

**THEREFORE,
GO ...
in MISSION
TOGETHER**

**STATE of the CHURCH
2017**

2017

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

This is an important issue of our annual State of the Church Report. This report follows our collective experience of holy conferencing in Portland in May 2016 during General Conference. As we gathered for General Conference, we celebrated, as a worldwide church, the fruit of our 2013-2016 efforts to focus and align ourselves to the mission.

As we begin a new quadrennium, we build upon this alignment, moving into strategic planning processes. In November 2016, members of extended cabinets within the United States gathered for a summit to learn and share their strategies for increasing vital congregations, bearing fruit in four areas of collaborative focus with one another. This event, and others like it around the connection, demonstrate our commitment and our conviction that we are stronger together when we are focused on our mission.


This commitment to unity undergirds everything we do as a church in the Wesleyan tradition. Our Wesleyan theology informs that, as disciples in community, we join God's mission to transform the world. We are compelled by a vision of salvation in its fullness, encompassing all of life and all of creation. We are, in other words, "together in mission for the sake of the world."

We express this through the four missional foci: Leadership – New places with new people – Ministry with the poor – Global health. Together the four foci form a holistic expression of our Wesleyan understanding of a mission-driven church. One focus cannot be detached from the others. None of the foci is self-pollinating; rather, they are interdependent and intertwined as they influence and shape each other.


This quadrennium, we, as The United Methodist Church around the world, will:

- » continue our focus on increasing vital and vibrant congregations
- » make 1 million new disciples, many of whom will come through our commitment to new faith communities
- » equip 3 million difference-makers to transform the world
- » develop 400 community partnerships to reach those at the margins
- » and save 1 million children's lives through life-saving interventions

We pursue these strategic directions and priorities, presented at General Conference, together. We believe fervent prayer, clarity of vision and direction, intensified collaboration, respectful mutual support, a deliberate worldwide scope, purposeful communication, extravagant generosity of grace and resources and unconditional dependence on the Holy Spirit will determine the quality of the long-term outcome. ■


 Bishop Christian Alsted
 CHAIRPERSON,
 THE CONNECTIONAL TABLE


 Bishop Bruce Ough
 PRESIDENT, COUNCIL OF BISHOPS


 Bishop Michael McKee
 PRESIDENT, GENERAL COUNCIL ON FINANCE AND
 ADMINISTRATION



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ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE BAPTISM: Bishop Elaine Stanovsky baptizes the daughter of a clergy couple from the Rocky Mountain Conference.

COURTESY ROCKY MOUNTAIN ANNUAL CONFERENCE.



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A GENERAL CONFERENCE 2016

delegates worked through hundreds of petitions, they approved continuing work that will support the teachings and polity of The United Methodist Church worldwide. Their efforts will serve tens of thousands of congregations in places as distant as Anchorage, Alaska, United States, and Pasig City, Philippines, as diverse as Alberta, Canada, and Kalima, Democratic Republic of Congo, as different as Mutare, Zimbabwe, and Trondheim, Norway.

Work continues to develop the *General Book of Discipline* and to finalize which sections one or more central conferences may adapt to fit their context and which sections must be the same throughout the Church. Leading the work is the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters. It is working in consultation with the Commission for the Study of Ministry, the Committee on Faith and Order and

the Connectional Table on chapters in Part VI and developing a new Part VII. As work continues, each annual conference will have an opportunity to respond to the draft before the writers finalize the new sections for proposal to General Conference 2020.

The Committee on Faith and Order, established in 2012, is leading study of the church's ecclesiology – its understanding of church – using a draft document entitled *Wonder, Love and Praise*. Working through the annual conferences, the Committee is inviting members around the world to review the document and provide feedback as it drafts a final version for recommendation to the 2020 General Conference. When adopted, the statement articulating and clarifying the identity of The United Methodist Church will carry the same weight as *By Water and the Spirit*, the Church's official teaching on baptism, and *This Holy Mystery*, the official statement on communion.

The General Board of Church and Society is continuing work begun in the 2013-16 quadrennium to make the Church's Social Principles succinct, theologically grounded and globally relevant. Actual

rewriting of the Social Principles is underway this year. The draft will be discussed in public hearings in 2018 and 2019 in each central and jurisdictional conference. Collaborating with Church and Society in the work are the Connectional Table, the Committee on Faith and Order and the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

Another step toward embodying our worldwide connectional system is the apportioning for the first time a part of the general budget to the annual conferences in Africa, Asia and Europe. While a number of those conferences have made voluntary contributions to support the Church's budget for connectional mission and ministry, each is now apportioned a share of the support of the Episcopal Fund and the General Administration Fund.

The Connectional Table continues to move toward adapting its own structure and membership to better serve the worldwide connection, and engaging the urgent question of how United Methodist leaders in the United States make decisions about matters only relevant to churches in that country.

As the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table Task Force on the Global Nature of the Church reported to the 2008 General Conference, "U.S. dominance in denominational governance damages both the Church in the United States and in central conferences. It disempowers central conferences from being fully actualized within the body and allows the Church in the United States to escape responsibility from dealing with its internal issues." ■



◀ Kuimej project coordinator Daniella Charles gathers community health survey information from Aye James, a pregnant woman from Kpawula Village in Sierra Leone.

UMNS/PHILEAS JUSU

Pastor Ivan Morunov (front) plays music during the 2015 Bulgaria-Romania Provisional Conference in Shumen, Bulgaria.

COURTESY BULGARIA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Membership Statistics

The United Methodist Church reports a professing membership of 12.7 million disciples worldwide, a 12 percent increase over the past 10 years. The membership numbers have shifted globally during the past 10 years, with growth in Africa and Asia and decline in the United States and Europe.

CENTRAL CONFERENCE/REGION	2005	2015	10-YEAR CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP	10-YEAR % CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP
AFRICA CENTRAL	374,090	610,125	236,035	63%
CONGO	1,216,257	3,081,590	1,865,333	153%
WEST AFRICA	1,462,457	1,673,612	211,155	14%
CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN EUROPE	18,410	13,539	(4,871)	-26%
GERMANY	34,900	30,069	(4,831)	-14%
NORTHERN EUROPE AND EURASIA	15,731	9,996	(5,735)	-36%
PHILIPPINES	201,309	233,457	32,148	16%
UNITED STATES	7,995,591	7,064,189	(931,402)	-12%
TOTAL	11,318,745	12,716,577	1,397,832	12%

General Church Funds

This chart shows the total amount of apportioned funds requested and received from annual conferences in the United States. In 2016, the delegates to General Conference approved expanding apportionment collections for the General Administration Fund and Episcopal Fund to central conferences. Some central conferences have contributed to apportioned funds in the past, but not in a formalized apportionment collection system.

Paid on Apportionments to All General Funds, 1994-2016*

YEAR	TOTAL FUNDS APPORTIONED	PAID	% PAID
1994	\$110,639,996	\$93,339,909	84.4%
1995	\$113,828,214	\$97,868,862	86.0%
1996	\$117,146,649	\$100,382,948	85.7%
1997	\$118,425,273	\$104,496,463	88.2%
1998	\$118,431,010	\$105,394,783	89.0%
1999	\$119,630,756	\$107,857,724	90.2%
2000	\$121,999,757	\$111,187,769	91.1%
2001	\$127,256,750	\$114,676,537	90.1%
2002	\$127,860,750	\$113,095,935	88.5%
2003	\$129,634,750	\$112,418,090	86.7%
2004	\$132,656,250	\$116,808,070	88.1%
2005	\$139,955,000	\$121,703,502	87.0%
2006	\$142,849,627	\$126,427,676	88.5%
2007	\$145,693,841	\$130,564,022	89.6%
2008	\$150,973,581	\$130,210,994	86.2%
2009	\$150,308,000	\$126,303,259	84.0%
2010	\$150,232,058	\$129,428,321	86.2%
2011	\$149,472,006	\$130,885,848	87.6%
2012	\$147,268,131	\$132,743,590	90.1%
2013	\$143,302,750	\$128,613,187	89.7%
2014	\$143,132,984	\$130,069,948	90.9%
2015	\$142,579,036	\$130,649,815	91.6%
2016	\$143,115,210	\$131,444,245	91.9%

*Excludes the 25% of Ministerial Education Fund apportioned funds that is retained by the annual conferences.

Parishioners raise their hands in praise during worship at Vedado Methodist Church in Havana, Cuba.

UMNS/MIKE DUBOSE



STATE of the CHURCH



UMC Membership, Congregations, Clergy, Conferences, Bishops

In 10 years, The United Methodist Church has experienced strong growth in Africa and Asia as evidenced by increases in the number of clergy, congregations, conferences and members.

2015	PROFESSING MEMBERSHIP	TOTAL CONGREGATIONS	ORDAINED CLERGY	ANNUAL CONFERENCES	ACTIVE BISHOPS
AFRICA	5,365,327	13,668	4,758	30	13
ASIA	233,457	1,762	2,016	25	3
EUROPE	53,604	1,237	977	21	4
NORTH AMERICA	7,064,189	32,149	47,271	56	46
TOTAL	12,716,577	48,816	55,022	132	66

2005	PROFESSING MEMBERSHIP	TOTAL CONGREGATIONS	TOTAL CLERGY	ANNUAL CONFERENCES	ACTIVE BISHOPS
AFRICA	3,052,804	9,757	4,005	22	12
ASIA	201,309	1,654	798	21	3
EUROPE	69,041	1,601	1,228	20	4
NORTH AMERICA	7,995,591	34,678	45,220	63	50
TOTAL	11,318,745	47,690	51,251	126	69

The General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA), is constantly assessing the way in which statistics are collected from central conferences in an effort to make the process as efficient and effective as possible. From terminology used on forms to communication and deadlines, every aspect of collecting data has been evaluated. One example of reaching out to improve the processes is that later this year, GCFA will conduct training in Africa to deal with data collection. We continually thank the global leadership in our Church for efforts that assure our information is correct.



Sylvain Jean Baptist, 42, sells food from her market stall in Mazak, Haiti. She is one of the first clients of the microcredit program at Haiti Artisans for Peace International.

UMNS/MIKE DUBOSE

Connected in mission through Four Areas of Focus

SINCE 2008, Four Areas of Focus have undergirded the connectional mission and ministry of the people of The United Methodist Church.

The Council of Bishops first named them to identify areas in which the ministries of faithful disciples of Jesus Christ in their conferences were making disciples, changing communities, transforming the world. Increasing vital congregations bearing fruit in these four areas continues to be an essential element of our United Methodist mission. Understanding how the connection works together through local congregations as one of the most significant arenas for disciple-making is necessary to our mission. Delegates to General Conference 2016 reaffirmed our mission and supported the Four Areas of Focus to guide the work of the Council, the Connectional Table and the general agencies as they lead the church and support the ministries of local churches and annual conferences.

As the 2017-2020 quadrennium begins, we work together towards achieving strategic directions for each of the areas: developing leaders, new places for new people, ministry with the poor and global health.

Implementing carefully developed strategic plans has been key to the progress The United Methodist Church has made in each of these areas over the past two quadrennia. The work of the general church in developing these strategies, though, is not enough to bring about the fruit we've seen in these areas of focus. Equally important is each individual United Methodist and each congregation living Jesus' command to love God and love neighbor, of each individual United Methodist playing his or her part to carry out the church's mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Among the results will be an increase in vital congregations nurturing new and growing disciples.

Developing Leaders

In the Dakotas Annual Conference, the Elisha Project is creating a "Culture of Call" for students and providing an environment to uncover prospective ministerial leadership. The Elisha Project is an internship program that allows students to explore, discern their call and discuss with mentors and peers where God is calling them. As we seek to develop leaders who are "difference makers," we will urge members to remember, discern



Alexis Soto (left) and Freddie Bermudez share reflections during a MARCHA caucus in Boston. UMNS/TIM TANTON

and live the call to service that came with their baptism. We encourage every congregation to develop a "culture of call" that affirms and nurtures those called both to ordained and lay ministry.

General Conference goal: Engage 3 million-plus "difference makers."

New Places for New People

Between 2013 and 2015, 1,885 new faith communities/ministries started in the central conferences, 330 faith communities started in parts of Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe outside central conferences and annual conferences planted 510 new churches in the United States. We have long known that the most effective evangelism comes through relationships, through one friend or neighbor or co-worker sharing with another. As local church members grow in their understanding of what it means



This inflatable church used in Germany draws in curious visitors of all types – even secular Europeans who've never set foot in a church. COURTESY BARRY SLOAN

to be followers of Jesus Christ and to be United Methodists, their comfort in carrying messages of faith will increase. New church plants, new and revitalized faith communities and spiritual neighborhoods will welcome new people and both nurture spiritual practices and involve people in mission.

General Conference goal: Make 1 million new disciples of Jesus Christ around the world and double the number of highly vital congregations

Ministry with the Poor

To be in ministry with the poor means we share in ministry with the poor, recognizing the gifts as well as the needs of those who are marginalized. In working to transform



Nhots Celzo demonstrates how to use solar bulbs to the Rev. Iris Picardal Terana in Tacloban City, Philippines. UMCOM/APRIL GRACE G. MERCADO

400 communities for vital, abundant living, we will train conference and local church leaders to develop partnerships in their communities to challenge systems that create and perpetuate poverty. We will encourage members to develop relationships with the people to whom they extend God's love as they serve to meet needs.

General Conference goal: Address issues of poverty within 400 new communities.

Global Health

The Imagine No Malaria global health initiative helped halve the death rate from malaria among people in sub-Saharan Africa. As we move to emphasizing Abundant Health for All, projects are already underway in Liberia, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Haiti and the United States. They range from maternal-child health projects to prevention and treatment of childhood illnesses and promotion of child health and wellness. In some places, connective ministries and



A youngster receives a bandage from pharmacist Rick Talley for bravely offering to take a flu shot during a community health fair at Friendship United Methodist Church in Millington, Tennessee. Although she was too young to be immunized, her father did receive the vaccine. UMNS/MIKE DUBOSE

local churches will be partners in mission; in others, local churches will engage in fund-raising to support the efforts. In all places, we will encourage church members and leaders to adopt healthier lifestyles and urge pastors to become advocates for health and well-being in their communities.

General Conference goal: Reach 1 million children with life-saving interventions.

As we continue our connection-wide ministry through the Four Areas of Focus, we will see congregations becoming more vital and vibrant as they reflect both flourishing discipleship and a connection to local and global communities. ■

Finding A Way Forward

FOR DECADES, The United Methodist Church has struggled with how it addresses questions of human sexuality, specifically, how to be in ministry with LGBTQ people and their life and roles in the Church.

Midway through General Conference 2016, as it became apparent that the Church was at an impasse on these complex questions, the delegates turned to the Council of Bishops for guidance and leadership. In response, the bishops presented “An Offering for a Way Forward” that asked the delegates:

- » “to affirm your own commitment to maintaining and strengthening the unity of the Church,”
- » to “pause for prayer” – to step back from attempts at legislative solutions and to intentionally seek God’s will for the future” and
- » to authorize a special commission, named by the Council of Bishops, to develop a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph in *The Book of Discipline* regarding human sexuality.

In January 2017, the 32 members (eight bishops, 11 laity, 11 elders and two deacons) of the General Conference-authorized Commission on A Way Forward began their work

with the guidance of three moderators, Bishops Sondra Steiner Ball, Kenneth Carter and David Yemba. The 18 men and 14 women on the commission are from Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Germany, Mozambique, Nigeria, Philippines, Switzerland, the United States and Zimbabwe.

A special session of General Conference has been called for Feb. 23-26, 2019, in S. Louis, Missouri, USA, to receive and act on a report from the Council of Bishops based on the recommendations of the Commission.

The Commission’s mission, as set forth by the Council of Bishops’ executive committee, is to address matters of human sexuality and unity that are the presenting issues for a deeper conversation that surfaces different ways of interpreting Scripture and theological tradition. Ultimately, the Commission’s

work is to inform deliberations across the denomination and to help the Council of Bishops as they serve the next General Conference in finding a way forward. The bishops said the Commission would consider giving “greater freedom and flexibility to a future United

Methodist Church that will redefine our present connectionality, which is showing signs of brokenness.”

As they began their work in January, the Commission members worshipped together and began foundational work integral to their charge of developing consensus about how to move forward amid different theological understandings of LGBTQ identity. Conversations in small groups ranged from challenges, hopes and concerns for what is happening in the Church currently to the meaning of unity. The members also developed some initial proposed outcomes along with a list of learning objectives and informational needs.

Reflecting on the meeting, the moderators noted, “While the ‘we’ of The United Methodist Church is contested, at the moment, there is a fundamental



Council of Bishops President Bruce Ough presents “An Offering for A Way Forward” to the 2016 General Conference.

UMNS/PAUL JEFFREY

David Armstrong thanks then 5-year-old Ellie Hill as he receives the light of Christ during worship at the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference.

OREGON-IDAHO ANNUAL CONFERENCE/GREG NELSON



commitment to seek unity.”

“This work can be a part of our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” they continued. “It is not an interruption or a distraction from that work.”

While the formal process of study, discernment and recommendation falls to the Commission, the entire Church can support it through an initiative of “Praying Our Way Forward.” Aiming to seek God’s guidance at this critical time, the Council of Bishops created the initiative as part of their commitment to lead the Church in every part of the world in times of worship, study, discernment, confession and prayer.

During the first phase, 84 active and retired bishops spent 15 minutes each day for four months in prayer for the selection and initial work of the Commission.

In the second phase, which began Jan. 1, each of the annual conferences is taking one week to have intentional prayer for the mission of the Church and for the work of the Commission. In addition to joining in their conference’s week of prayer, individuals are encouraged to pray daily and fast weekly for the Church, its mission and future. ■

Commission on a Way Forward,
www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward

Praying Our Way Forward,
UMCprays.org



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Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church®

This report is a collaborative effort of The Connectional Table and United Methodist Communications with statistical data provided by the General Council on Finance and Administration. To view this report online, visit www.umc.org/sotc.

COVER PHOTO CREDITS: (Clockwise from upper left) GiffinCreative; UMNS/Mike DuBose; UMNS/Mike DuBose; UMCom/Kathleen Barry; UMCom/Kathleen Barry; UMCom/Kathleen Barry

**The Connectional Table of
The United Methodist Church**

Phone 866-648-9584

Website www.umc.org/connectionaltable

**The Council of Bishops of
The United Methodist Church**

Phone 202-547-6270

Website www.umc.org/councilofbishops

**The General Council on
Finance and Administration**

Phone 866-367-4232

Website www.gcfa.org