

I perceive a new humbleness on our part as United Methodists. We're learning from the church around the world as it grows by leaps and bounds. We are realizing that leaders can be clergy and lay – and there does not need to be a preconceived idea of how to do ministry. We're learning the local church is the key to offering hope for the world. . If we focus on meeting the people where they are, the local church will become part of the community... [if] we hold each other accountable for heart and social holiness, effectiveness and spiritual disciplines, revival will happen again. There is a revival of prayer and fasting among our members, who are questing to be spiritually connected with Christ.

These are signs that make me hopeful.

Eliseo A. Mejia-Leiva is associate director of Hispanic Ministries, Kentucky Conference, in Crestwood, Kentucky.

We are a diverse church and celebrate our diversity! Our diversity is a product of successful ministry. We are global and multiethnic. We represent the American and the world's variety of socio-economic and political orientations. We welcome all peoples of the world and community. Thus, it is not surprising that our life as a church involves the struggles to live out our diversities. In other words, we wrestle with our identities. And because we hold on to our diverse identities we also struggle with the visions and sense of purpose that those identities involve. This is not to suggest that we should do away with diversity so we can reduce our struggles. On the contrary, struggling with our diversity is to be celebrated and affirmed as a necessity of life and who we are. Our challenge is how to manage our diversity and how to live together as God's people.

David Maldonado Jr. is MARCHA president and director of the Center for the Study of Latino/a Christianity and Religions at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas.

I believe that the United Methodist Church is vibrant, even vibrating. A mix of desire and uncertainty will do that to you.

The United Methodist Church is in a time of reinvention in which the change is coming from the bottom up—from the local congregational level up through the conference and into the national church. A good number of our churches are “getting it” and are learning to be more effective in talking with the changed culture which seeks faith but can't easily connect with past congregational practices. Another good number of our churches want to be clear about their ministry and are working to learn how to change. However, a good number of our churches will not be able to make the transition.

One of the greatest challenges that lies ahead for our conference and national leaders is the need to focus attention, prayer, and the limited resources of dollars and good leaders in those places and with those people where ministry can thrive—not where ministry has to be propped up and subsidized.

Leaders are increasingly sharing their work and their insights across congregational and conference lines. As leaders we are in an enviable time when God is doing something new. There is little to fix and much to learn. There is little to be sure of but much to trust.

Gil Rendle is a United Methodist elder and a consultant at The Alban Institute in Herndon, Virginia. His most recent book (with Susan Beaumont) is *When Moses Meets Aaron: Staffing and Supervision in Large Congregations*.

The recommendation to make the United States a separate Central Conference has enormous implications and needs careful consideration.

In light of sagging membership, money, and morale, one wonders whether a priority for us in Ft. Worth ought to be the creation of yet another tier of bureaucracy. One wonders whether this request represents a strong felt need on behalf of the African, Asian, and European churches or whether we are making that decision for them. What is clear is that the closer our relationship is with the churches in the central conferences, the better off the American church will be. We have been and are enriched by our close relationship with these churches.

James Heidinger is president of Good News in Wilmore, Kentucky.

The first time I attended an annual conference and heard the question, “Are we yet alive,” I thought it a silly question. Yes. But what are we doing with the extraordinary life that we yet have? And how might we get more life?

The question about life is the ever revolutionary heart of our work in Memphis. Much of the imagination of the hospital is captured by disease, injury, and dying—it is what we constantly fight, so it is what we constantly think about. [But] we are learning to think about what causes life—the life of those who come as patients, their families, those who care for them, our physicians, their congregations and the larger communities. God has already seeded all of the systems with vitality and possibility.

There is plenty of life in the church. But you have to ask the right question to see it. We are deeply connected to thousands of communities through many thousands of rooted institutions. Wesleyan logic is coherent and relevant (and it sings well). We have a stunning array of choices before us that could channel our agency. And our hope is tangible, real, grounded in experience. I have little patience for singing “Are we yet alive?” But I can hardly resist bursting into a chorus of “How can I keep from singing?”

Gary R. Gunderson is senior vice president for health and welfare at Methodist LeBonheur Healthcare in Memphis, Tennessee.



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