

Fall 2021 Board Report

From the General Secretary and Staff

“Witnessing and Rejoicing in a New Mission Age”

General Secretary and staff report to directors of the General Board of Global Ministries
October 27, 2021

Introduction: Structuring for Witness in a New Mission Age

By Roland Fernandes, General Secretary

I want to begin by thanking the directors for your continued service to Global Ministries. Some of you are in your tenth year now of service and others into your sixth as the so-called quadrennium continues to reshape itself. For almost two years now, the imagery of witnessing to Jesus Christ in a “new mission age” has defined our context as we have met as the Board of Directors of Global Ministries, the mission policy-making unit of The United Methodist Church. The phrase is from our Mission Theology statement where a “new mission age” is seen as a gift of the Holy Spirit, enlivening our commitment to God’s mission.

A “new age” implies challenge and change and we have in earlier meetings described the markers of this new age. These include the COVID-19 pandemic, uncertainties about the future of our denomination, the perils of climate change and the continuation of systemic racism with its denial of equality in church and society.

At our board meeting a year ago, we enumerated five operational touchstones for responding to these challenges. These included: sharpening our focus; tightening accountability in fiscal and program interface; increasing collaboration within our organization, within our United Methodist connection and with ecumenical partners; expanding monitoring and evaluation measurement tools; and enhancing communication. We have continued to emphasize our four missional priorities: missionaries, evangelism and church revitalization, global health, and humanitarian relief and recovery.

And we have begun the hard, demanding work of sharpening and shaping our mission activity. By “we,” I mean directors, staff, missionaries, partners, volunteers and many other participants in the United Methodist connectational mission. As we continue to change and adapt to this new experience, I want to use this time today to share with you some of the measures in process and some of the challenges we face. As we all

realize, not everything will be different, but many things are going to look and feel different. We are not going back as a mission agency, church or world to some pre-2020 “normal.” That age is past; our eyes and focus must be set upon the future.

Yes, we have a strong foundation. We are blessed to have a sturdy 202-year-old legacy that we honor and from which we can learn and on which we can build. But yesterday will not recruit the missionaries needed for today or tomorrow nor will it plant new congregations. Yesterday will not respond to pandemics nor will it clean the environment. Yesterday will not raise thoughtful children and the leaders of tomorrow. Yesterday cannot fully address the challenges of today or fully imagine the challenges of tomorrow.

The United Methodist ideals of collaboration and connection are endangered. After months of working online and at a distance, churches, conferences, agencies and other Methodist entities are often tempted to work independently and disconnected from one another. But here, yesterday’s values of collaboration and connection need to be drawn from our past and strengthened, revitalized and reimagined in new ways for this new age of witness. One of the questions we have been wrestling with in recent months is how to better connect with the church in mission. In this new age of witness, what does missional engagement mean today for the role of Global Ministries? We continue to seek insight into this critical area.

Rejoicing in Our Work

Though it will not be easy, I hope we will find joy and fulfillment in our work of shaping our witness in these rapidly changing times. We need to be mindful of the risk involved in reshaping anything significant. Recall what happened when the ancient Jews rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem following the return of the exiles from captivity in Babylon, in the days of restorers Ezra and Nehemiah. A few verses in Ezra chapter 3 paint a vivid picture:

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the Lord with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.”

And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation

of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shouts from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away. (Ezra 3:10–13 NRSV)

You might reason that sounds of joy being indistinguishable from lamentations aptly describes the aftermath of the Special General Conference of 2019 or, perhaps, the expected finale of the next General Conference, whenever that occurs. But this passage is about more than noise levels. It is more of a story about giving thanks that a new house of the Lord can rise on a firm foundation than it is a story about tears. The temple of Solomon was gone. Lamentation was not going to bring it back. It is a reminder that God's steadiness is what endures, not earthly and organizational structures. God is about moving forward in joy, not about wishing for the way things used to be. As the people of Israel had no choice but to welcome a new temple in Ezra's day, so too do we have a God-given opportunity to rejoice in new forms of mission witness in this new age.

I hope that the majority response within our United Methodist community will be one of thanksgiving, as expressed in Ezra 3:11, remembering that God is good and "his steadfast love endures forever." I hope that joy will prevail over tears and that we will find our doxology in Philippians where Paul addresses a congregation that has experienced internal differences:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4–7 NRSV)

Pray with me that our continuing work of shaping mission witness in this age will be a constant reminder that this is God's mission, God is near, and that only by working together can we witness to the love of Jesus Christ.

And now, recognizing our new mission age with joy in our work and trust in God, we turn to some of the bricks and mortar of mission.

Program Inventory and Strategic Planning

Last week you received 13 documents related to the strategic planning process through which we are inventorying and evaluating our programs in preparation for the 2022–2024 strategic plan. Those documents are program refinements and logical frameworks for three of our four program priorities. The framework for the fourth—missionaries—is still in development. These documents are being shared in more detail in our committee work. I have asked Amihan Jones, director of Monitoring and Evaluation, to share with you an overview of the strategic planning process and the results of the program inventory, including the refinement of our work into 17 programs from an original list of 30.

Thank you and greetings to the board and staff. The program inventory and strategic planning process has been invaluable to the agency.

The process began in September 2020, when we reviewed and catalogued our work around the four missional priority areas. We developed an initial program inventory along with descriptions for each of these programs. These descriptions provided a sharpened context for conversation across the Senior Leadership Team about the value and impact of our programs.

For the second phase from April of this year until December, there have been 13 out of 17 programs that were redefined. To be clear, we have not stopped or curtailed any existing programs, but have redefined and consolidated some of the programs.

After all the strategic templates and logical frameworks are completed in early 2022, Global Ministries leadership will go through a high-level strategic planning process reviewing the current state of our programs. Stakeholders, including directors, will be included in this process to provide input and recommendations for any adjustments or revisions for the 2022–2024 strategic plan.

Finally, we hope that this work of documenting and refining programs, developing logical frameworks and incorporating stakeholder feedback will lead to a comprehensive, impactful and realistic strategic plan that will work to equip and transform people and places for God's mission.

The program templates, which you all received last week for mission priority areas two through four, have been a key focal point of our work this year as an agency. There are two main components—the program narrative

and the logical framework. The program narratives were completed through an iterative process with programs and leadership, and the program narrative includes components such as what the program addresses, alignment of mission and vision, the five key touchstones, program design and short-term objectives.

The second component is the logical framework, which the Monitoring and Evaluation unit developed after initial input from the program templates. Logical frameworks are essential tools to help each program enhance goal setting and accountability. Formulated with careful guidance from the Monitoring and Evaluation unit, these logical frameworks will support program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the work going forward, ensuring impact and responsiveness to what we are being called to at this time.

Here you will see a list of the 17 programs currently within our program inventory. Each of the large boxes are the different missional priority area. For priority area one—missionaries—there are four programs listed and this box is highlighted in a different color because the programs are currently being reviewed with the program template process. For priority area two through four, there are 13 programs listed.

There are currently four main programs listed under priority area one—missionaries. This includes global missionaries, who serve in varied roles and ministries with partners around the world; Global Mission Fellows who connect faith and action by engaging in community, connecting the church in mission, and growing in social and personal holiness; Church and Community Workers and Racial Ethnic Plan missionaries who bridge church and community in mission in marginalized or racial/ethnic communities; and Mission Volunteers who seek long-term partnerships with communities around the world. The work of missionaries intersects with several areas of the agency.

For priority area two, there have been four main programs identified. The first is Leadership Development and Scholarships and the goal of the program is to develop principled leaders who are helping to strengthen, enhance, build and connect mission capacity. The second program is Multiethnic Ministries and the purpose of the program is to confront racial, ethnic and social disparities inherent in The United Methodist Church and communities in the U.S. The Multiethnic Ministries grants program includes the Community Developers Program, Native American Ministries, United Methodist Voluntary Services grants and other similar funding. Third are the Mission Initiatives, whose goal is for Wesleyan Methodism to develop more disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And finally, Missional Connections, whose goal is to create, strengthen and sustain United Methodist relationships within

and among the global regions and, in turn, their connection to the global church for greater missional effectiveness. This program includes activities such as roundtables, In Mission Together, grants and relationship building.

For priority area three—global health—the four main programs include Health Systems Strengthening; Imagine No Malaria; Maternal, Newborn and Child Health; and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). The goals of the programs remain as they have been in the past.

For priority area four—humanitarian relief and recovery—there are five main programs: International Disaster Response; U.S. Disaster Response; Global Migration; Environmental Sustainability; and the Yambasu Agriculture Initiative.

As you can see, there has been substantial time and effort devoted to understanding who we are as an agency, what we do and how we can do things better. It is our belief that through careful planning, thoughtful decision-making and making space for the Holy Spirit to work through us, our ability to transform the world for God's mission will be multiplied.

I am grateful to our staff who have continued to work through this period of the pandemic with all its restrictions and we have continued to function as best we can. I will now briefly lift up some **specific program matters** which I believe are relevant to share with you at this time and clearly cannot cover everything we are doing.

1. I want to mention two important developments regarding **Native American Ministries**. In late September, we coordinated with 10 other United Methodist general agencies in crafting a statement that strongly condemned the abuse of Indigenous young people in government-funded boarding schools across many decades prior to 1980. Such schools often operated in concert with religious organizations, including the Methodist Church. These schools, which have become the topic of public outcry, engaged in nothing less than cultural genocide by deliberately separating Native boys and girls from their families and culture. Global Ministries has been exploring Methodist complicity in these institutions. To date in our research, we have discovered that some of our predecessor mission agencies did indeed sponsor some of the implicated schools. Research on the extent of our involvement is ongoing and we will continue to pursue this important matter. September 30 was observed as a Day of Remembrance for victims and survivors of the boarding

schools. The recent public and church attention to those schools and the harm they inflicted on Indigenous communities recalls our denomination's 2012 "Act of Repentance Toward Healing Relationships with Indigenous People." However, that act does not specifically reference the boarding schools, which are cited for their harm in a 2016 General Conference omnibus resolution on Native American ministries. I have asked the Rev. David Wilson, a director and superintendent of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, to tell us briefly what this issue means to Indigenous people, especially those within our church. David was consulted in the preparation of the September statement marking the Day of Remembrance and will share more with us on Friday morning.

Also, we would recommend action at this board meeting to fund an exhibit called "The Land Calls Us Home" at Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport on Native experience and culture. This project, though on a temporary hold, has been long in the works in collaboration with our church's Native American Comprehensive Plan and has involved some of our directors.

2. On another matter that, literally, continues to plague us, we continue to respond with partners to the **COVID-19 pandemic** around the world. As of late September this year, we have made 270 grants totaling more than \$4.3 million in 52 countries. In addition to its continued response, the Global Health unit is an active participant in COVAX (COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access), a worldwide initiative aimed at equitable distribution and access to the vaccines. We have worked with First UMC Boise to set up an Advance to support UNICEF's role in COVAX, specifically funds for the vaccine distribution initiative. We have endorsed several international and/or interfaith statements advocating equity in vaccine distribution.
3. Along with hurricanes and wildfires in the United States, the late summer and fall brought new challenges to UMCOR, such as the earthquake in **Haiti**. The August 14 earthquake that ravaged southern and western Haiti caused over 2,000 deaths and injured over 13,000 people. Haiti has a special place in our history of disaster response, notably because we lost two prominent staff members, the Rev. Sam Dixon, director of UMCOR, and the Rev. Clint Rabb, head of the Volunteers in Mission office, in the massive earthquake of January 2010. Haiti is never an easy place to work because of political, economic and geographic realities. The recent kidnapping of 17 missionaries and ransom demand are further indicators of the complexity in Haiti. This year, as often in the past, we are part-

nering with the Methodist Church of Haiti, as well as other partners on the ground, in earthquake response. We have provided a \$110,000 grant to the Methodist Church of Haiti, with a significant part of that coming from a gift in Sam Dixon's memory from the First United Methodist Church in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, the last congregation he pastored before joining the UMCOR staff. UMCOR matched the memorial gift in a tribute to Sam's example of service in Christ's name.

4. The withdrawal of the United States from a 20-year war in **Afghanistan** at the end of August created a new generation of refugees, as many as 50,000 expected to seek safe haven and a new home in the U.S. UMCOR is working with long-time partner Church World Service in resettlement efforts. A grant of \$100,000 to CWS, one of the official resettlement agencies, will assist the newcomers with housing, legal assistance, medical care and other essentials. In addition, the Emergency Committee just approved a \$100,000 reimbursement program that will give local UMCs in the U.S. who wish to sponsor Afghan resettlement through CWS up to \$1,000 reimbursement on the expenses they incur in this activity. We hope this program will encourage local churches to engage in this important and transformative ministry. We continue to focus on other migration issues, including those along the U.S.-Mexico border, anti-trafficking and legal assistance for migrants, among others.
5. We are bringing six grants to this board meeting for approval from the **Bishop John K. Yambasu Agricultural Initiative**. These are from North Katanga, Central Congo, Sierra Leone (second grant), Zimbabwe East, Zimbabwe West and Liberia. This batch of Yambasu Agriculture Initiative grants total \$1.3 million and are predicted to impact 30,000 beneficiaries. I am glad that there is growing interest in this project which could go a long way to increase self-sustainability of individuals and of the church in Africa, while maintaining local ownership. We have also begun conversations with Africa University around collaboration in this area.
6. The past months have raised questions for us on **operating principles for UMCOR**. Yesterday in our committee meeting we began a discussion on matters we must explore including capacity, accountability, partner relations and the role of the church in UMCOR's work and vice-versa. Even though this was only the beginning of the conversation, it was very fruitful. We must talk about how to manage these issues without violating our core principle of responding to human need regardless of religion, race or national origin.

7. Despite the logistical challenges to missionary training and travel caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we continue to equip and place **missionaries**. We were hoping to do an in-person commissioning at this meeting, but it could not happen due to travel challenges. We hope to do this in May of next year. We were able to celebrate—via Zoom—the 70th anniversary of the founding of the US-2 young adult mission program.

Operational Updates

1. In the **Mission Appropriations** book you will have noticed that we reimagined the way the budgets are prepared and presented. The budget narrative focuses predominantly on the agency's programs and is organized accordingly. This focus on programs versus unit structure recognizes the centrality of programs and their roles as preeminent features of the agency, ensuring that it achieves its programmatic objectives, organized into four missional priorities. As you will have also noticed, another key shift is that all streams of income and expenses have been included so as to provide a comprehensive picture for next year both programmatically and financially.

The proposed Global Ministries budget for next year is \$43 million and the UMCOR and Global Health budget is \$26 million. Our current financial position made the balancing of the 2022 appropriations fairly easy and included the use of available reserves. The budgets have already been reviewed and approved by the Budget Committee and will come to the board for approval through the Executive Committee.

2. We have moved to a **remote and hybrid work environment** in preparation for when the building reopens. "Hybrid" means that some staff who need to be in the office to do certain tasks spend part of their time at the office and part of the time working remotely. We do not know exactly when the reopening will take place, but the hope is for this to happen sometime in early 2022. I want to state clearly that physical space is crucial to our ministry even as we expand its use.
3. We have updated our **child safety policies**, putting strong emphasis on the necessity of every grantee that deals with children to have a child protection policy that is vetted by our general counsel. In light of the sexual abuse crises in other denominations and other organiza-

tions, we consider it crucial to be at the forefront of best practices in ensuring child safety.

Finally, before the treasurer's report and some concluding thoughts, I want to introduce the issue of the **use of space** in our building. In this new mission age, an age of remote and hybrid staff service, we have space to share. This gives us opportunity for new mission possibilities.

From the outset of our ownership and tenancy of the Grace Church property in 2016, we envisioned this site as an international mission headquarters, a base for a worshipping congregation and a center of community ministry. We have continued to house programs devoted to community outreach, as has been possible throughout the pandemic, such as food ministries and the work of Action Ministries and Grace UMC. We now have the opportunity to welcome new neighbors in our space with regard to both congregational life and humanitarian outreach. Earlier this year, Action Ministries merged into HOPE Atlanta, another agency, founded in 1900, that seeks to find solutions to homelessness. In just a minute, Jeffrey Smythe, CEO of HOPE Atlanta, will tell us about his organization, its work and vision. Another wonderful opportunity is that Grace Church, a small, predominately white congregation, celebrating 150 years this month, is excited to move into a new partnership with Cascade UMC, which will continue its witness in Midtown Atlanta. Cascade, which is now a 7,000 member, predominantly African American congregation, was founded in 1926. The details of the Cascade-Grace relationship are still being worked out, but the pastors of each local church are here to share with us. We will hear from Pastor Sara Webb Phillips of Grace and Pastor Kevin R. Murriel of Cascade after Jeffrey Smythe tells us about HOPE Atlanta. Mike Gurick will then bring the treasurer's report.

(Jeffrey Smythe introduced HOPE Atlanta, **H**ousing, **O**utreach, **P**revention and **E**mergency services—HOPE, which merged with Action Ministries and the Women's Community Kitchen. HOPE Atlanta continues to carry out the ministries of Action Ministries and the merged organization works with communities to alleviate and avoid homelessness and hunger, engaging with partners from Rome to South Fulton, Georgia.

Sara Webb Phillips and Kevin Murriel outlined the vision for this new congregational merger, which will form a second Cascade campus at Grace UMC. They see this as a new church plant that is social justice and Christ driven, operating in the Old Fourth Ward of Atlanta's midtown. The 4th Ward needs space to coexist and connect with God and one another. "We want to have this congregation intersect race, class and gender," said Murriel.

Mike Gurick presented the treasurer's report. This report was sent to the directors prior to the meeting.)

You have heard only some of what we are doing during these times. The committee time will provide more opportunity for discussion. We have a great deal of work for God's mission over the next three days. This work, I hope, is our joy in a new mission age, and may we approach it in the spirit of Philippians 4:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen and thank you.

