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Call to Action Steering Committee Reports Recommendations

Lake Junaluska, NC: Reporting to the Council of Bishops today, the Call to Action Steering Committee laid out a vision of The United Methodist Church of the future and urged a system-wide operational assessment, from the general boards and agencies to the annual conferences to the Council itself.

In making the progress report, Bishop Larry Goodpaster, project director, said, "As United Methodists, we dream of a church with more accountability to Gospel and less conformity to an outdated, bureaucratic system; with more participation with young people and less rhetoric about good intentions; with more ministry with the poor and less with the privileged; with more expectation for growth and less acceptance of status quo . . ."

The committee recommended that the Council and the Connectional Table engage an independent outside group for the next phase of the process. This group would be responsible for conducting a comprehensive evaluation under the direction of a new 12-member steering team to be led by Bishop Gregory Palmer. In addition, a four-member project team would be created to function as a day-to-day work team.

Critical to the success of the project would be gathering feedback and insights from a large number and wide range of United Methodists. The contractor would develop an online survey instrument designed to reach a broad constituency, as well as summarize and analyze the results for review by the steering team. Every bishop would be asked to host a series of conversations in his or her area.

One of the goals of conducting the assessment would be to gather data regarding our current and future financial obligations at all level of the connection in order to move towards creating a means for constructing a viable financial future for the denomination.

Funding support for the project will be requested through the Connectional Table. A progress report would be provided at the spring 2010 meetings of the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table, with final recommendations to be provided in the fall.

Bishop Goodpaster said the past six months' work by the steering committee was just a first step. "In some sense, we have left Egypt and are making our way through the wilderness to the Promised Land, but we are not there yet. We have identified some possibilities for consideration, but we are a complex organization. Before designing the specifics of a system-wide reordering of the denomination, we must evaluate the whole system."

In other recommendations, the committee identified a need for establishing a standard of accountability across the connection through the development of clearly defined measurements, standards and

expectations. The committee called upon the Council of Bishops to initiate a development process of consultation, conferencing and conversation with stakeholders and constituents that would lead to the development of a comprehensive set of metrics for every level of the church.

Another critical area where the committee felt intervention is necessary is the rebuilding of a leadership development system with special attention to youth and young adults, urging the church at all levels to creatively engage the younger generation.

The committee also affirmed a need to recast the General Conference and prompted the Council to immediately begin working with the Commission on the General Conference, the General Council of Finance and Administration, and the Rules Committee to redesign the plan and operation of General Conference, including its frequency and format.

Another recommendation of the committee was to consider whether guaranteed appointments should be continued, an issue that has also been under review by other groups. The steering committee endorsed further study from all angles and proposed the matter be referred to the Ministry Study Committee.

In May, the steering committee was directed by the Council of Bishops to “guide our denominational response to the urgent opportunity for further alignment of the mission of the church and the four areas of focus, and to refashion and reposition the church for the 21st century.”

In forming their recommendations, the 18-member committee engaged in extensive discussion about a vision of a vital, growing church and the barriers that currently exist, identified literally dozens of potential interventions, and gathered feedback from a cross-section of stakeholders in response to preliminary ideas.

The Council of Bishops is scheduled to act on the committee’s recommendations on November 4.

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