

Report of
Thomas Kemper, General Secretary,
to the
Board of Directors of Global Ministries

March 20, 2020

Introduction

I gave my first verbal report as general secretary to the Global Ministries' board of directors on April 13, 2010. The setting was the ballroom of a hotel in Stamford, Connecticut, the venue for board meetings for many years. There were around 100 directors in those days. Meetings took up the better part of a week, twice a year. While I knew the organization – I was a director when elected general secretary and had been one in an earlier quadrennium – I was nervous. Perhaps I was nervous, in part, because, as a director, I knew we were coming out of a rough period of administrative transition; and I was nervous because I was a German layman coming to a position traditionally held by American clergy. The warm reception my remarks received gave me confidence, confirming my commitment to add to the strong record of Methodist mission on a global scale.

Today, I bring you my 20th biannual general secretary's report – my 20th and last formal address to directors. Global Ministries has a new home in a new city; there are 37 directors and a smaller but more efficient board. Our mission house is in good order, but these are turbulent times for our church. This makes me nervous in a new way, but I have confidence in God's grace. The years 2010 to 2020 form a remarkable decade for United Methodist global ministry and mission, including the United Methodist Committee on Relief. We — and this is a story of we — have accomplished so much. We have encountered and taken positive account of expected and unexpected challenges. The days and years have passed so quickly. I feel a twinge of sadness that my stewardship will come to an end in the autumn. However, I am convinced that, together, we have built a strong foundation on which my

successor and the cabinet, together with the new board of directors, can build and continue to grow the ministry of this agency.

My first report 10 years ago fell into three sections. I expressed appreciation, provided information on who Thomas Kemper was — at least at that time — as person and mission leader, and discussed mission priorities I'd identified for the agency. I want to use those three general themes in my comments today. First, I will consider key mission concepts and relationships that have guided our work over the last decade and that now point us toward the future through specific illustrative highlights, for mission is always praxis as well as theory. Second, I will express my appreciation, and, finally, I will give a brief account of the impact of these 10 years at Global Ministries on Thomas Kemper, United Methodist layman and missionary.

I would ask you to remember that my years here and your time as directors are but portions of a continuum spread over 200 years. Ours is a history of strong, significant mission accomplishments and, on occasion, of regrettable failures in intention and performance. It is my purpose here to give an account of one brief decade, having been privileged to be part of this great cloud of witnesses and mission.

I. Mission Concepts and Relationships: 2010-20

Our work is rooted in the theological concept of the *Missio Dei* — God's mission dei — and is expressed through a network of collaborative relationships. This pattern is evident in everything I will mention in my survey of mission highlights across the last 10 years. We have together refined our mission theology and strengthened our practice of collaboration and partnerships.

1. Missio Dei

The official United Methodist theology of mission is the venerable "Grace upon Grace," adopted by General Conference in 1988, and a timeless expression of Wesleyan mission commitment. Early in my time here, we identified and decided to add a complementary new, shorter mission theology statement,

attuned to the reality and vocabulary of the 21st century, but built upon “Grace upon Grace.” Directors and members of the United Methodist Missionary Association took an active role in producing several drafts, and the final version, approved by the directors, is now widely used.

The central insight of *Missio Dei* is that mission “begins with God, belongs to God, and will be fulfilled by God at the end of time.” God is the primary actor in mission, not the bishops or the church or individual Christians. Our Theology of Mission statement announces in the first paragraph “Global Ministries is in mission to witness to what God has done and is doing, and to learn from what God is doing in every land where disciples gather in the name of Jesus Christ.” The mission and the transforming power belong to God.

The statement goes on to describe God’s mission from creation to completion in God’s time. It affirms that the church:

lifts up the name of Jesus in thought, word, and deed, proclaiming Jesus Christ ... through its own incarnate living. ... By representing the revelation of God in Christ in word and deed, the Church remains faithful both to the Great Commandment that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves; and to the Great Commission that we make disciples of all nations.

The Holy Spirit, the statement reminds us, “calls the Church into being for mission”; the church “is one sign of God’s presence in the world.” And, “the Spirit is always moving ... the Church into a new mission age. With openness and gratitude, we await the leading of the Spirit in ways not yet seen.” The phrase about the Spirit’s leading is displayed prominently in the fellowship hall of our new home in Atlanta. It is a constant reminder of our engagement in God’s mission. Other lines from Our Mission Theology statement appear in motivational displays throughout the building.

This emphasis on God’s mission appears in the literature and statements published across the last decade and is notable in the call for unity in mission (“United in Mission”) issued last year by you as directors in response to the sharp divisions in the denomination following the Special General Conference in St. Louis, an event that failed to resolve questions of inclusion of LGBTQ persons. You

reminded United Methodists of the many ways they are in mission through missionaries, disaster response, health and education ministries, creation care and economic development. You declared: “This is God’s work ... [and] we believe that the work God has called us to do represents what is right with the global church. ... We remain committed to the Missio Dei.”

2. Collaboration

Significantly, in your statement “United in Mission,” the affirmation of the Missio Dei is immediately followed by an invitation to others “to participate in what God is already doing in saving, healing and transforming the lives of all people, everywhere in this world.” This is a call to collaboration.

The concept of collaboration in mission is not new, but it has been deepened and extended in the past decade. Global Ministries’ tagline, “Connecting the Church in Mission,” a recognition of collaboration and of the ideal of “mutuality in mission,” had already come into use with the 2009-12 quadrennium and would be underscored by evolving mission mandates. The 2008 General Conference introduced the United Methodist Four Areas of Focus – leadership development, new places for new people, global health and ministry with the poor – as denominational priorities, with general agencies given responsibility for specific areas. Our focus was ministry with the poor. Accordingly, we provided motivational and educational resources on the topic, most notably, on the concept and praxis of Ministry WITH. Ministry and mission should always be **with** others — not “to” or “for” them. “Ministry with” is now an integral part of our mission vocabulary and mindset. Global Ministries would later be assigned the focus area on global health by the Council of Bishops, and I thank God for our experience in pointing the denomination toward creative, collaborative ministry **with** – with the poor, as well as with congregations, conferences, schools, nonprofits, foundations, related Methodist denominations and ecumenical partners – for this has informed our approach to the Abundant Health Initiative.

One of our main ecumenical partners early in the last decade contributed significantly to our vocabulary and understanding of mission today. I refer to the work of the Commission on World Mission

and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, especially its declaration “Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes,” published in 2012. In its attention to “mission from the margins,” “Together towards Life” recognized and named a growing reality in our work and all mission today, disrupting long-standing assumptions. Historically, mission flowed from centers in Europe and North America to “margins,” mostly in the global South. This is no longer the case. The so-called younger churches on the historical margins are now important agents of mission enthusiasm and action. We recognize this is essential for the future and raises serious theological and operational challenges, since the old centers still control most of the financial resources for mission. We have significant issues of parity, mutuality and equity to work through in the years ahead. More fully reaching these goals will require collaboration.

We see the productivity of collaboration in the roundtable approach to mission planning and implementation that has come to characterize our work in recent years. I outlined and strongly advocated for the roundtable approach in my first address to directors in 2010. It was a new idea to American ears then but not so new to people from the central conferences. I had learned about and participated in mission roundtables with colleagues in Africa when working in mission with Germany Central Conference. I said then, “The model brings to the table all of those who are in partnership with a certain conference or country in order to share the work, set priorities together, and achieve as much transparency and accountability as possible.” Mission roundtables celebrate and practice the values of equality and respect and are now standard in many areas of our work. We have published guides on the organization, leadership and even theology of roundtables and held seminars for roundtable facilitators.

A collaborative approach to reaching decisions on mission, one that has an inclusive table of players and strives to respect all, is a blessing from God and has been proven so again and again over the last 10 years of our mission experience. Collaboration brought reunion to a badly divided United Methodist community in Burundi two years ago, paved the way for struggling mission initiatives in

Cameroon and Senegal to become mission districts of the Cote d'Ivoire Annual Conference, and allowed the former Alaska Missionary Conference to project itself as a mission district of the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference.

3. Missio Dei and Collaboration in Action: Themes, Projects and Events

Awareness of the Missio Dei is our theological reminder that Global Ministries is a facilitator, not the owner, of mission. This truth played a role in our decision to develop a more regional operational model and to relocate our agency headquarters from New York City to Atlanta in 2016. Almost 200 years in a great international city, housed since the late 1950s in a building informally called “the God box,” had given us the reputation as the possessors of United Methodist mission, distributing grants and wisdom to colonies and dependents. That is not who we should be. Yes, we have know-how. We have resources and connections, and the Missio Dei bids us to use these gifts to strengthen others. Yet, to repeat, we are the facilitators, not the owners, of mission.

The move to Atlanta and toward regional operation — and we still have a ways to go on that — gives us a new frame of reference, a new venue, to represent ourselves as an agency facilitating mission. And we facilitate better on a global level when we work regionally. That is why we opened an Asia-Pacific office in Seoul, South Korea, in 2017. Our office for Latin America and the Caribbean, which we opened in Buenos Aires in 2016, continues through our operational centers in Brazil and Honduras. An Africa regional office location awaits determination, in light of pending General Conference decisions.

Let me share a dramatic example of how facilitation is more effective than high-minded pronouncements.

We went to the 2016 General Conference with a petition to set up a Provisional Central Conference in Southeast Asia and Mongolia. There was a very good, if somewhat obscure, connective reason for the request, but we were met in Portland with a very concerned reaction from the participants attending from autonomous Methodist churches in Asia. The reaction was, in effect, “here

goes The United Methodist Church, trying to set up an American neocolonial church structure in our territory.” We had failed to clarify that a central conference was needed, should any of our Southern Asian mission initiatives ever decide to move toward annual conference status. This dissatisfaction was increased by the news that we planned to open a regional office in South Korea. We invited the Asian Methodist leaders to Seoul for the opening of that office, to gather around the table. The conversation became increasingly warmer as we heard and responded to concerns. Our proposal soon had visible support around the table. We were able to talk as partners committed to mission in Asia. From that good event came the idea, proposed by the president of the Methodist Church of Hong Kong, for an Asian Methodist Mission Platform, to explore and launch collaborative mission in Asia. Through active listening and good conversations, collaboration became possible. The Asian Methodist Mission Platform will hold its third meeting this summer. I will be there among others representing Global Ministries which, through its heritage and engagements, has a longtime presence in the region. But Global Ministries does not own the platform. We are one member at the table.

Another example of meaningful collaboration was the 2018 Roundtable for Peace on the Korean Peninsula, which we hosted on behalf of the international Methodist family and involving the Korean Methodist Church and the World Methodist Council, as well as several United Methodist entities. A consensus statement committed participants to work collectively and in their respective churches to encourage progress toward peace. Submitted also to the U.S. and South Korean governments, the statement encouraged an immediate and official end of the Korean War by the approval of a formal peace treaty.

Grateful for our work, South Korea President Jae In Moon sent his personal greetings, and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter attended. A key speaker was James T. Laney, former U.S. ambassador to South Korea, former Methodist missionary and president emeritus of Emory University. For his work as a missionary, educator and diplomat on behalf of the people of Korea, Laney received the 2019 World

Methodist Peace Award from the World Methodist Council. Global Ministries hosted the event in Atlanta with the WMC in November 2019.

Here are a few more examples of mission collaboration in action:

- *Missionaries: “From Everywhere to Everywhere”* describes our goal in the recruitment and placement of missionaries, and we have made great strides in that direction. We have a thoroughly international missionary community, achieved and maintained in large measure through multiple kinds of collaboration, involving annual and central conferences, autonomous Methodist churches, ecumenical mission partners and congregations. It is not easy to turn a slogan into an operational reality; it takes constant vigilance. Our “from everywhere to everywhere” policy runs headlong into national visa restrictions and travel bans, competition with other humanitarian programs, huge student debt and changing vocational interests. Many individuals and couples called to mission today are already retired from first careers. Younger persons may be interested in time-limited careers as missionaries. This has led to very practical challenges. For instance, how do we arrive at an equitable missionary

pension plan for personnel retiring to India or Indiana, Liberia or Louisiana, Colombia or California? How do we make active and retiree personnel policy manuals covering from everywhere to everywhere? How do missionaries even come to know one another when they are from everywhere to everywhere?

How? Through collaboration. Early on, in 2011, I believe, we explored such practical issues and the necessary theological framework in a missionary service consultation held at Drew University in New Jersey. In that meeting, we formulated the “Guiding Principles for Mission Service,” which is still operative today. Many of our current policies on missionary compensation and benefits were influenced by that deliberation. To build rapport among missionaries, as well as between missionaries and staff, we implemented an idea from Gordon Greathouse, a now-retired missionary, to hold regional missionary gatherings primarily for fellowship, renewal and relationship building. These continue and are of great benefit to our involvement in the *Missio Dei*.

Collaboration can have very practical benefits. It means having friends when you need them. We experienced this in remarkable ways in the summer of 2018 when three of our young missionaries were detained by government authorities in the Philippines on spurious charges of aiding subversive persons. We organized a protest campaign of prayer and petitions — called “Tawanda Kasama No Kami!” in the Philippines” and #LetThemLeave” in other regions — that succeeded in collecting almost 20,000 online signatures within a week on a letter urging the Philippines government to free the missionaries. And the signatures came from all continents. Our central conference and the bishops in the Philippines carried much of the weight in this campaign, and we were notably assisted by the World Council of Churches and other partners. We could not have done it so effectively without this generous collaboration.

Collaboration plays a pivotal part in keeping our young adult mission service programs vital and growing. Ten years ago, the historic US-2 and newer mission-intern programs were very small. Consolidated into the Global Mission Fellows program, today we have more than 100 young adults in two-year mission service commitments, with many participants and placements provided by partners

around the world, including central conferences and our mission initiatives. I had dreamed of 500 Global Mission Fellows in the program every year, but the goal proved too complex and too costly. However, the program has greatly extended our outreach, increased our cross-cultural footprint and enhanced the future leadership pool for regional and local expressions of the church.

Wisdom gained through ecumenical partnerships has strengthened our theology and practice of missionary recruitment, training and placement of missionaries. I think particularly of the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct,” issued in 2011 by the World Council of Churches, together with the Vatican and the World Evangelical Alliance. The relatively short paper, developed over five years and including United Methodist participants, is a clear reminder that all Christian mission and evangelism, including the actions of missionaries, takes place in a multi-religious world and must observe certain patterns of conduct. The conduct of mission incorporates 12 principles, including acting in God’s love, imitating Jesus, performing acts of service and justice, healing, rejecting violence, freedom of religion, mutual respect, renouncing false witness, ensuring personal discernment, and building interreligious relationships. I am happy to acknowledge that our United Methodist mission theology, our understanding of the *Missio Dei*, both informed and reflects these principles.

- *Evangelism and Church Growth*: The recommendations of “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World” have particular relevance for new and recent mission initiatives, where partners have little or no experience of Methodism. We often forget that many of our central conferences and other partners in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and parts of Asia have been in the Methodist family for many, many years, some for longer than a century. Our newer mission starts are unfamiliar with our ways of doing things. (I am thinking of Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Mongolia and the Central Africa Republic.) This agency and its predecessors started no new overseas missions between the early 1930s and the 1980s. That’s a half century! Yes, we started UMCOR, a blessing to the world in 1940,

but no new churches during this time. Because of global political and economic upheaval, a policy of mission maintenance prevailed in that half century.

A period of “mission initiatives” began in the 1990s with the restart of former churches in Russia and the Baltic region, areas freed by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Courage rose for new church planting in other countries formerly under totalitarian regimes, such as Central and Southeast Asia, and then spread to parts of Africa and Central America. Some of these efforts in church growth and development have flourished; others have wilted because they could not achieve the foothold required to gain self-sufficiency. Through collaboration and the building of meaningful relationships, we’ve learned a lot from our mission partners about managing expectations, celebrating joys, mourning disappointments and caring for one another. I pray that this board going forward will not undertake new mission initiatives without extensive interaction with local, regional and international collaborators, as well as interaction with other communions that may anticipate church starts in comparable areas.

- *Global Health:* The story of health as a component in mission has unfolded in new ways in the past decade. Of course, health and wholeness – understood as spiritual, mental and physical well-being – have been included in mission since the ministry of Jesus and figured prominently in the work of John Wesley. Wesley’s book of home health advice, “Primitive Physick,” was an 18th-century bestseller, carried along with the Bible in the saddle bags of early Methodist circuit riders. Accounts of missionary doctors, nurses and technicians, as well as the hospitals and clinics they founded, fill our archives.

I have welcomed in recent years two new or renewed emphases on mission and health. The first is a fresh awareness of healing as part of the theological substance of mission. By this, I mean healing in a broad Wesleyan sense, involving scientific application, humanitarian care and spiritual exercise through prayer. Our Theology of Mission statement recognizes this in a paragraph on “transformative witness.” The text says,

The Church in Mission lifts up the name of Jesus in word, and deed, proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Word become flesh through its own incarnate living; deeds of love; and service, healing, and renewal.

It is more fully developed in the ecumenical “Together toward Life,” mentioned earlier, in a section on the healing and wholeness of life, the first such highly developed treatise of this theme in any ecumenical publication on mission and evangelism. The affirmation is thrilling:

Healing was not only a central feature of Jesus’ ministry but also a feature of his call to his followers to continue his work (Matthew 10:1). Healing is also one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9; Acts 3). The Spirit empowers the church for a life-nurturing mission, which includes prayer, pastoral care, and professional health care on the one hand and prophetic denunciation of the root causes of suffering, transformation of structures that dispense injustice, and pursuit of scientific research on the other. Health is more than physical and/or mental well-being, and healing is not primarily medical. This understanding of health coheres with the biblical-theological tradition of the church, which sees a human being as a multidimensional unity and the body, soul, and mind as interrelated and interdependent. It thus affirms the social, political, and ecological dimensions of personhood and wholeness. Health, in the sense of wholeness, is a condition related to God’s promise for the end of time as well as a real possibility in the present.

The second emphasis in health and healing is its broad collaboration encompassing congregational, conference, ecumenical, institutional, foundation, corporate, other nonprofit and governmental partners. This breadth is perhaps most visible in our work to overcome malaria and our current focus on lifesaving interventions for children. The United Methodist “Imagine No Malaria” campaign established Global Ministries and UMCOR as trusted partners with others committed to the fight against malaria. These others included the United Nations, the National Basketball Association and the Gates Foundation, as well as hundreds of villages in Africa. The campaign served as one motivation for the development of annual conference health boards, predominantly in Africa, and gave a boost to the renewal of links with our United Methodist network of more than 300 related hospitals and clinics. Following “Imagine no Malaria,” our current campaign, “Abundant Health,” had a central goal of one million lifesaving interventions for children during this quadrennium, and we celebrate having already reached 730,458 children as of Jan. 15, 2020. This effort is also broadly collaborative, linked to local and international campaigns to address nutrition and maternal health and child concerns. On the latter,

we are one of but a few faith-based members of the United Nations' Every Woman, Every Child initiative, an effort of governments, the private sector and civil society to ensure that women, children and adolescents are at the heart of development. We also provide incentives for congregation-based community health programs in the United States.

- *Humanitarian Response:* We have effectively interpreted and significantly tightened the relationship of mission to the humanitarian work of UMCOR – work in international and U.S. disaster response, social and economic development, and migration. All of this is done without regard to religion, race, nationality, gender or sexual orientation. We have greatly expanded services to migrants worldwide and, thereby, brought into clearer focus UMCOR's founding challenge, which was creative response to the needs of refugees and internally displaced people caused by conflicts in Asia and Europe during World War II. UMCOR, launched in 1940, as the Methodist Committee on Relief, was an expansion of an earlier Methodist committee organized by Bishop Herbert Welch to care for people displaced by civil war in China.

Displaced people on a global scale — including asylees, refugees and economic migrants — number 272 million today, the largest migration in history. Global Ministries and UMCOR currently support 24 partners working on 36 projects in nine countries, assisting more than 233,000 migrants. UMCOR continues to support National Justice for Our Neighbors (NJFON) which, through affiliates in the United States, provides free or low-cost immigration legal assistance. It also assists Church World Service in the resettlement of refugees in the U.S.

UMCOR is at work in 80 countries. Remarkable outreach has been done in the last decade, not only in responding to natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the frequent storms in the Caribbean, United States and Philippines, but also to less well-known disasters, health emergencies and armed conflicts around the world. I have been blessed and encouraged by visiting many of the places where we, together, have offered hope for many. Even as we meet today, our UMCOR and

Global Health units are collaborating to support regions of the world ill-equipped to handle the novel coronavirus.

- *Human Rights and Religious Freedom.* We have underscored and taken in new directions our historic commitments to human rights and, especially, religious freedom. I will confess that the latter is a lifelong interest of mine stemming from my youth, when I became aware of restrictions on the free expression of religion experienced by my Christian colleagues east of the Berlin Wall.

In the general area of human rights, I am grateful for Global Ministries' participation in the interagency "Task Force on Human Rights and Investment Ethic," which we organized with the United Methodist Board of Pension and Health benefits (now Wespeth). In 2014, the task force, with members from general agencies and affiliated partners, drafted guidelines for our denomination's investments, including those of this board, so that, by policy, we would identify for our investments those "resources, principles, and procedures that express our commitment to human rights, taking into account fiduciary responsibility and ministry priorities, consistent with the global mission and ethical standards of The United Methodist Church." It is no easy task to find common ground around issues involving profit, fiduciary duties and scriptural holiness — to inject a Wesleyan theme. The task force did a commendable job. As I said at the time, "What we do as a church in mission cannot be separated from how we invest our resources. We have reached points of agreement, consensus, on how we will go about dealing with specific situations that arise in the complicated matrix of international investment and its moral implications."

Religious freedom is a matter of both self-interest and an expression of love for neighbor. We appeal to it in order to:

- Assert the right of Christians to share the story of Jesus, the gospel, and to form communities, that is, churches, for worship, mutual support and acts of service to others;
- Defend the rights of historic Christian groups and other faith minorities in lands where laws, politics or culture oppress them, and;

- Assure that our humanitarian services can be and are provided without regard to religious affiliation, nationality, race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.

We have taken up the cause of persecuted and marginalized religious minorities, Christian and others, frequently during the past decade, with recurring reference to Pakistan, Nigeria and Palestine.

Christian minorities in the majority Muslim county of Pakistan are often targeted by extremists. And so it happened in September 2013 that suicide bombers invaded the courtyard of All Saints Church in Peshawar right after Sunday services. The blasts killed 127 people and wounded more than 250. Among the dead were two children of Insar Gohar and his wife Uzma, and Insar's mother. Insar was the youth coordinator of the Church of Pakistan, our mission partner. When the Gohars spoke to our directors while recovering in the U.S., their remarks were translated by a Muslim staff member originally from Pakistan. We were able to assist in arranging to further Insar's education. After a three-year program, Insar graduated from the Claremont School of Theology in California and returned to Pakistan to work for better interfaith relations and the welfare of his community. We have also partnered with the Church of Pakistan to bring their schools up to required safety standards.

Along with defending religious freedom in concrete situations, we have offered sound theological and biblical rationale for a principle too often identified with civil and human rights. A resolution approved by directors in 2015 and intended for consideration by the 2016 General Conference describes religious freedom as "Grounded in Love." The resolution is a theology of and for religious freedom; it understands religious freedom as flowing from the grace of God. The advocacy and practice of such freedom requires attentiveness to the ebb and flow of history and to the aspirations and fears of differing communities in various cultures. It probes the admonition of Colossians 3 to "bear with one another." The resolution has been resubmitted, per your approval last year, for action at General Conference 2020.

- *Peace and Justice in the Middle East:* We reached out in new ways to the Middle East, notably the area of Israel/Palestine. In 2012, we joined with the World Methodist Council and The

British Methodist Church in forming the Jerusalem Liaison Office for the purpose of increasing international awareness and involvement of the Methodist community in the issues of Israel/Palestine. The office upholds our Methodist commitment to peace and justice for both Israelis and Palestinians, including introducing Methodist pilgrims who visit the Holy Land to local Christians, indeed Palestinians, whose ancient communities are dwindling in size. This has led to renewed concern for the current and future situation of the Palestinians, including the Christian minority, and has given me personal grief for I have come to see two valid liberation movements in deadly conflict. I say this as a German who is pro-Israel by history and upbringing but also now pro-Palestine by experience and observation. When I see what is happening to the people of Gaza and the West Bank, the people around Bethlehem, I cannot justify an uncritical pro-Israeli position. I feel the need for much more prayer and some balanced international diplomacy. Hosting the United Methodist Task Force on Israel/Palestine at Global Ministries in 2018 gives me hope for the denomination's role in future conversations.

- *Ecumenical Mission Engagement:* I want to elaborate further on ecumenical relations.

Collaboration with other Christians in mission is an inherited and inherent dimension of Methodism. We work closely on many fronts with other Methodist denominations, as well as with ecumenical organizations. Over the last two quadrennia, we've worked closely with the World Council of Churches and its Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. The commission was responsible for the document "Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes," formally presented to the WCC's general assembly in Pusan, South Korea, in 2013. I have already shared with you the positive impact of this publication on our work, and since its publication, I have responded to it in several venues and journals, including giving an "ecumenical Protestant response" in a book on ecumenical missiology.

Between WCC assemblies, the commission holds a major conference, most recently two years ago in Arusha, Tanzania. Global Ministries played important roles in planning and implementing this conference on the theme “Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship.” The initial planning meeting was held right here at Global Ministries on my invitation as a member of the commission. The United Methodist Church had a delegation of eight at Arusha, and two of our missionaries were seconded for conference leadership roles as conference coordinator and for the youth program.

- *Changing Patterns of Partnership:* Patterns of partnership do change over time and in response to emerging situations. Global Ministries experienced a major transition in one of our oldest and most valuable partnerships during my years here. I am referring to the administrative changes culminating in the movement of the corporate expression of United Methodist Women from a division of the Board of Global Ministries to that of a separate but missionally connected organization. This development formalized in 2012 has had enormous importance for both the UMW and Global Ministries. It was also a necessary move to correct a great injustice done to women organized for mission decades ago.

Women have always been central participants in and supporters of mission in the many streams of church life that form United Methodism. While the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the earliest predecessor of Global Ministries, was chartered by men, women were responsible for much of the work. Without the strong, dedicated support of the New York Female Missionary Society, mission through the Missionary Society would not have grown as it did.

The Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society, formed in Boston in 1869, the earliest forerunner of the UMW, represented a further step forward for Methodist mission. The bold, courageous missionaries of the WFMS not only carried out invaluable work of their own; they also gave critical aid to the work of the Missionary Society around the world. Women, both those sent

by women's societies and those sent by denominational societies, historically made up most Methodist missionaries.

But relationship between the official denominational missionary societies and the women's mission organizations were not equal or unproblematic. Patriarchy was all too common, constraining mission of and by women, often with limits imposed by organizational structures. And so it was, in 1964, in preparation for the formation of The United Methodist Church, that the strong tradition of Boston 1969 was subordinated into a "Woman's Division" of Global Ministries. The women, in effect, lost their freedom.

The 150th anniversary of the founding of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, which coincided with the Global Ministries bicentennial in 2019, provided opportunity to acknowledge and repent of the harm done to women and women's work in the 1964 decision. I conveyed a message of repentance at the UMW's 150th birthday celebration in Boston almost exactly a year ago and reaffirmed the importance of partnership in mission now and in the future. We rejoice in the ongoing collaboration between United Methodist Women and Global Ministries and are grateful that structural separation has not meant the end of missional cooperation. We value our cooperation in missionary deployment and other collaborative programming initiatives. As we look back on 150 years of shared mission history, we look forward to continuing to walk together in mission for many years to come.

4. Other Highlights

- *Mission Bicentennial:* It is important to touch on our 200th mission anniversary. Many directors took part in the bicentennial activities marking the founding of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the oldest forerunner of Global Ministries. As you may recall, celebratory events and activities included a scholars' and mission practitioners' conference a year ago and production of an online database of significant mission figures and places. There were annual conference and local celebrations, and one distinctive occasion at which some, but not all, of you were

present. The return of land in Ohio held in trust for the Wyandotte people since 1843 was a momentous occasion. This land was comprised of sacred spaces associated with missionary John Stewart, whose ministry among the Wyandotte from around 1816 to 1823 inspired the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Missionary Society.

The return of the land at Upper Sandusky, Ohio, was a glorious event of both celebration and repentance. It significantly reinforced our long-standing commitments to Native American and indigenous peoples. I have intentionally made this a missional priority, partly because of the guilt we all share in the horrendous sin the church has committed against Native Americans and other indigenous people over the centuries. We have supported the implementation of the United Methodist Act of Repentance with Native Peoples, including our own move of the agency's headquarters to Atlanta — where the major league baseball club has a mascot offensive to Native Americans and opposed by The United Methodist Church. We have developed a new working group supporting our Native American sisters and brothers. UMCOR, through its various programs, assisted 17 unique projects among 10 tribes/nations in seven U.S. states from early 2017 to 2019. The total funding for these projects was \$2.28 million, benefiting 35,592 persons, with an additional \$1.5 million in grants committed through the end of last year.

- *Mission Volunteers:* More than 125,000 mission volunteers each year give their time and talent to build churches, mission facilities and houses; respond to disasters; participate in community health programs; and take part in leadership training. This remarkable grassroots movement benefits from the leadership of jurisdictional United Methodist Volunteers in Mission coordinators and their network of global volunteer opportunities. Such networks will continue to be enhanced by training made possible by funds we have solicited and protected for that purpose, including gifted interest from a \$5 million trust over 10 years to support training for disasters, after which Global Ministries will receive the principle.

- *Accountability and Transparency:* We extended and institutionalized the work of an independent audit committee to guarantee transparency in all our accounts, including those within the UMC connection and those applying to all partners in our networks. Our independent committee alerted us to irregularities in Advance reports from a region in Africa, which we continue to pursue in conjunction with other agencies. We have strengthened our work in Monitoring and Evaluation, significantly increasing staffing and creating a unit directly reporting to the general treasurer and chief operating officer.

- *Creation Care:* We have followed through with the emphasis on creation care included in Our Mission Theology statement. The new EarthKeepers program equips clergy and laity for creative environmental ministries and began our first ever e-commissioning services. The program has trained more than 200 persons since its inception in 2017. Let me also add that we received the Platinum lead certification for our renovated office building in Atlanta.

- *Strengthening the Mission Engagement Unit:* Unifying communications, constituent relations, marketing and fundraising, including the Advance, into a new unit was a strategic move for the present and the future. It has simplified and facilitated internal operations, smoothed interactions with other general agencies and positioned us for the uncertain days ahead, when World Service apportionments will likely be decreased. Mission Engagement works to promote the four functional priorities stemming from the Strategic Plan that you, as directors, developed. The four are: missionary service, evangelism and church growth, disaster response, and global health. One goal is to forge strong ties around these priorities with annual conferences, congregations and individual supporters.

II. Appreciation

Ten years ago, expressions of appreciation in my introductory report filled two paragraphs. Far more space would now be required to thank all those who have assisted and supported me in this work since 2010. The list is exceedingly long and constitutes an important and central part of the “we” who

are in God's mission together. At the risk of unforgiveable omissions, I want to register my gratitude to several notable persons:

- All those laity and clergy, women and men, who have served as directors in my time here;
- Directors who have served as officers, including the three episcopal leaders, Bishops Bruce Ough, Hope Morgan Ward and Hee-Soo Jung, who have served as visionary, mission-driven agency presidents; and Bishops Janice Huie, Jung and Thomas Bickerton, who have chaired and championed UMCOR;
- Three successive chairs of the Personnel Committee, Maggie Jackson, Jay Brown and Deanna Stickley-Miner, officers who work tirelessly behind the scenes to keep this organization running smoothly and with whom I have enjoyed trusting, reliable relationships;
- The many staff members in both New York and Atlanta (and increasingly more parts of the world) who are or have been part of the Global Ministries/UMCOR team; the diversity of the staff is remarkable and is a blessing and an inspiration to me;
- The missionary community around the world, of which I am proudly a part;
- Those staff members who have served on the cabinet, often at sacrifice to themselves or their family because of so many travel requirements;
- The staff in the Office of the general secretary. Whether in New York or Atlanta, the team has been dedicated, creative, responsible and selfless, amazingly supportive even during the most hectic days or prolonged absence through travel. I couldn't have asked for better support, especially from executive secretaries and administrators, and I will name them since they are few: Deborah Mahaney in New York and Margaret LeBeck and Izabel Scott in Atlanta;
- Roland Fernandes, whom I thanked in my 2010 report by describing him as "a gift of heaven to the organization and me as general secretary," and he is still a God-given gift.

In another category for appreciation are the many persons and institutions that encouraged and welcomed our relocation to Atlanta: not only the United Methodist annual conferences but also organizations throughout the region. Emory University has been an especially important partner through its Candler School of Theology and Rollins School of Public Health. Collaborations since our arrival include a program with Candler Dean Jan Love in which our missionaries and Candler students are exploring the changing shape of global mission. We have learned how many in this community value our work in mission, and we give thanks for their generosity: among them the William I.H. and Lula E. Pitts, SunTrust, and Woodruff foundations, as well as others whose gifts have been equally appreciated.

A special thanks to our information officer and consultant Elliott Wright. His extraordinary skill as a journalist, combined with his deep knowledge of Wesleyan theology and The United Methodist Church, have been a blessing to Global Ministries for many decades, including all my years as director and then as general secretary. In many hours of meetings and close conversations, and through his remarkable work lending his pen or keyboard to my thoughts and mutterings, his eloquence and humanity have inspired me in countless ways.

Finally, to my family, I say “thank you” for accompanying me literally and in spirit on this adventure in mission: my daughters and son who interrupted lives in Germany to refocus our family life on this side of the Atlantic, learning to live on a global map. All are now back in Germany. No words can convey my appreciation and love to my wife Barbara for her partnership in God’s mission on behalf of The United Methodist Church. Christian mission has been part of our shared experience for as long as I can remember.

III. Personal Impressions

Lastly, a few personal reflections. People ask me, “How has 10 years at Global Ministries affected you, Thomas? How has the job changed you?” Those are not easy questions to answer, but, yes, I have reflected on them and want to make a few remarks in reply. My work here has made the world larger for me. I already knew the earth and its people comprise a vast world of diversity, of diverse cultures, languages, ethnicities, nationalities and religions, not to mention the diversity of hopes, dreams, likes and dislikes. I just didn’t know how big it is. Such a wonderful experience it is to encounter God’s vast creation and the wideness of the human family. Most of my new learning about the world and its people has been pleasant and joyful; a few incidents in my travels have been scary, such as being in the Istanbul airport when it was bombed by terrorists; but even that horror put me in touch with wonderful people, such as the Muslim family trying to get home to Somalia, a group with whom I was evacuated from the damaged airport.

That experience and many others leads me to my second point. My work here has made the world smaller for me. There is such commonality among God’s diverse people. The Somalian refugee family at the Turkish airport just wanted to be home with loved ones. I, a German Methodist living in Georgia, just wanted to be home with loved ones. My experience in the Istanbul airport attack provided opportunity for our witness to our shared humanity.

The commonalities of our species outweigh the dissimilarities we may have. Perhaps the great lesson of the current coronavirus pandemic is that of our shared humanity. This virus strikes celebrities as well as ordinary people. It frightens the poor and the rich. It respects no national or ethnic distinctions. I am deeply disturbed by the reference of a U.S. American politician to the new virus as “foreign” and by others to it as “the China virus.” This kind of rhetoric is not what the world needs. The threat is shared by all humanity; when it comes, a vaccine or cure must be made available to the entire human family. A part of our responsibility as Christians, as United Methodists, is to work for equity and justice in the care of all who suffer.

The coronavirus epidemic and panic also call us as United Methodists to question our immediate denominational priorities and plans. Given the global health crisis, including enormous fear among millions, a question arises: is our best path to holiness by way of a General Conference in Minneapolis, or elsewhere, that divides the denomination and threatens our work as United Methodists? Is that the work to which God is calling us? I leave it as an open question, while I am very convinced that Global Ministries not only is prepared for whatever structural future The United Methodist Church might choose. We are also ready to confront the expected budget cuts to continue into the 21st century as an essential part of a Wesleyan discipleship movement shaped for mission.

Of course, differences determined by happenstance and choice do count, and lead to the formation of distinct faith communities. Methodists are different but very similar the world over. What is the distinctive quality of Methodists? They sing about the grace of God and do good things for others. It was John Stewart's songs that first attracted the Wyandotte. The Wesley hymns – "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing," "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" and "And Are We Yet Alive" – can change hearts and bind lives together.

I want to end with a hymn, not one by Charles Wesley, but the hymn I used to close my first address as Global Ministries general secretary 10 years ago. The song, "Vertraut den neuen Wegen," originally written by a German theology professor for a wedding, is closely associated with the breaching of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, and represents a pivotal chapter in the faith journey that has included a decade in this place.

I had close ties with Christians, especially Methodists, in East Germany starting in 1975. I visited there at least twice a year to speak in churches and meet friends. I learned that the churches were the only independent organizations in the country and had a social relevance far beyond liturgies in sanctuaries. It is no surprise that East German Christians were essential to the movement that brought

down the wall. One communist figure said with great insight: “We were prepared for everything except candles and prayers.”

I came to Global Ministries as a missionary believing in the power of candles and prayer. I am still a missionary; I still believe in the power of candles and prayer. I have learned to put full trust in God’s grace. I believe that Christians can change the world and that United Methodists can be transformed by the love of God.

May the power of the hymn’s words of faith and hope, of trust and confidence, inspire us. (And if we had met in person at this board meeting, we would have sung all three verses together in German and English!)

Have faith in God who leads you on pathways you do not know.

To live is to set forth on new ways you dare to go.

Whene’er God’s rainbow radiant doth high in heaven stand:

It beckons men and women: Come to the Promised Land.

Are we prepared for the Holy Spirit to move us into a new day of mission?