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Board Calls for Focus on Congregations

Nashville, October 2018 - The Board of Directors of The United Methodist Publishing House eagerly affirmed initiatives to build up the capacity and effectiveness of congregations and annual conferences during their annual meeting in Nashville October 23-24.

The Board pledged to implement strategies for reaching and receiving more people in more places through evangelistic hospitality and resonant worship in order to deepen relationships with Jesus Christ and encourage servant ministries.

The members confirmed the need to adopt measures of effectiveness that focus on hearts and minds molded by the Holy Spirit and hands and feet activated in ministries of mercy and justice.

“As we experience uncontestable mainline decline in attracting, engaging, and influencing more people, the challenges require more than books, curricula, and other products. We need a different mindset and an intensive and sustained focus on the essential competencies requisite for bearing witness to the good news of Jesus Christ for a world aching for mercy, crying for justice, and ready for renewal,” said the Reverend Brian K. Milford, President & Publisher.

In response, the Board unanimously endorsed initiatives including:

- Projects aimed at expanding specific skills and practices to increase the capacity of congregations and annual conferences for innovation and effectiveness;
- Cultivating greater church-wide consensus and passion for “what to teach and how to teach”;
- Activating mutual learning and support networks for global United Methodist publishing & distribution to serve every region;
- Adapting and changing even faster in order to be better poised for developing and delivering resources that clergy and laity most need, want, and use.

The Board marked the 13th year in a row that revenues topped \$50M and recouped all operating expenses (with the exception of 2014 when closing brick-and-mortar Cokesbury stores required extra expense to end leases and care for other one-time charges). In 2018, UMPH also contributed additional funds to the employee defined benefit pension assets caring for 101% of

long-term liabilities. Nevertheless, there are persistent trends, such as the 50-year steady decline in attendance at children's Sunday school and the resulting drops in use of curriculum resources, as well as other changes in congregational practices and the Christian resources marketplace, that contributed to a 6.6% drop in product sales in 2018 compared to 2017.

“We reiterated our commitment to making frank assessments of financial risks in all planning, to stay alert to how well our products compare with those from competitors, and underscored the board's readiness to upend conventional wisdom and adjust promptly to what's required for successful publishing and retailing,” said board chairperson, Connie Clark. Members applauded Milford's reminder that the goal is to guarantee that “our missional aims and the best business practices *intersect* and become thoroughly intertwined and mutually correcting. That's when we know that our self-supporting ministry is both effective and sustainable.”

“For UMPH to aspire simply to be just another viable Christian publisher and retailer is *not nearly a big enough vision*,” he said. “We will partner with the congregations and annual conferences that are the heartbeat of The United Methodist Church. Our aim is that they be ever more vibrant and effective institutions, making disciples of Jesus and playing critical roles in the transformation of the world.”

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