to providing and sustaining leaders for the fulfillment of the church's mission. We further recommend that the church, especially through its Commission on Theological Education, develop a long-range strategy that looks more proactively at the institutions the church needs to equip leaders for pastoral leadership – and where it needs them. This would enable the church to develop stronger criteria for a Wesleyan theological education and formation at the institutions (some of which would not be formally United Methodist) that it approves, and to be more clearly engaged with those institutions. We also recommend that theological schools in the United States develop relationships with sister institutions in the Central Conferences in order to facilitate and enhance the education and formation of pastoral leaders in the global church.

6. We call upon the church, through the leadership of the Council of Bishops and with assistance from relevant bodies, to develop a comprehensive plan for the funding of theological education and leadership formation in The United Methodist Church.

In order to do so, we also call upon the church to focus renewed attention on ensuring that the gospel of Jesus Christ, not influential market-driven assumptions, is the primary lens through which our lives and the world are viewed and the primary basis on which decisions are made. Too often, economic factors negatively impact the formation, support, and deployment of pastoral leaders and set much of the agenda of both church and academy. We recommend that the Council of Bishops and the AUMTS develop a critical understanding of the ways in which economic assumptions have too often driven our mission, rather than having our economic judgments serve a Wesleyan understanding of our mission. Faithful and effective education and formation of leaders in service to the church's mission require adequate financial support for students, faculty, and all institutions devoted to such education and formation.

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