

SECTION III



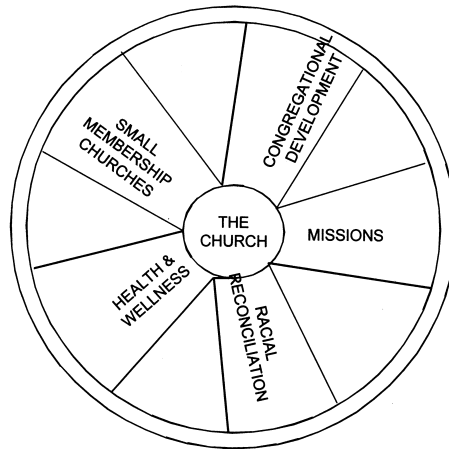
CONNECTIONAL  
MINISTRIES



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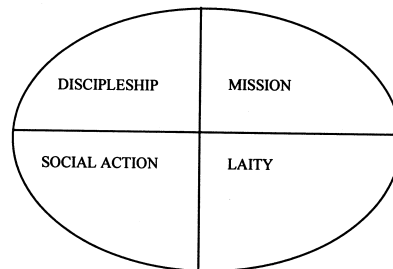
# CONNECTIONAL MINISTRIES ANNUAL REPORT

“...to envision the ministries necessary to live out the mission of the church in and through the annual conference...” ¶ 607 The Book of Discipline



In 2005 a five-pronged vision was cast and adopted by the Annual Conference.

At the same time the Annual Conference allowed Connectional Ministries to move away from a formal ministry committee structure to broader “tables” of ministry. The purpose of the tables was to utilize persons, who had been elected to lead the ministry committee structure, to collegially work toward resourcing more functional ministries for the local church.



The Ministry Table concept lessens the number of committee meetings. It best utilizes the gifts of those who have been named by the Annual Conference to lead our conference. It offers greater stewardship in the use of the conference’s connectional ministry dollars. **BUT** ... in-and-of-itself the Ministry Table concept still lacked vision. As a matter of fact, as the saying goes, “it was a rearrangement of the deck chairs.” Even with a change structurally, our view was still the same, but from a different angle.

In the fall meeting (August 23, 2005) of the conference Leadership Council, a decision was made to drop the Ministry Table idea and to look toward the five initiatives/foci which we had adopted at the 2005 Annual Conference for the 2005-2008 quadrennium:

1. Health and Wellness
2. Congregational Development
3. Mission
4. Racial Reconciliation
5. Small Membership Church

Each of our conference ministry leaders was invited to move to a setting identified with one of the five quadrennial foci. The end product was a good distribution of folk among the different foci.

In a January 2006 address to the directors of Connectional Ministries across the denomination, Karen Greenwaldt, general secretary of the Board of Discipleship, noted that “Vision is not a destination or a

place or a goal. Vision is a field with interpenetrating influences and invisible forces that connect.” The five foci of our conference create that kind of a vision of a field of “interpenetrating influences and invisible forces that connect.” The change in the configuration of connectional ministry tables was a move away from an attempt to achieve a goal toward the field of influence that can (and is already) affecting the life of the local church.

Hurricane Katrina has given us a great pause but it has not darkened the path of this vision. If anything, it has made for a good seed bed prepared for the planting.

What follows are progress reports of the forces and influences which have been at work in the midst of us, with us, and through us.

## BISHOP’S INITIATIVES

### *Life In the Light: Health and Wellness*

We give thanks for the creative response of the annual conference, districts, and local churches toward wellness. The conference kicked off its wellness initiative last year at Annual Conference with the Arise! Shine! Run! 5K run and one-mile walk. Since then, local church, district, and conference events have shined light on wellness of clergy and laity.

Sixty-five persons across the conference continue to respond to Bishop Felton May’s 2005 Annual Conference challenge to respond to God’s calling for involvement in health and wellness ministries. Local health initiatives have begun in Greenville, Columbus, Jackson, Brookhaven, and other locations across the conference. District wellness activities, such as the Circuit Striders walking program in the West Jackson District, were launched. The conference hosted a Health and Wellness Conference on October 29, 2005. Health and Wellness leadership groups for the conference, districts, and many local churches have formed.

The conference’s commitment to wellness of body, mind, and spirit is also exhibited through the continuation of our relationship with Methodist Healthcare, the deployment of a “Life Clinic” kiosk in the conference office, and the Cabinet’s development of a Self-Care Covenant.

Health and wellness has become an important topic across the church. Denominational publications including Circuit Rider and Interpreter profiled the Mississippi Conference’s focus on health and wellness in early 2006. In October, the General Board of Global Ministries will hold its second Health and Welfare Ministries/Congregational Health Ministries National Conference in Memphis.

*Embra K. Jackson, Administrative Assistant*

### *Life In the Light: Vital Congregations*

The year 2005 was a year of great change in our annual conference as we embraced the conference’s five ministries for this quadrennium. One of these is the area of congregational development.

The mission of the United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Disciples will in turn make more disciples until the reign of God becomes a reality. The conference emphasis on vital congregations is thus to help promote disciple-making in existing congregations and also via new church starts.

New churches are contemplated or have been planted in Greenville, Oxford, Jackson, and Hattiesburg. Following Hurricane Katrina, the work of congregational development has become especially important in the Seashore District. Coast churches have been helped and supported as they set a course for the future by the creative and visionary work of the Seashore District Committee on Church Building and Location in conjunction with Steve Compton of the North Carolina Conference and the appointment of Church Recovery Director Chris Cumbest.

#### **School of Congregational Development**

In July, the Mississippi Conference will launch the School of Congregational Development (SCD). The vision for the School of Congregational Development is

*Growing People  
Who Are  
Growing Churches  
That Are  
Growing the Kingdom.*

The goal of the SCD is transformation, not simply to provide another continuing education experience. It will enable theory to become practice. SCD participants will attend 10 retreats over two years and one national conference. The school is built around three tracks – church planting, church turn-around, and pastoring African-American congregations – but everyone will participate in all three tracks. Rev. Bryan Collier of The Orchard in Tupelo is the SCD facilitator.

### **Church Vitalization: Healthy Churches**

Sedentary lifestyles often result in a lack of energy or ambition and poor health. What is true for the human body also can be true – metaphorically – for a local congregation. Many congregations find themselves complacent, tired, aimless, and ill. In both cases, the key to wholeness and vitality is fairly simple – diet, exercise, discipline, and adequate rest. Simple, but not easy.

A “vitalized” or healthy church is one that exhibits characteristics found in Acts 2:42-47. Four practices essential for congregational health and wellness are clarity of identity and purpose; balanced focus; accountability; and impact awareness.

Healthy congregations have a strong sense of identity and purpose and can answer these questions with specifics:

*Who are we?*

*Why do we exist?*

*How can we be effective?*

*What do we have to work with?*

Participants in healthy congregations balance an inward focus – acts of piety – with an outward focus – acts of mercy. Vital congregations realize that church is the place people go to be equipped to follow God’s call in the world.

The greatest issue facing congregations desiring to become healthy is accountability.

What does it mean to be a member or active participant of a community of faith? Who decides whether a person is faithfully fulfilling their covenantal relationship to the congregation? Every participant is expected to be actively involved in some form of ministry. Healthy churches equip people to be ministers in their daily lives.

The bishop and Cabinet have decided to administer the Indicators for Church Health assessment in all congregations, under the guidance of Rev. Shane Stanford. This will provide a framework for assessing local church health and success in making disciples.

A diverse group from the conference attended the national School of Congregational Development in Dallas in 2005. Plans are being made to attend the school in 2006 in San Diego. Several joint planning sessions have been conducted in Jackson with the bishop, various cabinet members, conference staff, members of the Revitalization and New Church Development committees, and other conference leaders.

The Congregational Development Synergy Group is composed of the director of Connectional Ministries, a representative from the United Methodist Foundation, two district superintendents, the ELCC director, and the administrative assistant to the bishop. This group helps to provide oversight and sharing of ideas in regard to congregational development in the Mississippi Conference.

*Embra K. Jackson, Administrative Assistant*

## ***Life In the Light: Racial Reconciliation***

### ***Commission on Religion and Race***

*If you walk in the light as God is in the light, you will have fellowship one with another.*

This scripture from First John continues to guide the work of the Commission on Religion and Race. The Journey Toward the Light: Conversations on Race has expanded to include not just the Commission and the Bishop’s Cabinet but also persons from across the Conference who feel called by God to cross racial boundaries.

The first Journey was in January to historic Gulfside Assembly in Waveland, a retreat center that has deep and important meaning to African Americans. Tragically, the Assembly was destroyed by the fierce winds and water of Hurricane Katrina. Some 150 people gathered overlooking the beach in a Service of Remembering, hearing stories of the transforming experiences that had occurred on that holy ground. It was a time of celebrating the past and planting seeds for what will be in the future.

McComb, Mississippi, known during the Civil Rights era as the dynamite capital of the world, was the locus for the second Journey. Journeying to six sites important to the struggle, some 75 participants heard leaders from that era narrate the events. Remarkably, the city and public schools have embarked on concrete programs toward racial reconciliation, programs that could be adapted to other towns. It was a time of studying the past and present in order to inspire a better future.

On the third Journey in Jackson Dr. Tex Sample, nationally known Christian theologian, worked from the premise of "The Common Good." As the primary focus of the Journey moves to the local church, Dr. Sample dealt with the realities of study, worship, prayer, and action as they cross barriers of race and class at the local level.

Light Partners is the initiative that takes the Journey to the local church. Light Partners is an INVITATION to local churches to grow in love and fellowship through four spiritual disciplines: study, worship, prayer, and action. In its own unique setting, a congregation or any small group or any individual in the church, can commit to move forward in each of the disciplines during the year. The Conference office needs to be notified of the commitment. CORR members and a Light Partner Coordinator in each district are trained to help churches understand and begin working in the four disciplines.

The Commission is fully aware of its monitoring responsibilities, not just at Annual Conference but also throughout the year. We are also concerned that the journey not be taken in black and white but that Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asian Americans join the journey. CORR is truly on an extraordinary journey, one not expected as the group gathered to organize but one that we believe is leading us and the Mississippi Conference toward the Light where we can have real fellowship with one another.

*Twick Morrison, Chair  
Commission on Religion and Race*

### ***Life In the Light: Helping the Church with a Small Membership To Be Stronger and Healthier***

The Mississippi Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church offers a bold opportunity for churches and/or charges with an average attendance of 150 or less to grow in their effectiveness.

Such churches and/or charges which choose to participate will be invited to send a team of five persons including their pastor and four key lay persons to The Wood Institute in Mathiston, Mississippi. The in-conference training experience will involve five weekend sessions over a ten month period requiring participation by highly motivated churches seeking to improve the quality of life in their church. The teams will spend Friday evenings and Saturdays in practical training on key issues facing their congregation.

This home-grown training is a first of its kind offered with the accessibility of the Wood campus to the churches of our annual conference. The participating church teams will actually design plans each weekend for on-site implementation in their home church or charge. Each session will build on the last session with progress reports on previous designs. Churches will be able to give testimony to the developing strength and health of their church through the experience.

One year following the fifth session of the training, the church teams will return to Wood for a reunion to celebrate victories and to discuss continued needs as well as next steps.

The Small Membership Church Missional Initiative is the work of a partnership between the following entities of the Mississippi Conference:

- Connectional Ministries
- Parish & Community Ministries
- Ethnic Local Church Concerns
- Rural Life Ministries
- Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century
- United Methodist Rural Fellowship
- The Bishop and The Cabinet

A Sampling of some of the topics the participating teams will explore include:

- Building a Spiritual Community
- Creative Evangelism... Growing by Adoption
- The Most Important Hour of The Week
- Organizing to Beat the Devil...

- Do We Have the Faith Capacity to Be The People of God?
- Pastoral and Laity Roles... Part-Time/ Full Time
- Prescription for “BIGCHURCHITIS” Disease  
Contagious Christians

## PROPOSED ACTION

The Parish and Community Ministries Committee of the Mississippi Conference proposes a change in the Small Membership Church Loan Program which it operates on behalf of the conference.

There are currently two pools of money in the loan program; money not yet loaned and money already loaned to churches.

1. The P & C Committee proposes a freeze of the cash on hand (not yet loaned). Further, use all interest income in 2006-2008 from this Cash Fund to help resource the conference Small Membership Church Leadership Initiative which is being implemented at Wood Institute. The committee respectfully requests the freeze on the aforementioned funds be effective upon passage of this proposal at this 2006 Annual Conference. P & C Committee makes this recommendation for the period of January 2006 through December 2008.
2. The P & C Committee proposes the use of the interest from “loaned money” to “bolster” its Church Improvement Grant Program. Beginning on January 1, 2006, through December 31, 2008, it is proposed that the interest from loaned money go directly into the grant program to provide additional funds for small membership churches and parsonages for repairs and improvements.

## THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE AWARDS

### *Evangelism: Harry Denman Award*

Harry Denman was truly a “Fisher of all Persons.” He sought to lead the Board of Evangelism into wide presentations of the Gospel to reach people. His personal dedication forced him to follow Christ totally, and he sought to lead others to have what he had, that total commitment to a life of Faith. He told it like it was, as best he understood it. He did not hesitate to give answers to the tough questions of personal faith, nor did he fail to admit his own personal weakness, and frequently asked another person to “pray for me.”

When he was part of a group, whether with colleagues or strangers, businessmen or politicians, invariably Harry shifted the conversation to the Bible, prayer and the risen Lord whom he sought to continually serve. He commanded attention by his dedication and singleness of purpose.

Harry Denman was a layman, not a preacher. He had the gift of making people want to listen whether he was speaking with just one person or to a multitude. He was a person who never accepted “no” as final. He sought to try that which others thought could not be done, and he succeeded at it.

Love for his Lord and for his fellow human beings was the keynote of his life. He stood for many things that are today coming to pass, but were not popular causes in his own day. He advocated the equality of persons, regardless of sex, nationality or race; simplicity of lifestyle; the discarding of false values of materialism and a search for the true values of life taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Harry Denman died on November 8, 1976.

### *Religion and Race: Emma Elzy Award*

A descendant of slaves, Emma Elzy was a woman of great faith and built her life’s foundation on the teaching of the Methodist Church. Elzy taught five grades at the Pontotoc Colored School.

Elzy moved to Corinth to teach after she lost her job in Pontotoc. It was there that she joined Mount Moriah Methodist Church. She would remain in Corinth nearly all the rest of her life.

Emma Elzy was an outstanding laywoman. She gave liberally of her time, talent, money, and ingenuity to promote better race relations, human relations, church relations, and family relations. Elzy went beyond the norm to bring unity and inclusiveness to the body of Christ.

She died in 1985 age 98. She had been a member of the Methodist church for about 70 years and attended Methodist conferences for 50 years.

### ***Archives and History: Tobias Gibson Award***

In January, 1799, Tobias Gibson who, though young, had already served eight years in the Conference, was chosen as the person to bring Methodism to the Natchez settlers.

His first service was probably held in a schoolhouse in the town of Washington and his first congregation was organized there. He went on to establish ministries in such places as Woodville and Port Gibson. For three years he was the only Methodist preacher within 500 miles of his advanced post. He preached from Walnut Hills (Vicksburg) to Loftus Heights (Fort Adams) and by the end of 1799 reported 60 members.

Tobias Gibson established sixty Methodist congregations in his five year's as a missionary to Mississippi. He left behind a great legacy, the foundation for Methodist growth in the state which would thrive to the present time.

### ***Board of Ordained Ministry: Hannah Project***

The Hannah Project is named for Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, who handed her child into ministry. Her story is found in I Samuel 1:1-2, 10.

The continuing need for ordained elders and deacons to lead our churches calls for each local church to be responsible for helping people to hear the invitation to become ministers of the Christian faith. Each congregation is challenged to participate in the program of ministerial recruitment and nurture through the Hannah Project of the Vocational Call and Nurture Committee of the Board of Ordained Ministry.

### ***Board of Ordained Ministry: The Calling***

The Calling provides participants with a wonderful opportunity to enhance their personal relationship with God and to discern if God is calling them to ministry as a Deacon or Elder in the United Methodist Church, through workshops, small groups, and worship. This is a bi-annual retreat sponsored by the Board of Ordained Ministry.

## **BLACK COLLEGE FUND REPRESENTATIVE**

### ***Biographical Sketch for La Toya Glover***

La Toya Glover is a member of Bethel United Methodist Church in San Antonio, Texas; Reverend Robert W. Douglas is pastor. She is Business Accounting major at Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, Texas where Dr. Larry Earvin is President. She aspires to open a full-service beauty salon/spa and a child-care facility to empower youth.

La Toya is currently on the National Dean's List with a 4.0 GPA, while holding the titles of Miss Black San Antonio 2006, and Miss Omega Psi Phi 2006. She has been very instrumental in the newly developed Drama Club. Her hobbies are modeling, and hanging out with her two-year old niece.