

Part III

THE MINISTRY OF ALL CHRISTIANS

THE MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

Section I. The Churches

¶ 120. The Mission—The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.

¶ 121. Rationale for Our Mission—The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by proclaiming the good news of God’s grace and by exemplifying Jesus’ command to love God and neighbor, thus seeking the fulfillment of God’s reign and realm in the world. The fulfillment of God’s reign and realm in the world is the vision Scripture holds before us. The United Methodist Church affirms that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, and the Lord of all. As we make disciples, we respect persons of all religious faiths and we defend religious freedom for all persons. Jesus’ words in Matthew provide the Church with our mission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (28:19-20), and “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . And you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (22:37, 39).

This mission is our grace-filled response to the Reign of God in the world announced by Jesus. God’s grace is active everywhere, at all times, carrying out this purpose as revealed in the Bible. It is expressed in God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah, in the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, and in the ministry of the prophets. It is fully embodied in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is experienced in the ongoing creation of a new people by the Holy Spirit.

John Wesley, Phillip Otterbein, Jacob Albright, and our other spiritual forebears understood this mission in this way. Whenever United Methodism has had a clear sense of mission, God has used our Church to save persons, heal relationships, transform social structures, and spread scriptural holiness, thereby changing the world. In order to be truly alive, we embrace Jesus' mandate to love God and to love our neighbor and to make disciples of all peoples.

¶ 122. The Process for Carrying Out Our Mission—We make disciples as we:

—proclaim the gospel, seek, welcome and gather persons into the body of Christ;

—lead persons to commit their lives to God through baptism by water and the spirit and profession of faith in Jesus Christ;

—nurture persons in Christian living through worship, the sacraments, spiritual disciplines, and other means of grace, such as Wesley's Christian conferencing;

—send persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, being and becoming a compassionate, caring presence, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel; and

—continue the mission of seeking, welcoming and gathering persons into the community of the body of Christ.

¶ 123. The Global Nature of Our Mission—The Church seeks to fulfill its global mission through the Spirit-given servant ministries of all Christians, both lay and clergy. Faithfulness and effectiveness demand that all ministries in the Church be shaped by the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

¶ 124. Our Mission in the World—God's self-revelation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ summons the church to ministry in the world through witness by word and deed in light of the church's mission. The visible church of Christ as a faithful community of persons affirms the worth of all humanity and the value of interrelationship in all of God's creation.

In the midst of a sinful world, through the grace of God, we are brought to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. We become aware of the presence and life-giving power of God's Holy Spirit. We live in confident expectation of the ultimate fulfillment of God's purpose.

We are called together for worship and fellowship and for the upbuilding of the Christian community. We advocate and work for the unity of the Christian church. We call all persons into discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

As servants of Christ we are sent into the world to engage in the struggle for justice and reconciliation. We seek to reveal the love of God for men, women,

and children of all ethnic, racial, cultural, and national backgrounds and to demonstrate the healing power of the gospel with those who suffer.

Section II. The Ministry of All Christians

¶ 125. *The Heart of Christian Ministry*—The heart of Christian ministry is Christ's ministry of outreaching love. Christian ministry is the expression of the mind and mission of Christ by a community of Christians that demonstrates a common life of gratitude and devotion, witness and service, celebration and discipleship. All Christians are called through their baptism to this ministry of servanthood in the world to the glory of God and for human fulfillment. The forms of this ministry are diverse in locale, in interest, and in denominational accent, yet always catholic in spirit and outreach.

¶ 126. *The Ministry of the Laity*—The ministry of the laity flows from a commitment to Christ's outreaching love. Lay members of The United Methodist Church are, by history and calling, active advocates of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Every layperson is called to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20); every layperson is called to be missional. The witness of the laity, their Christ-like examples of everyday living as well as the sharing of their own faith experiences of the Gospel, is the primary evangelistic ministry through which all people will come to know Christ and The United Methodist Church will fulfill its mission.

¶ 127. *The Ministry of the Community*—The church as the community of the new covenant has participated in Christ's ministry of grace across the years and around the world. It stretches out to human needs wherever love and service may convey God's love and ours. The outreach of such ministries knows no limits. Beyond the diverse forms of ministry is this ultimate concern: that all persons will be brought into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ and be renewed after the image of their creator (Colossians 3:10). This means that all Christians are called to minister wherever Christ would have them serve and witness in deeds and words that heal and free.

¶ 128. *Ministry as Gift and Task*—This ministry of all Christians in Christ's name and spirit is both a gift and a task. The gift is God's unmerited grace; the task is unstinting service. Entrance into the church is acknowledged in baptism and may include persons of all ages. In baptism, water is administered in the name of the triune God (specified in the ritual as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) by an authorized person, and the Holy Spirit is invoked with the laying on of hands, ordinarily in the presence of the congregation. In this sacrament the church claims God's promise and the seal of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). Baptism is followed by nurture and the consequent awareness by the baptized of the claim

to ministry in Christ placed upon their lives by the church. Such a ministry is confirmed by the church when the pledges of baptism are accepted through profession of faith, and renewed for life and mission. Entrance into and acceptance of ministry begin in a local church, but the impulse to minister always moves one beyond the congregation toward the whole human community. God's gifts are richly diverse for a variety of services; yet all have dignity and worth.

¶ 129. Faithful Ministry—The people of God, who are the church made visible in the world, must convince the world of the reality of the gospel or leave it unconvinced. There can be no evasion or delegation of this responsibility; the church is either faithful as a witnessing and serving community, or it loses its vitality and its impact on an unbelieving world.

¶ 130. The Unity of Ministry in Christ—There is but one ministry in Christ, but there are diverse gifts and evidences of God's grace in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4-16). The ministry of all Christians is complementary. No ministry is subservient to another. All United Methodists are summoned and sent by Christ to live and work together in mutual interdependence and to be guided by the Spirit into the truth that frees and the love that reconciles.

¶ 131. The Journey of a Connectional People—Connectionalism in the United Methodist tradition is multi-leveled, global in scope, and local in thrust. Our connectionalism is not merely a linking of one charge conference to another. It is rather a vital web of interactive relationships.

We are connected by sharing a common tradition of faith, including our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules (¶ 103); by sharing together a constitutional polity, including a leadership of general superintendency; by sharing a common mission, which we seek to carry out by working together in and through conferences that reflect the inclusive and missional character of our fellowship; by sharing a common ethos that characterizes our distinctive way of doing things.

Section III. Servant Ministry and Servant Leadership

¶ 132. Mission as Active Expectancy—The ministry of all Christians consists of service for the mission of God in the world. The mission of God is best expressed in the prayer that Jesus taught his first disciples: Thy kingdom come; thy will be done, on earth as in heaven. All Christians, therefore, are to live in active expectancy: faithful in service of God and their neighbor; faithful in waiting for the fulfillment of God's universal love, justice, and peace on earth as in heaven.

Pending this time of fulfillment, the ministry of all Christians is shaped by the teachings of Jesus. The handing on of these teachings is entrusted to leaders who are gifted and called by God to appointed offices in the church: some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip

the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12). For these persons to lead the church effectively, they must embody the teachings of Jesus in servant ministries and servant leadership. Through these ministries and leadership, congregations of the church are faithfully engaged in the forming of Christian disciples and vitally involved in the mission of God in the world.

¶ 133. **Calling and Gifts of Leadership**—The United Methodist Church has traditionally recognized these gifts and callings in the ordained offices of elder and deacon. The United Methodist tradition has recognized that laypersons as well as ordained persons are gifted and called by God to lead the Church. The servant leadership of these persons is essential to the mission and ministry of congregations. They help to form Christian disciples in covenant community within the local congregation through spiritual formation and guidance for Christian living in the world.

Section IV. Servant Ministry

¶ 134. **Christian Discipleship**—The ministry of all Christians consists of privilege and obligation. The privilege is a relationship with God that is deeply spiritual. The obligation is to respond to God's call to holy living in the world. In the United Methodist tradition these two dimensions of Christian discipleship are wholly interdependent.

¶ 135. **Our Relationship with God: Privilege**—Christians experience growth and transition in their spiritual life just as in their physical and emotional lives. While this growth is always a work of grace, it does not occur uniformly. Spiritual growth in Christ is a dynamic process marked by awakening, birth, growth, and maturation. This process requires careful and intentional nurture for the disciple to reach perfection in the Christian life. There are stages of spiritual growth and transition: Christian beginnings; Christian birth; Christian growth; and Christian maturity. These require careful and intentional nurture for the disciple to come to maturity in the Christian life and to engage fully in the ministry of all Christians.

¶ 136. **Our Relationship with Christ in the World: Obligation**—The ministry of all Christians in the United Methodist tradition has always been energized by deep religious experience, with emphasis on how ministry relates to our obligation to Jesus Christ. The early Methodists developed a way of life that fostered reliability, and their methodical discipleship is best expressed in the General Rules that John Wesley first published in 1743, which remain in *The United Methodist Book of Discipline*.

Section V. Servant Leadership

¶ 137. Leadership Privileges and Responsibilities—Within The United Methodist Church, there are those called to servant leadership, lay and ordained. Such callings are evidenced by special gifts, evidence of God’s grace, and promise of usefulness. God’s call to servant leadership is inward as it comes to the individual and outward through the discernment and validation of the Church. The privilege of servant leadership in the Church is the call to share in the preparation of congregations and the whole Church for the mission of God in the world. The obligation of servant leadership is the forming of Christian disciples in the covenant community of the congregation. This involves discerning and nurturing the spiritual relationship with God that is the privilege of all servant ministers. It also involves instructing and guiding Christian disciples in their witness to Jesus Christ in the world through acts of worship, devotion, compassion, and justice under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. John Wesley described this as “watching over one another in love.”

¶ 138. Ordained Ministry—Ordained ministers are called by God to a lifetime of servant leadership in specialized ministries among the people of God. Ordained ministers are called to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world and the promise of God for creation. Within these specialized ministries, deacons are called to ministries of Word and Service (¶ 328), and elders are called to ministries of Service, Word, Sacrament, and Order (¶ 332). Through these distinctive functions ordained ministers devote themselves wholly to the work of the Church and to the upbuilding of the ministry of all Christians. They do this through the careful study of Scripture and its faithful interpretation; through effective proclamation of the gospel and responsible administration of the sacraments; through diligent pastoral leadership of their congregations for fruitful discipleship; and by following the guidance of the Holy Spirit in witnessing beyond the congregation in the local community and to the ends of the earth. The ordained ministry is defined by its faithful commitment to servant leadership following the example of Jesus Christ, by its passion for the hallowing of life, and by its concern to link all local ministries with the widest boundaries of the Christian community.

Section VI. Called to Inclusiveness

* ¶ 139. We recognize that God made all creation and saw that it was good. As a diverse people of God who bring special gifts and evidences of God’s grace to the unity of the Church and to society, we are called to be faithful to the example of Jesus’ ministry to all persons.

Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that enables all persons to participate in the life of the Church, the community, and the world; therefore, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination. The services of worship of every local church of The United Methodist Church shall be open to all persons.

The mark of an inclusive society is one in which all persons are open, welcoming, fully accepting, and supporting of all other persons, enabling them to participate fully in the life of the church, the community, and the world. A further mark of inclusiveness is the setting of church activities in facilities accessible to persons with disabilities.

In The United Methodist Church inclusiveness means the freedom for the total involvement of all persons who meet the requirements of The United Methodist Book of Discipline in the membership and leadership of the Church at any level and in every place.

Section VII. The Fulfillment of Ministry Through The United Methodist Church

¶ 140. The Church—Affirming the spiritual dimensions of the ministry of all Christians, as proclaimed in ¶¶ 120-142 of this Book of Discipline, it is recognized that this ministry exists in the secular world and that civil authorities may seek legal definition predicated on the nature of The United Methodist Church in seeking fulfillment of this ministry. Accordingly, it is appropriate that the meaning of “The United Methodist Church,” “the general Church,” “the entire Church,” and “the Church” as used in the Book of Discipline should now be stated consistently with the traditional self-understanding of United Methodists as to the meaning of these words.

These terms refer to the overall denomination and connectional relation and identity of its many local churches, the various conferences and their respective councils, boards, and agencies, and other Church units, which collectively constitute the religious system known as United Methodism. Under the Constitution and disciplinary procedures set forth in this Book of Discipline, “The United Methodist Church” as a denominational whole is not an entity, nor does it possess legal capacities and attributes. It does not and cannot hold title to property, nor does it have any officer, agent, employee, office, or location. Conferences, councils, boards, agencies, local churches, and other units bearing the name “United Methodist” are, for the most part, legal entities capable of suing and being sued and possessed of legal capacities.

¶ 141. Definition of Clergy—Clergy in The United Methodist Church are individuals who serve as commissioned ministers, deacons, elders, and local pastors

under appointment of a bishop (full- and part-time), who hold membership in an annual conference, and who are commissioned, ordained, or licensed.

¶ 142. Employment Status of Clergy—Ministry in the Christian church is derived from the ministry of Christ (¶ 301). Jesus makes it clear to us that he is a shepherd and not a hireling (John 10:11-15). Similarly, United Methodist clergy appointed to local churches are not employees of the local church, the district, or the annual conference. It is recognized that for certain limited purposes such as taxation, benefits, and insurance, governments and other entities may classify clergy as employees. Such classifications are not to be construed as affecting or defining United Methodist polity, including the historic covenants that bind annual conferences, clergy, and congregations, episcopal appointive powers and procedures, or other principles set forth in the Constitution or the Book of Discipline (see e.g., ¶¶ 301; 328-329; 333-334; 338; 340). In addition, any such classifications should be accepted, if at all, only for limited purposes, as set forth above, and with the full recognition and acknowledgment that it is the responsibility of the clergy to be God's servants.

