

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Connectional Table Petitions to the 2012 General Conference of The United Methodist Church

### **What is the Call to Action?**

The Call to Action is a call to every United Methodist to engage in the vital mission of the United Methodist Church – *to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*. It calls all of us to create vital congregations where this mission is being lived out every day, and faithfulness and fruitfulness are exemplified by congregations that grow over time, engage more of their people in ministry and mission, are making more new disciples and are generous in giving to mission.

In 2009 the Council of Bishops, with support and funding from the Connectional Table, initiated a study of our congregations which led to the Call to Action and major recommendations that would change the structure and processes of The United Methodist Church.

Contributing factors which led to the study included the world-wide economic crisis; the four-decade decline membership; an aging and predominantly Anglo constituency; declines in worship attendance, professions of faith and baptisms; difficulty in attracting "young" generations; and other trends around clergy health and job satisfaction.

Research was commissioned by the Call to Action Steering Team (CTA), made up of leaders from throughout the UMC who were asked to examine and evaluate our Church's overall systems for effectiveness in fulfilling our mission to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

After extensive research, the Call to Action Steering Team issued a report and made key recommendations, which were embraced by the Connectional Table and the Council of Bishops.

The study said it was urgent for the church to address its "Adaptive Challenge," which is *"to redirect the flow of attention, energy, and resources to an intense concentration on fostering and sustaining an increase in the number of vital congregations effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."* It also urged us to call and equip more turn-around leaders, to better connect with the faith needs of people in our communities, to embrace metrics as a means of measuring fruit, and to build greater trust within the denomination.

To move this Adaptive Challenge forward, an Interim Operations Team was created. For more on the history of the Call to Action work and the Interim Operations Team visit [www.umccalltoaction.org](http://www.umccalltoaction.org)

### **What are the legislative changes being proposed by the Connectional Table?**

The Connectional Table has submitted legislation based on both the findings from the Call to Action report and recommendations from the Interim Operations Team.

The changes include organizing the denomination for greater fruit bearing ministry, to be accomplished through less bureaucracy and agencies working in silos, and instead engaging in increased collaboration through fewer boards and agencies, so that we grow and support more vital congregations focusing on four areas – ending malaria, eliminating poverty, creating more turnaround leaders and starting more new faith communities.

This will mean consolidating our governance into one board, and empowering our staff to work together to achieve our mission.

Two other changes are proposed:

1) a request to General Conference to empower other church entities to make changes in the allocation of general church funds between General Conference sessions. This would not change the amount of money allocated, but rather, create a mechanism to re-allocate funds if necessary. Currently, once funds are designated for a specific purpose and approved by the General Conference, they cannot be re-allocated, even if needs change. The Connectional Table proposes more flexibility with General Conference deciding which entity has that authority.

2) A related resolution calls for up to \$60 million to be spent on supporting future leaders of the UMC, with \$5 million for youth and young adult leadership development, \$5 million toward Central Conference theological education and \$50 million toward seminary scholarships future U.S. clergy under age 35 and other ways to support the growth and development of vital congregations.

The other recommendations and affirmations from the Interim Operations Team do not require legislation by the Connectional Table at this time. Visit [www.umccalltoaction.org](http://www.umccalltoaction.org) to view the five recommendations and four affirmations affirmed by the Connectional Table.

#### **Why are these changes being proposed and what are the hoped for achievements?**

These changes give us greater flexibility, accountability and responsiveness to meet the needs of our congregations and mission partners around the world. It also focuses attention to the primary connectional body of the denomination – the annual conferences. The challenges of structure have been a recurring issue since the 1968 merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren, when two different church structures were merged into one, maintaining elements of each denomination. Today, in 2011, we see the need to revise our systems to be more adaptable and responsive to our quickly changing world.

#### **How do the Four Areas of Focus fit in?**

The Four Areas of Focus continue to serve as guiding areas of mission and ministry for The United Methodist Church including the general agencies, annual conferences and local congregations. Developing principled Christian leaders, engaging in ministry with the poor, improving global health and starting new places for new people are fundamental to who we are as United Methodists in the Wesleyan tradition, and will continue to be central to the mission of the proposed Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry. As a reminder, the Four Areas of Focus originated from the ministries that residential bishops celebrated as vital ministries in their conferences. We pray that local congregations and annual conferences will continue to strengthen their mission and witness in these areas, which will be an important contribution toward meeting our adaptive challenge.

#### **The Call to Action's Adaptive Challenge was slated to begin January 2011. What has been done since that time?**

The Adaptive Challenge, to redirect the flow of attention, energy, and resources to an intense concentration on fostering and sustaining an increase in the number of vital congregations, is the central focus of a new initiative called the Vital Congregations Project (VCP). The VCP, led by Bishop John Schol of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, has recently launched a new website and is actively engaging with annual conference leaders to provide tools and support for local churches and annual conferences who are ready to implement ways to track and measure progress in the five areas identified as signs of

vitality in the Call to Action research. In this cross-agency partnership, the VCP has been working to assist church leaders in using a web-based program to enter weekly data on attendance, new members, baptisms and professions of faith, benevolent giving, and small group ministries. To learn more, visit the VCP website at: <http://www.umvitalcongregations.org>.

### **How does the Vital Congregations Project relate to the Four Areas of Focus?**

The goal setting process for congregations and Annual Conferences builds on the UMC's Four Areas of Focus – 1) new places for new people, 2) developing principled Christian leaders, 3) improving global health and 4) engaging in ministry with the poor. The Four Areas are reflected in the identified “drivers” or qualities found in vital congregations, such as engaged and competent clergy and lay leadership, disciples who are engaged in mission and who donate generously to missions. As described in the Vital Congregations Planning Guide, missional ministries are examples of Wesley's “means of grace” – works of mercy and justice that include ministry with the poor and the marginalized and improving health globally, such as joining the Imagine No Malaria campaign. Missional justice ministries are those that seek to transform systems of injustice that create poverty and diminish people's health around the globe. For Annual Conferences and local congregations, setting specific goals to start new vital congregations is the heart of the matter – creating new places of vitality where disciples of Jesus Christ are born and nurtured in the faith for the transformation of the world. As we move into a new quadrennium, our attention to increasing and sustaining vital congregations is a deepening of our commitment to the Four Areas of Focus. Measuring the fruits of our ministries in these areas helps us focus on bearing witness to God's transforming love and grace through Jesus Christ in our own lives, our communities and world.

### **The CT legislation calls for restructuring the general agencies into one general agency with one board of directors. Which agencies will be affected by these proposed changes?**

The agencies that are proposed to merge into the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry include: General Council on Finance and Administration, the General Board of Discipleship, the General Board of Global Ministries, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministries, the General Board of Church and Society, the Commission on Archives and History, the Commission on Communications, the Commission on Religion and Race and the Commission on the Role and Status of Women. The General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns has submitted its own proposal to become part of the Council of Bishops, thus it is not included in the CT's legislation.

The proposal aims to institute a single Board of Directors that will meet four to six times a year to guide the work of the Center. In addition, the Center will hire an executive general secretary who will provide executive leadership to all of the program areas.

In addition, the Connectional Table will disband to make room for a new entity called the General Council for Strategy and Oversight.

### **Will the current agency staff continue to work for the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry once it is established?**

The current proposal is to retain all agency staff to work in the Office, or department, to which their programmatic or administrative area is assigned. The new Board, together with the new executive general secretary, will examine the appropriate staffing needs for each Office and begin to make changes as needed. The proposal does not suggest any specific staffing changes.

We realize these changes create a climate of uncertainty and anxiety. We would like to see the transition take place with transparency and with everyone's needs in mind. We simply cannot predict what the changes might look like or when they might occur.

### **What is the proposed timeline for this transition?**

The legislation calls for a new Board of Directors to be established no later than July 31, 2012. The Board will then need to hire an executive general secretary. The length of the search for an executive has not been determined yet.

### **How will the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry Board of Directors be selected?**

The Board of Directors will be selected by the 2009-2012 Connectional Table within 90 days of the close of General Conference 2012. The new board is to hold its first meeting on or before July 31, 2012.

### **What will happen to United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men?**

The CT recommends that United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men each become their own independent organization each with their own Board of Directors. Women's Division, which is currently a part of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), had already made that decision with GBGM to establish itself as a separate organization. The CT affirms their decision, proposing that they become the Board of United Methodist Women. The General Commission on United Methodist Men is currently a general agency and the proposal is to have GCUMM become the Board of United Methodist Men.

### **Who will hire an executive general secretary?**

The Board of Directors of the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry will hire a new executive general secretary. A timeline for the executive search has not yet been determined.

### **How will the General Council for Strategy and Oversight be chosen?**

The General Council for Strategy and Oversight will be a 45-member body that will work with the Council of Bishops and the Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry board and executives to help establish long-term strategies for the UMC. The members will consist of:

- 21 jurisdictional members;
- seven central conference members;
- a representative from each of the five official UM racial and ethnic caucuses;
- three young people from the Advisory Committee on Ministries with Young People;
- five bishops appointed by the Council of Bishops, one of whom to be appointed as chair of the GCSO by the Council of Bishops;
- the executives of the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits, the United Methodist Publishing House, United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men.

Jurisdictional members will be elected to the GCSO in the same way that members have been selected to serve on the Connectional Table. Of those who were elected as General Conference delegates, nominees will be elected at their jurisdictional conferences and central conference representatives will be selected according to processes determined in each central conference. (See ¶ 705 for more information on general agency membership and ¶ 803 for the proposed structure of the GCSO.)

**Constitutional Change:****Why does the CT want to change the constitution on Paragraph 16.9?**

The Connectional Table recommends a change to ¶ 16.9 of the United Methodist Constitution in order to allow more flexibility in making any necessary changes in general church budget allocations between General Conference sessions. General Conference would have the authority to name those bodies, which would be amenable to the General Conference.

**Resolution:****Why did the CT submit a resolution to reallocate apportionment funds of \$60 million?**

The CT agreed with the Interim Operations Team that we must begin to redirect resources toward increasing the number of vital congregations immediately. One of the key ways to do that is by training competent leadership across the Church, both clergy and laity. That is why the CT has specific recommendations to allocate funds for leadership development of young people and to Central Conference theological education. In addition, we support the movement to recruit and train potential clergy members under the age of 35. Overall, our goal is to begin the process of redirecting resources in ways that will increase the number of vital congregations across the UMC in specific and measurable ways.

This resolution supports the proposed constitutional amendment to ¶ 16.9 allowing General Conference to give authority to other church units to reallocate funds when necessary in between sessions of the General Conference.

*October 21, 2011*