

Spring 2023 Board Report

From the General Secretary and Staff



**Spurred to
Love and Good Deeds
in Such a Time as This**

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Global Ministries General Secretary and Staff Report

Maputo, Mozambique

April 20, 2023

by Roland Fernandes, General Secretary

Greetings in the name of the Risen Christ, and again welcome to this historic gathering, the first meeting of Global Ministries’ directors outside the United States. What is also a remarkable sign of our times is that this is also my first time as general secretary addressing you as a board of directors, in person. As you know, my previous five reports have all been on zoom.

As we enter into this meeting, it should be noted that yesterday we concluded a historic Africa Mission Partners Consultation, which I believe was a landmark event for the future of mission in The United Methodist Church in current times. A bit later, I will provide feedback from the event.

At this time, I want to welcome new directors to our board: The Rev. Corey Perry from the North Central Jurisdiction, the Rev. Margaret Johnson from the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference and the Rev. Patricia Longstroth from the Western Jurisdiction. As you know, recent turnover on our board gave us seven vacancies. Three have been filled and I have just received names of the four other new members, and we should have them transitioned onto the board and committees in the next few weeks.

Our reason for meeting in Maputo today, and in Cambodia later this year, is to enable our directors to get a sense of the context of places connected to our mission. Another is to engage our local partners, with site visits and worship. A third reason is to allow all our directors to take part in board meetings, which is challenging these days due to visa issues. Another reason is to enable our directors and regional missionaries to engage with each other. We are

grateful to Bishop Joaquina Nhanala, the vice president of our board, for hosting the various meetings we are holding here in Maputo.

[Here, Fernandes expressed condolences for the loss of missionary Innocent Afful, who died April 17, 2023, in Kinshasa, DRC.]

Scripture

Let me set my remarks in the context of the theme Scripture from the Book of Hebrews for this and our other meetings this week: The passage reads:

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:23-25 NIV)

Realities of the past several years

This has been a perplexing season in many respects, especially the last three years. We have called this season “such a time as this,” borrowing a phrase from the Book of Esther that describes a period of challenge and poignancy. There was, and still is to varying degrees, the COVID-19 pandemic, which upended our usual ways of operation – the impact of which will likely be felt for years to come. Racism, notably in the blatancy of white supremacy, continues to require constant awareness and vigilance. The effects of climate change have been witnessed with increasingly extreme events of weather. And we are beset by the perplexing divisions and divisiveness in The United Methodist Church leading to disaffiliations across the denomination.

But this extended quadrennium has also been a time of courageous self-examination and creative anticipation for the future of the General Board of Global Ministries, including the United Methodist Committee on Relief. We have, in the words of Hebrews 10, held

“unswervingly to the hope we profess,” for we have at every turn been reminded of the steadfast grace and constancy of God, of the joy experienced as we engage in God’s mission.

Mission in such a time

Principally, our response to the challenges of these times has not and cannot be theoretical. Mission, in such a time as this, requires action. As Hebrews 10 says: “And let us consider how we may *spur one another on toward love and good deeds.*” The COVID-19 pandemic required swift, compassionate response. Climate change spurred us to accelerated attention on creation care ministries. The continued presence of racism necessitated renewed focus on justice and equity. United Methodist uncertainty encouraged prayer and a focus on mission.

Five operational touchstones

In addition to fulfilling our established mandates and responding to new mission opportunities, the board of directors and staff have done far reaching evaluation and planning for present and future. We have acquitted ourselves well in this arena. We have studied and refined our program catalogue, established greater operational accountability, promoted broader collaboration within and beyond the agency, become more deliberate in gauging our impact and initiated more effective communication practices. These build on the five touchstones I have shared before and we must remain persistently focused on the task ahead of us and be grounded in these important values.

Program inventory

I again share our identified 17 programs within four program priorities that are in continuity with our long history and relevant to what may lie ahead. The four priorities are:

- Missionaries
- Evangelism and church revitalization
- Global health
- Humanitarian relief and recovery

During our deliberations and actions since 2020, we updated our strategic plan, celebrated our history, launched new ventures in mission, developed new partners, and – by focusing on love and good deeds – avoided being pulled into the whirlpools surrounding the question of the future of The United Methodist Church.

Timeline of strategic conversations

Engagement in mission in such a time

I have repeatedly said that we are in a liminal time, a time when transformation can happen. This period of 2020-2024, this ‘additional’ four years added to the quadrennium, have given us a rare opportunity to rethink and reimagine how we move forward. We cannot go back to how it was prior to 2020. We have been given this time to discern the future of mission. This is best done by listening to our partners, which is why we are engaging in a series of critical strategic conversations over this year and next to discern the “good deeds” God is calling us to do. The Africa Mission Partners Consultation, which we finished yesterday, is the first such event we have conducted as Global Ministries in decades and will have a significant impact on mission in Africa in the future.

As you know, the three-day consultation immediately preceded this meeting. We had bishops and annual conference representatives from across Africa join some of our executive committee members, staff and other partners. I want to recognize those directors who came

early to attend the consultation, some of whom put in additional work as group recorders or in other roles. I also want to emphasize how involved the General Board of Higher Education and Ministries (GBHEM) was as a fellow agency, and during the event, we realized, in a much deeper way, that there is so much alignment in our work, and this is a very positive thing for the future.

The directors and staff who were present spent a lot of time listening to our African partners, who were very engaged in this event. The engagement of the bishops, in particular, was impressive and vitally critical. That was the whole point of the event – for us to listen to our partners and hear their perspective on God’s mission in Africa. I was proud of our staff and directors for approaching conversation with a listening stance. It showed a different approach, which was acknowledged.

We heard some very honest and open feedback from our partners. Some of it was affirming of the work we are doing, especially in agriculture and health. Some of it was critical of how mission is done now or has been done in the past, especially those instances in which Global Ministries has come in with the attitude that we know best. Our African partners were very interested in developing new and strengthened partnerships that recognize and utilize African assets, build capacity and develop leadership within African conferences, moving the church in Africa toward greater self-sustenance, based on mutual respect and accountability.

I think it was a good event, and we had a lot of affirmation from our partners who were there. They felt they were being heard...some for the first time. We collected a huge amount of information. I am still impressed by the immensity of what we have realized and yet we have barely touched the surface. Now that the consultation is done, we need to analyze the information, assess our capacities to respond to our African partners and figure out how to carry the work of the consultation forward so that it will have a meaningful impact. You can look forward to hearing more about what comes out of this consultation in future board meetings.

Our conversations in November this year with U.S. partners, including directors of Connectional Ministries, Conference Secretaries of Global Ministries, Conference Disaster Relief Coordinators and Mission Advocates, among others, will give us a chance to listen deeply to our U.S. partners.

Guiding principles of missionary service

In between these two events (August 2-3), we have a significant conversation that will convene at the Candler School of Theology in Atlanta around the Guiding Principles of Missionary Service. Eleven years ago, we met at Drew Theological Seminary in New Jersey to enunciate such principles. It is now time to revisit them deeply and critically in a rapidly changing church and world. Over the last year, I have met in small group conversations with 80 missionaries from regions around the world. The missionaries were invited to provide feedback on a variety of questions related to mission and missionary work. The feedback has been compiled, we will follow up on the responses, and this data will guide us into the conversation on Guiding Principles for Missionary Service in August. As directors, you will all have the opportunity to engage with our regional missionaries in Africa on Saturday.

We continue to engage staff in discussions of how best to bring our regional work and sectoral work together. This direction has been affirmed by you as directors in the strategic conversations we have had in our last two board meetings. “Regional” describes how mission work has historically happened within Global Ministries while a “sectoral” approach is taken in the humanitarian work of UMCOR and Global Health.

As directors, you are aware that we have focused on strategic conversations at our last two board meetings. We will continue this today and in a short while you will be in small groups focused on strategic conversations surrounding governance of this agency for the future. While there is uncertainty about the future, this is one area where the board has provided substantial input in the last two board conversations, and we want to move now to specific recommendations. One of the challenges for a future board will be that of continuity. We have

been fortunate to have several directors who are approaching 12 years with us and have keen understanding of the work of this agency. One of the ideas relating to continuity that has come up is having advisory board members in the future, and I hope that you will take a serious look at this.

How Global Ministries engages with the church globally

On the topic of listening, individual conversations with bishops in Latin America and the Caribbean are continuing after completing conversations with bishops in Africa.

I am pleased that the work of Mission Engagement is being revitalized with the creation of the new unit by that name. I am grateful the Rev. Dee Stickley-Miner is leading that unit, which will refocus the ways Global Ministries and UMCOR engage with unfolding global realities. “How Global Ministries Engages with the Church Globally” continues to be a key focus of Dee’s role as well as the agency’s work as a whole.

Finally, regarding strategic conversations, the general secretaries of those program agencies funded by the World Service Fund continue to engage regarding shared services in the areas of finance, IT and communications, among others. We have also been in discussions with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry about how our programs might align.

Program Notes

At this time, I want to provide you with updates on some of our programs, noting this is in no way exhaustive. All committees met prior to our arrival in Maputo, intentionally freeing up time so directors can engage with local partners and missionaries serving in the region. You have the committee reports, which go into greater depth.

Yambasu Agriculture Initiative

I call attention to another \$5 million allocation from unrestricted undesignated funds to the **Yambasu Agriculture Initiative**. The Yambasu Initiative is, for me, full of potential for far-reaching impact on United Methodist mission across the continent. It is ambitious, enlisting

sustainable agriculture in the causes of both food security and income production for local churches and annual conferences. It puts land the church already owns into broad-based use. It can serve as a tool of evangelism through the promotion of community welfare and prosperity and hopefully will play a significant economic role in Africa's United Methodist Church of tomorrow.

Ukraine dashboard

Our humanitarian relief and assistance continue to be strong in response to the conflict caused by the Russian invasion of **Ukraine** more than a year ago. UMCOR is working with 29 partners in Ukraine and surrounding countries, mostly meeting the needs of displaced persons in housing, food and medical care. As of the end of March, we had approved 44 grants in 12 countries totaling just short of \$18 million with another \$1.5 million in process. Expenditures to date are targeted to assist more than 445,000 persons. Total contributions received for the Ukrainian crisis stand at \$27.3 million, meaning we have unspent funds that will be of essential value in the rebuilding process. Relief and recovery in a war situation have their own special challenges. Limited resettlement of Ukrainian refugees is taking place, including in the United States, where we partner with Church World Service, one of the officially recognized resettlement agencies by the U.S. Government.

Migration advocacy partners

You are aware of our Global Migration program, including the **Mustard Seed Grants** that we are currently promoting, which encourage local United Methodist churches to engage in ministry with migrants in their midst. One of the lesser-known aspects of the Global Migration program is our engagement in global advocacy on migration. In recent years we have actively participated in United Nations and ecumenical conversations on migration, including but not limited to the UNHCR, ACT Alliance, United Nations Network on Migration, the UN International Organization on Migration and the Global Forum on Migration and Development. We participate in all these international meetings for the primary purpose of reminding people that The United

Methodist Church cares about refugees and migrants of all types; that those on the move in this world are children of God, who have a right to a life with dignity and a right to assistance along the journey.

Turkey and Syria

UMCOR is responding to needs in the areas of **Turkey and Syria** devastated by earthquakes in early March of this year. By the end of March, more than 57,000 deaths were confirmed, the majority in Turkey. Because we had a partner already on the ground in the area, we were able to swiftly provide support for emergency supplies and services. As of earlier this month, we had awarded four grants totaling \$461,035 for Turkey/Syria earthquake relief.

And UMCOR is continually at work, including within Mozambique, responding in partnership with annual conferences and local partners to tornados, cyclones, floods and hurricanes. Sometimes I think we could write a book on climate change based on UMCOR's record of disaster response.

Environmental sustainability

As we move toward and then beyond 2024, one of my hopes is for greater emphases on our Environmental Sustainability ministries, especially education promoting the reduction of humanity's – and the church's – carbon output. Churches have a key role to play in the education of all people on the care of the physical and natural world. We have a variety of inboxes on our website and social media platforms to receive feedback, through which we learned how an elementary school teacher in the U.S. is using our recommended resources to learn about the environment. Creating awareness of the climate crisis we are in remains a big need.

Missionaries, health, multiethnic ministries, mission initiatives

Missionaries continue to be a significant focus of our work and both the recent conversations I have had with the missionaries and the Guiding Principles for Missionary Service conversations later this year are important opportunities for us to engage together in

enhancing this historical and critical function of Global Ministries within the overall life of The United Methodist Church.

Our **health** programs continue to be effective. In the recently concluded Africa Mission Partners Consultation, we heard a renewed sense of the effectiveness of our health work in Africa, although less extensive than the need. Along with agriculture, the health program is one of our most enduring components of our work in Africa and one in which we have invested substantial resources in recent years.

At the last board meeting you approved a \$2 million grant to the Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Ark., for the health center there. We also continue to focus our work with historically black colleges and universities through the Kendall scholarships and on our **multiethnic** ministries. Our work with and support of racial ethnic plans continues to be of unique value to the fabric of Global Ministries. Scholarships are administered by GBHEM, another example of interagency program alignment, but our directors still approve the recipients.

Noteworthy progress is being made in developing strategic plans for our **mission initiatives**. All six now have closer ties with the bishops who oversee them and annual conferences that support them. The plans include essential space and voice for the local leadership. We will spend more time on these at our fall board meeting.

As we contemplate “good deeds” for the future, let us not neglect deeds of **peace and justice** as elements of mission. While these are values that Global Ministries has long endorsed, I believe it is a time for a much stronger action agenda to counteract growing racism, nationalism and violent political activism. The goals of peace and justice demand a great deal from each of us as Christians, from the church and from Global Ministries. The scope is global. To respond to this need, I will be creating a portfolio for Peace and Justice that will work within the Office of the General Secretary.

Quadrennial budget questions

Questions continue to swirl around the budget for the next quadrennium and the impact of disaffiliations on finances. While our finances are on the positive side for the immediate future, the picture will be less bright beyond the next General Conference. Uncertainty and disagreement continue on World Service Fund budget reductions for the 2025-2028 quadrennium. For World Service revenue into GBGM, it will likely be in the 40-45% reduction range. That will be significant. While the measures we took from 2018-2020 will no doubt mitigate some reductions, we will need to reevaluate what we do and how we can continue to be effective stewards with diminished resources. It also points to the need to maximize the effectiveness of own fund development.

Building global community in such a time

Meeting in Mozambique dramatizes for me the need and the possibility of building broad community and collaboration within the church – to foster within the church a sense of global community and coming together in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ. The tenth chapter of Hebrews points us such an understanding of community.

It is a self-evident truth that without unswerving faith in the grace and mercy, the compassion and forgiveness of God, there is no church, no mission and no Christian community. Faith and hope, along with love, are what brings us together across various boundaries to stand together as a community of Jesus Christ. Diversifying the location where the directors of this United Methodist agency convene is our testimony to the unity of the United Methodist community in faith and mission.

The community unswervingly fixed on God, has missional responsibility. The writer of Hebrews puts the matter in the strongest of terms: to “spur” one another toward love and good deeds means to put force in action; the verb here means that love and good deeds are not optional in the community faithful to God.

Such a time as this demands that we find means of demonstrating to ourselves and to the world that we, as Christians, have the capacity to build communities where we are known for increasing love around the earth and performing good deeds of benefit to all our sisters and brothers, our children and our elders.

Amen.