The Heart and Soul of Wesleyan Mission Theology

Section 1: *The World is My Parish:*

I am very pleased and honored to return to Kwansei Gakuin University, after visiting here and speaking to you two years ago. I trust that this means what I offered then was acceptable! It is an honor to be here again, particularly with our historical and missionary connections through the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church… Ruth Grubel – your Chancellor and faculty member in the Sociology department; Tim Boyle – Christian studies professor; as well as Claudia Genung – serving in social outreach and evangelism in Kobe, and Kennis Lam from Hong Kong – a youth minister at the Okamoto Church in Kobe. These faithful servants carry on the long tradition of missionary service here in the Land of the Rising Sun.

I was asked to offer today some insights into the core understandings of mission theology from a Wesleyan perspective, with my comments on how these foundational beliefs of global Methodism find contemporary pragmatic application in our United Methodist mission work.

It might be suggested that the core of Wesleyan missional theology derives from John Wesley’s often quoted statement that, “the world is my parish”. From this phrase has come an understanding that Christian evangelists have the theological and ecclesiastical right to walk into any nation, or any community of any nation, and set up their evangelistic tents, because, after all, the whole world is my appointed territory for such work. However, that would not be the full Wesley story.

In his journal for June 11, 1739, John Wesley refers to a quote from a letter to the Rev. James Hervey (a former student of his), discussing Wesley’s preaching in London at Fetter Lane.
Chapel. Wesley wrote about his “many thoughts concerning the unusual manner of my ministering among them,” meaning the parishioners of that congregation to which another pastor was assigned and for whom, in the Anglican polity of the day, Wesley had no ecclesiastical authority or responsibility.

You accordingly ask, “How is it that I assemble Christians, who are none of my charge, to sing psalms, and pray, and hear the Scriptures expounded?” and think it hard to justify doing this in other men’s parishes, upon catholic principles. Suffer me now to tell you my principles in this matter. I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation....His servant I am, and, as such am employed according to the plain direction of His word: “as I have opportunity, doing good unto all men.”

The world as our parish is that ringing mantra of Methodism with which we have understood our movement into the world for these past three centuries. It is a forceful and dynamic image for a global church with far-reaching missional enterprises. Wesley here states, however, his principle that wherever he is, THAT is the place where God would have him proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ; to whoever will listen, or not listen in some cases! He was often derided and physically attacked for his preaching. Yet, as he states, as much as he has opportunity, he would be about doing good unto all.

While this is an important and significant insight from Wesley on the nature of the church, some interpretations of it, along with some colonial mission enterprises, are far from the heart of Wesleyan mission theology.

First, it must be stated that when Wesley wrote the statement in that letter to James Harvey he was simply expressing his rejection of contemporary Eighteenth Century ecclesiastical protocol that restricted the Gospel to the interior four walls of a consecrated
church building—an official holy place. Wesley’s real genius, as well as the heart and life of Wesleyan missional theology, was to literally “think outside of the box” of his day. That is, the box of the church buildings. He was issuing a call to what was called “field preaching,” or what we might label as taking the Gospel message to the people. Far from mission as numerical or territorial expansion of the church, Wesley’s sought convergence with Jesus’ practice of going out and about where people are found. That is being in mission.

Geography, of course, is involved in mission but we must be careful in our geographical language and thinking. For the past two centuries or so, the major Western churches, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, have viewed mission as moving geographically from European and North American Christian “centers” toward the margins of the world. Yet now, as noted by the recent World Council of Churches document on Mission and Evangelism, entitled Together Towards Life, this center to periphery, or mission to “unreached territories,” has been literally turned inside out. It is the church at the margins – more cultural and economic than geographic – from which the great energy of the Holy Spirit is now emanating. I mention this here but will say much more about it in my second presentation tomorrow on the World Council of Churches Busan assembly.

Mission comes from our awareness of God’s imminent, that is, close at hand, and prevenient, that is, prior, presence in the world, important themes in Wesleyan and Methodist concepts of God’s grace. And we cannot discuss mission without considering grace. Among the resources upon which I have drawn here are The United Methodist Church’s 1988 official mission statement Grace Upon Grace, and a book entitled Faithful Witness: United Methodist Theology of Mission, written by Dr. John Nuessle a former senior staff person of the General Board of Global Ministries.
Grace is God’s love for the whole world. Grace is everywhere visible if we but see by observing it in our own lives. Grace is the foundation of Wesleyan theological understandings and of our mission theology; it is that which moves us onward and outward into the world that is so ultimately loved by God. Grace calls us to be the incarnate Body of Christ—the visible manifestation of God’s great love.

In temporal terms, this very day, every hour, every moment is grace, the free and ongoing gifts of God. We cannot make today—this very day—happen; it comes as a gift, but we can place ourselves in the pathway of God’s grace. We can openly receive and celebrate it. We can observe the results of grace about us in the world, but we cannot manufacture grace or manipulate its presence. God, in God’s most gracious manner, does not require anything from us for the grace of this day to come into our lives, just that we be aware and open, that we seek and then we will find, to paraphrase of Matthew 7:7-8: “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”

Grace upon grace is what we have received from the fullness of God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ (John 1:16: “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”). Grace stacked up on top of more grace. Life itself is a grace-filled experience, as we seek what God is doing in the world. As we so gloriously sing in Charles Wesley’s most Methodist of hymns:

O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise,
The glories of my God and King, the triumphs of his grace!4
Grace is exultant. It is not a passive feeling of pleasant gifts from God; it is the awareness of the active divine presence in the world. Grace is the very nature of God and of God’s interaction with the world, human and natural. We observe this foundation of our faith so well-expressed in what may be the most widely known of scriptural verses:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)

Section 2: Missio Dei: What it means to be in mission

Since the mid-twentieth Century, the thinking of the ecumenical community of mission scholars has coalesced around the Latin phrase, *missio Dei*—God’s mission-- to describe the essence of Christian mission and the missionary enterprise. To say God’s Mission is to acknowledge that God is the first and foremost actor in our world. Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, saying in part…, “your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10) This is the present interim stance because, he also said…“the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near…” (Mark 1:14-15), and, “the kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed….For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.” (Luke 17:20-21) This is the *missio Dei*—mission is God’s Mission, through which we participate in the coming, and in fact already occurring, reign of God.

The 1910 World Conference on Mission and Evangelism in Edinburgh, Scotland was a watershed missiological event, substantially organized and led by an American Methodist layman, John R. Mott. A significant result of this gathering was the birth of the modern ecumenical movement and the eventual establishment of the World Council of Churches, as well
as the progress toward the acceptance of missiology as an academic discipline within Christian universities and seminaries. One great realization coming from this conference was that Christians of different denominations could work as sisters and brothers toward the goal, as stated by the title of Mott’s book, of *The Evangelization of the World in this Generation*.

The twentieth century, however, lumbered forward through two world wars, economic depression, the advent of nuclear weapons, the creation and dissolution of the Communist world, and the subsequent domination by the capitalistic United States of many other cultures. In this same time period, missiology and the church-sponsored activities of mission wandered from a triumphalist and somewhat militaristic culture of missionary activity into a time of often acute embarrassment about the missionary past or vague understandings of mission as a secondary responsibility.

The concept of *missio Dei*—variously translated from the Latin as the Mission of God, or God’s Mission—came to the fore in the ecumenical world mission conferences of the 1950s and 1960s. It became the clear call to The United Methodist Church through the 1986 theology of mission statement of the General Board of Global Ministries, entitled “Partnership in God’s Mission.” This concept remains a nearly universally agreed-upon understanding of what mission is in the context of the church engaging the world with a missionary calling. Mission is not so much what we do as who we are. We are the church of Jesus Christ that participates in what God is doing in the world. We are in mission in the same way that God is incarnate in the world, by grace.

Karl Barth, the 20th-century Swiss theologian speaking at a conference in 1932, may have been the first to refer to mission as an activity of God by the very nature of God. *Missio Dei*
as a concept, while not the phrase itself, was first expressed at the Willingen conference of the International Missionary Council in 1952. *Missio Dei* primarily refers to the purposes and activities of God in and for the whole world. God is in mission by virtue of the Incarnation of Christ, in that God sent the Son into the world (again, John 3:16). Thus the very nature of the church as the visible body of Christ in the world is to be in mission, as God in Christ is in mission.

Those who are sought out, gathered together, and transformed by Christ are the Church. Their very existence, therefore, springs from God’s sending forth of His son. In this sense “mission” belongs to the life of the Church…..

The missional activities of the church are an expression of the identity of the church, rather than simply a response to need or a desire to expand the church. The mission of the church is to participate in what God is already, and has always been, about in the world. This is the natural extension of the basic Christian theology of incarnation. God’s grace is present in the world through the Son, Jesus Christ, who proclaimed the kingdom/reign of God in word and deed, and remains in the world through the church by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Both the *missio Dei* and the kingdom are what God “is” and “does”—and the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate in both, for God’s Mission is the visible manifestation of the in-breaking kingdom of God, and is most clearly seen in Christ Jesus.

Philip Potter, a noted Methodist missiologist and former general secretary of the World Council of Churches, in describing this understanding of mission as the *missio Dei*, puts it clearly before us, saying that, “Quite simply—and quite profoundly—what this phrase [*missio Dei*] means to assert is that *mission is God’s, not ours*. This was stated in the same way by the
International Missionary Council meeting in Ghana in 1958 (‘The Christian world mission is Christ’s, not ours’).

Dr. Potter describes four significant consequences of this statement. First he states that the church is not the center and goal of mission but rather the means and instrument of mission. We participate in what God is doing in God’s world. We are servants of the Servant of the world, Jesus Christ. The church is not the kingdom, but as the late Lesslie Newbigin, a missionary bishop of the Church of South India and a well-known twentieth-century missiologist, also asserted, the church is a sign of that kingdom which is always breaking into the world in new and different ways. Therefore, there is no one way, method, model, or strategy for calling attention to God’s in-breaking reign.

Second, if God is so engaged with the world, we must be also. That is to be listening to the world’s agenda and be in constant dialogue and interaction with the world about us, in order to be an authentic witness to God’s Mission.

Third, this means that the whole world, and inclusive of all nations and peoples, is the venue for mission.

And last, in this engagement the church needs to be constantly renewed as we call the world to repentance and renewal. “Mission is not only concerned with the conversion of others, but with the conversion of God’s people.” That is, the goal of transformation applies to the household of grace as well as to those not yet part of that family. How well we as the church live out this theology goes a long way in showing how thoroughly we grasp our call to God’s Mission.
Section 3: Mission Practice: How we live out these theological convictions.

God’s Mission, then, as the ongoing expression of the actions of the Trinity in and for all of life is the core and foundation of mission. Missio Dei is love and grace under the reign of God, which, as Jesus stated, is “among us”—within our grasp, yet not fully revealed (Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 17:20-21). Therefore, the practice of mission in and by the church centers on the announcement of God’s reign as present and future reality, meaning “among us” but not fully revealed. It means living into the kingdom as a reality more than activity or the conduct of programs. Again, as Bishop Newbigin states, “I have insisted that the Church’s message is about the kingdom. The Church is called to be a sign, foretaste, and instrument of God’s kingly rule.”

This “living into” the kingdom is empowered by the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit. As we see in the account of the first Pentecost in Acts 2, the Spirit moves in, moves among, and moves through the disciples. They all spoke differently but as one, energized by the tongues of fire of the Holy Spirit; so too is this the motivating fire of mission in our present day. We understand that we are the messengers of God’s already-occurring actions far more than we are the actors or “doers” of God’s Mission, and that all of our activities must proclaim this reality of God’s coming kingdom that is, in fact, breaking into the world through our very proclamation of this reality.

The church exists to serve the missio Dei; this is its essential purpose. Identity is not found in some Christian-only, apart-from-the world realm, but in finding the reign of God through the lives of God’s people everywhere. (Luke 17:21: “For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.”) Wilbert Shenk, a Reformed missiologist, suggests that, at best, a dominant Christian culture is an ambiguous understanding from both biblical and historical grounds. He
thinks that the church of modern Western culture is living out of the bygone era of “Christendom,” a coalescence of the spiritual and political, which was a church without a missional ethos. Now, the church must be renewed in mission to be the authentic body of Christ. “The sole source for renewal of the church is the missio Dei as the basis for its life in relationship to the world,” Shenk says. Mission is God’s Mission, missio Dei. It’s about the reign of God, present now and yet to be revealed. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near…” (Mark 1:15).

In this we recognize that we live in a religiously plural world, with adherents of many religious traditions, and with many of these persons moving and migrating across hitherto impenetrable continental divides. Many Christians may be relying on inadequate theological presuppositions to meet the multi-religious and interfaith nature of our world. Interfaith dialogue, once a “nice” idea in academic circles, is now an absolute necessity for missional activity. By such dialogue I mean a real interchange of thought, feelings, ideas, and foundational worldviews through which we are able to enter into one another’s global perspectives, as well locally lived experiences. It is totally impossible to engage in any kind of mission work in any part of the world without grasping the religious background and spirituality of the peoples among whom we are seeking to minister. If the world is truly our parish, then it behooves us to get to know everyone in our parish – their hopes, dreams, worldview, and God-view!

The fact that mission is God’s mission is not always clearly understood within the church. It is possible that our practice of mission can actually be “mispractice.” One misconception is suggested by J. Andrew Kirk, former professor at the School of Mission and World Christianity at the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, United Kingdom. He strikes a
chord similar to that of the World Council in the paper on mission and evangelism, which I will
go into tomorrow. Kirk writes:

For far too long in the Western world it has been perceived as something which is
done overseas, in places where the Church is not yet established or perceived to
be still in its youth. People still betray their thinking by talking about “going to
the mission field”, meaning somewhere else where the Gospel is needed. At best,
mission is thought of as a vital activity of the Church, one among others; mission
as the essential being of the Church has not yet been properly recognized.  

The “mission field” is not so much somewhere else, and certainly not just across
“saltwater,” but is among people who are not blank slates, but have fully developed thoughts and
ideas, as well as spiritual experiences, which guide them every day. In this interfaith world
Bishop Newbigin likewise understands “evangelism” and “proselytism” to be different activities;
the former as a Christian call in God’s Mission, while the latter is an effort to grow numbers for a
group. As conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, and not of human effort, our call is to
proclaim the Gospel, in Word and Deed, without regard to church growth.  

Or more simply, as is attributed to the Sri Lankan Methodist missiologist, D. T. Niles, “Evangelism is just one beggar
telling another beggar where to find bread.”

Mission is being present with persons where they live, knowing how they live, and
recognizing the plurality of religious practices and traditions in which we all live. Church
extension, helping people in need, and providing access to education or health-care are not
mission in and of themselves. Church planting is a methodology of mission, not the point of
mission. Volunteers in Mission form a methodological construct of the contemporary church, not
the purpose of mission. Disaster response after hurricanes or floods, and the resettlement of
political or economic refugees are all crucial and vital activities of the church of Jesus Christ,
and all point toward the reality of the kingdom, but none of these are the heart, soul, and driving
force of mission. It is the prevenient grace of God, expressed as *missio Dei*—God’s Mission—which is the reason we engage in any of these activities as Christians.

Section 4: *Global Ministries*: As a concept, not a mission agency

What does it mean to be an international mission agency operating with a *missio Dei* theology that sees the world as it parish and downplays mission as activities and programs? This is a question that my organization as well as many others face on a daily basis, and especially in our communications and interpretation.

It is very easy for church leaders to become so meaningfully busy with the organizational affairs of the local congregations they serve, or the national church agencies they head, either as lay leaders or pastors, that they forget there is a wide world out there for whom Christ died (John 3:16-17). God so loved the world and the world is our parish, not the parish is our world! Yet, we must acknowledge the inherent tension between local concerns and global issues. The good news of the Gospel is for all persons, yet must be lived locally in and among specific individuals who have very diverse backgrounds and understandings of life.

When we United Methodists, drawing upon all of these theological perspectives, use the term “global ministries” we are not intending to just name an international mission agency; we are intending to describe the way we seek to engage the whole world with the whole Gospel. Let me share four interrelated examples of how we at Global Ministries try to put this understanding into practice. These deal with missionaries, immigration, multicultural relations, and evangelism and new church development.
Missionaries, from Everywhere to Everywhere

The book of Isaiah declares:

Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Isaiah 43:16-21)

God is doing a new thing in missionary service today. Missionaries are no longer from a Christian “center” in Europe and North America; rather, missionaries are from everywhere to everywhere. Of our global missionaries at Global Ministries in international placements, some half, are from outside the United States. Here in Asia, we have for example a Bangladeshi laywoman serving in the slums of Phnom Penh, Cambodia; a Korean couple teaching in Methodist related institutions in Manila, Philippines; a Filipino couple working to establish new churches and a Methodist presence in Laos; a Kenyan woman helping to coordinate new church development in Cambodia, and a young pastor from Hong Kong engaged in youth ministries in Kobe, Japan. We have a missionary from China in the US state of Oklahoma and several from Brazil in other states. We have many missionaries from various Latin American countries and others in that region, and the same in Africa. We now have faithful servants of Christ going from everywhere to be in mission everywhere.

By God’s grace we are participants in the mission outreach that brings a greatly diverse people together in faith and action. Missionaries are leaders in finding ways to tell the story of grace, and to find ways through the wilderness of poverty, of hunger, disease, and injustice, to renew spirits and to be cooling waters to people trapped in the desert. Missionaries still “go”—they go from homes on all continents to faithful witness on all continents. From everywhere to
everywhere the United Methodist missionary presence continues to be the historic “new thing” that God is doing in our midst.

Philip Potter asserts that, “The God of the Bible is a missionary God, a God who sends.” He reminds us that God sent Abraham and Sarah, as well as Moses and Miriam. God sent Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and sent the Apostles through the power of the Son and the Spirit. Thus, J. Andrew Kirk, states, “The Church is by nature missionary to the extent that, if it ceases to be missionary, it has not just failed in one of its tasks, it has ceased being Church.” The church must always have persons going forth as the incarnation of the Gospel, moving with God’s mission in every place and every human situation. As a method of mission, missionary service is constantly changing, evolving, and molding to the new contexts of the world’s cultures.

**Immigration**

My second lecture will include the issue of stateless people, an issue prominent at the recent World Council Assembly in South Korea, but here I want to take the larger topic of immigration as an area where we follow God in mission today. Daily, the number of refuges worldwide grows—people flee war, famine, natural disaster, and persecution, as do the number of persons on the move for political, economic, or religious reasons. The enormous extent of immigration has profound implication for mission. It challenges us as Christians to put our theology of hospitality and humanitarian service into practice, following examples in both the Old and New Testaments.

Immigrant communities, very much on the margins of economic reality, also are making significant contributions to mission. For example, they contribute missionaries. Recently
launched Methodist church development and social services in Vietnam and Laos were planted and cultivated by former refugees who, after fleeing wars, came into contact with the church in the US and were called by God to return to their homelands as missionaries. We have lay and local pastor refugee-founded churches in several parts of Africa, including South Sudan, Guinea, and Kenya.

Also, immigrants from the Global South are enlivening churches in Europe and parts of North America. These immigrants often arrive as Methodists, seeking out congregations in their new locales and serve to jump-start what may have become lethargic faith or to bolster sagging church participation. We have missionaries working with these immigrant-revitalized churches in several parts of Western Europe and the United States.

*Multicultural congregations*

Of course, there can also be complications arising from immigrants from a different culture coming into formerly ethnically homogenous congregations. The diversity of God’s human family requires that we try to achieve multi-cultural, multi-racial congregations. Historically or economically dominant cultural groups do not always welcome the stranger, even if they belong to the same religion.

Indigenous groups or immigrants may feel especially excluded, even in clearly multicultural countries. In the US, where a third of the population is identified as ethnic minorities, and where half the people under 18 are ethnic, or non-white, we do not have many multicultural congregations or worship settings. The United Methodist Church is far behind in this area of ministry and mission.
The Biblical vision for the gathered community of believers is much different from our reality. The prophetic vision of the coming kingdom in Revelation 7:9, states…“After this I looked and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the Throne and before the Lamb, robed in white with palm branches in their hands.” This is extremely clear imagery about God’s realm.

Jesus, in Mark 11:17 is equally clear: “Is it not written…my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?” He said this in the account of the cleansing of the Temple, and I wonder whether Jesus might cleanse the contemporary church of our mono-cultural congregations, replacing believers from all nations.

We are attempting to promote new multi-cultural faith communities, particularly among younger persons, in the United States and globally. We are making efforts to develop pastors and lay leaders who catch the visions of a new day through workshops and mentoring experiences, as well as the ongoing engagement of national ethnic minority leaders in multiple settings.

Evangelism and New Church Development

The closing chapter of Matthew contains the great mission mandate: “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.” (Matthew 28:19-20a)

This well-known statement from the Gospel of Matthew has been a directive for mission expansion over the centuries. But what does it mean for us today to “make disciples of all nations”?
The first century Palestinians, Greeks, and Romans had a different understanding of the word *nation* than we have today. For them, “nations” meant sociological groups of people rather than sovereign states with defined political borders. Some translations of Matthew 28 use the term “people” as a substitute for nations. Thus, we are about the work of church planting among people, who may belong to different groups but are connected in faith. From John 15: 1-11, we understand that no individual branch of a vine bears fruit without being connected to the whole vine. A single branch does not have the capacity to draw up its own nourishment from the earth. Similarly, for local worshiping congregations to grow and bear fruit, they need to be intimately connected to the whole church—structurally as well as conceptually and to all groups of people within its range. The church is not a collection of individuals. We form congregations as the basic unit of faith, and most congregations are linked in some manner to others of like persuasion or history or language.

The United Methodist Church today engages in more than a dozen new mission initiatives that operate on geographical levels but are striving to be connected parts of the Wesleyan heritage. These initiatives are in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, West Africa, Central America, and East Asia, including Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Mongolia. Yes, we preach Jesus Christ, we organize worshipping communities and congregations; we start schools, provide medical services, offer job training for the marginalized, and open ourselves to work with other religious community or secular organizations for the sake of justice and freedom.

As of the end of 2012 some 800 new worshipping fellowships and faith communities had been planted in the past eight years through the initiatives. Six hundred more are projected for the next four years.
Several Biblical principles of church growth and development guide the United Methodist Mission Initiatives program in planting new congregations in countries where we have not traditionally been present. These Biblical principles include:

A. Collaboration. We follow the wisdom of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, where he says that all parts of the body make significant contributions to the working of the whole. We take that understanding into church development through the initiatives, so that we form partnerships among area congregations, mission agencies and institutions, and sponsors of various kinds. We emphasize connectedness, and highlight the concept of “In Mission Together.” This has produced a vital network of established congregations, mostly in the US and Europe, that are linked to the newer initiatives. They meet in common “roundtables” to consider opportunities and challenges—doing this together and with the missionaries in the initiatives involved. Indigenous leaders are key in the conduct of the initiatives and the planning of occasional roundtables. Together, the partners are working toward mutually sustainable approaches to ensure the health and growth of new disciples and new churches in nations around the globe.

B. Leadership development. New church planting is mostly a matter of leadership development. Paul states in Ephesians 4:11-13 that the work of the whole church is the equipping of the indigenous church leaders (“the saints”) for ministry, who in turn, work together in building up the whole body of Christ. Regional coordinating groups consider the recommended ways to provide pastoral and lay education, develop youth outreach, and strengthen natural leadership gifts.

C. Equality in mission. Matthew 28:19 stresses that disciples are to cultivate other disciples among all nations through baptism, teaching, and the proclamation of God’s
presence in the world. “All nations” is a key phrase here. It implies that disciples are not limited to an exclusive local context but are sent out to work among many but all groups of people. This is an inclusive mandate. In fact, Matthew 28:19 can be read as a Biblical call to create an infrastructure for the church in all parts of the world, connecting faithful Christians in one place with new Christians in all other places. Church leaders are called to move into new cultures or societies, working among a whole people or nation and seeking to grow the church there from a corporate and communal basis. Their goal is not just scattered groups of converts but the forging of regional and national church connected in faith and identity.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by emphasizing the importance we put at the General Board of Global Ministries on connecting the church in mission. That is part of our continuing reference to our goals and purposes. Connecting the Church in Mission is a Biblical model of church planting. We make disciples among all people by linking Christian communities together through a connectional system. This exciting work of frontier evangelism has inspired a passionate response from our constituents in the United States and Europe. Church members participate in supporting this work in many ways: as mission volunteers; in prayerful and financial support for missionaries; and with support for a wide variety of projects that address the physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs of new Christians.

God’s Mission is local and global at the same time, integrating all aspects, strategies, and methodologies of our identity with the missio Dei. Missionaries go from everywhere to everywhere. Leaders in new mission areas are trained and facilitated in their work by effective practitioners, or mentors, from other newly developed churches.
Mutuality is our process in all of our missional strategies; we seek a common way forward as a Wesleyan mission agency. The world is our parish, yet not to own or take advantage of in any way. Rather it is to be the vanguard of the *missio Dei*, God’s Mission in and for the whole world, which God’s loves completely and totally. The United Methodist Church, through the General Board of Global Ministries and its predecessor bodies, has been about this work for nearly two centuries, and looks forward with faith and hope to the future which God is bringing about—even this day.

---

6 Potter, op. cit., pp. 73-74.
7 Ibid., p. 44.
9 Newbigin, *op. cit.*, p. 45.