



Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing!

Mary Brooke Casad

General Conference, with its thousands of legislative items, can easily distort our focus and distract us from what is truly important. Yet God will be at work in the midst of it all! What decisions can we make that might shape and direct the life and witness of The United Methodist Church in ways that are most faithful and pleasing to God?

The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. With each decision that is made, delegates need to ask the question: “How does this help the church fulfill its mission?” Throughout the deliberations that take place, our mission statement can serve as a unifying factor. Our mission statement can help guide the process of prioritization. This may mean making hard choices concerning financial commitments. But our connectional dollars need to support our mission.

Supporting church-wide programs of media campaigns and congregational development, particularly among ethnic minorities, which help us reach people and relate them to God; equipping our seminaries, colleges and universities to raise up a new generation of Christian leaders; sending servants forth to serve in the tradition of our strong justice and mercy ministries—all are important pieces of the process of making disciples of Jesus Christ. My prayer is that the focus on our mission might be evident in all our decisions.

God’s Church, God’s World

We continue to struggle as we move towards truly becoming a global church, seeking for answers through our restructuring attempts. As the church, like our society, becomes increasingly multi-cultural, it will be important that we bring diverse people together to create new systems that do not threaten or exclude others. The challenge comes in finding fair and just balances concerning representation and resources.

Our differences in culture and worldview may blind us to possibilities because we have not taken the time to truly understand one another and to acknowledge that the institutional church was created by the dominant culture and therefore designed to favor the dominant culture. To approach the global church as simply a matter of restructuring and re-organizing is to fail to understand the immense complexities of institutionalized racism and colonialism.

With the changes predicted this century in the shift of Christian population away from North America and Europe to

South America, Africa, and Asia, we need to broaden our conversations and prevail upon brothers and sisters across the globe to join us in unraveling our current systems and creating new ones. What decisions might help us move toward a global church that embraces, reflects and honors all cultures? Perhaps decisions that are made out of trust in God, not a tug-of-war for power and control.

Leadership, Leadership, Leadership!

At the 2000 General Conference, the participation of many youth and young adults revealed an outstanding leadership potential for the church, both present and future. In the spirit of that hope, a commitment to the recruitment of new leadership, especially young adults, is needed. Our theological schools and institutions of higher learning need to be challenged to provide not just theological training, but leadership training as well.

A fresh look at the clergy credentialing process and an openness to its revision is desperately needed. Clergy and lay leaders are needed to lead our churches through this time of tremendous change and transition. How can we best recruit and train persons to serve in both ordained and lay ministry? What issues of itinerancy must be addressed in order to include persons from various language and ethnic backgrounds? General Conference decisions must strengthen our resolve to raise up new leaders by creating quality training opportunities and support systems. As leadership guru John Maxwell says, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.”

Perhaps more important than what is decided is the manner in which it is decided. God calls us to a high standard of Christian love in this process. Our witness will be effective and our actions will be pleasing in God’s sight if we are able to conduct our work in ways that reflect Christ’s love and respect for all persons. I pray that it may be so! □



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