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HOLISTIC STRATEGY ON LATIN AMERICAN AND THE CARIBBEAN AS SPECIAL PROGRAM

A Special Program as per Para. 703.10

Financial Implications: 20,000.

MARCHA (Methodist Associated Representing the Cause of Hispanic Americans)

MARCHA (Methodists Associated Representing the Cause of Hispanic Americans) calls for the implementation of a Holistic Strategy on Latin American and the Caribbean as a Special Program as outlined in Para. 703.10 of *The Book of Discipline*, 2004.

A special program is a quadrennial emphasis initiated by a general program-related agency in accordance with Paras. 906.1, .2, and .4, approved by General Conference and assigned to a general program-related agency. The program shall be designed in response to a distinct opportunity or need in God's world that is evidenced by research or other supporting data and shall propose achievable goals within the quadrennium. Para. 703.10, The Book of Discipline, 2004.

Holistic Strategy on Latin America and the Caribbean, a special program coordinated by the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), in collaboration with several agencies, with funding provided through the participating agencies through their quadrennial budgets.

Additionally, MARCHA requests the General Conference to allocate \$20,000 for the 2009-2012 quadrennium to the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) for coordination responsibilities of this special program. A description of the special programs follows.

Holistic Strategy on Latin America and the Caribbean Special Program 2005-2008

Come, you that are blessed ... inherit the kingdom ... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. (Matthew 25:34-36)

Statement on Latin America and the Caribbean

MARCHA (Methodists Associated Representing the Cause of Hispanic Americans) calls upon The United Methodist Church to pay close attention to the critical needs in the Latin America/Caribbean region and to respond to the missional opportunities that are present there. The United Methodist Church should include in its top priorities missional programs which respond to the growing number of impoverished persons in the Caribbean and Latin America, with women and children being the most affected. The social and economic situation in many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean continues to be critical.

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Missional Opportunities

Evangelization:

Methodist Churches in 20 countries and the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA), knit together in mission through the Council of Evangelical Methodist Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean (CIEMAL), are reaching out through new initiatives in evangelization, with significant church growth being experienced in many communities, and with renewed commitment to their Wesleyan heritage of witness with and on behalf of the poor and the oppressed. A new United Methodist Mission has been established in Honduras by the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM). New Methodist Churches have emerged in Colombia, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Venezuela in work under the auspices of CIEMAL with support of GBGM. Church growth could be enhanced if additional resources are provided.

Prophetic Voice and Accompaniment:

The different crises in Latin America and the Caribbean require the prophetic presence of the church helping the people to keep the faith and to seek solutions that would be fair to all. The churches in the region, within their limited resources, are responding to the more immediate needs. They also continue to advocate for justice and the preservation of human rights. The deep and complex relationships between the United States and the different countries in the Latin America/ Caribbean region demand a closer working relationship between the churches in the United States with the churches in the Caribbean and Latin America to amplify our effectiveness in our prophetic witness.

Poverty and Health Care:

In partnership with the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), the Methodist Churches in collaboration with CIEMAL are engaged in innovative initiatives in comprehensive community-based health care. A ~~recent~~ study revealed that this holistic approach to the total well-being of persons and their environment has impacted the lives of more than 200,000 persons in the last nine years. Ministries with poor and marginalized women are major dimensions of these health programs, MARCHA (Methodist Associated Representing the Cause of Hispanic Americans) involving the well-being of countless thousands of children. These ministries should be strengthened and expanded due to their importance.

Education/Leadership Development:

Leadership development is a must within the churches if they are to respond in the name of Christ to the aforementioned needs. There are many persons and church leaders with a good

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theological education; but, unfortunately, most of the pastors in the emerging churches or those serving rural areas have no formal theological education. The United Methodist Church should assist in the formation of persons in Latin America to enable them to serve their churches and countries in different fields.

Social Concerns in the Latin American and Caribbean Region:

Poverty:

According to UNICEF statistics, more than half of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean live in extreme poverty, subsisting on less than \$1 dollar per day per person. Millions of children live on the streets with no place to sleep. They survive by begging or subjecting themselves to inhumane treatment for scraps of food.

Children and Child Labor:

42 million children between the ages of five and thirteen work long hours each day to assist in the survival of their families if they have one, or just to feed themselves; therefore, they are not able to go to school. Children are being exploited in many other ways including prostitution. A majority is suffering from malnutrition and has no access or very limited access to health care facilities.

Political and Economic Changes:

The changing political and economical context in Latin America and the Caribbean offers an extraordinary opportunity for ministry in the region. Democratic governments that promote social policies have been intended to favor the poor and indigenous populations have been elected. Yet, the implementation of policies that favor the economic powers by the same governments, have generated an increased gap between the rich and the poor in the region. The financial havoc, the failure of political systems to respond to the needs of the people and the growing violence are producing a significant rise in migration. Border issues throughout the region, including the U.S. are becoming more critical. All of this in the midst of an emergent participation of the indigenous and afro descendent peoples in the region. The Churches are asked to be in partnership with the poor and indigenous to fortify the democratic changes and demand just economic and social practices.

Afro-Latin, Afro-Caribbean, and Indigenous Peoples:

According to the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank statistics, of the 502 million people who live in Latin America and the Caribbean, 120 million are of African descent and 40 million are indigenous people. These two groups constitute the majority of the poor in the region. They have less access to formal education, health care and other social services, while

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encountering greater discrimination based on race/color in accessing basic institutions, including the justice system.

Implications

There is a long list of indicators of the need for attention and assistance. These named above, without mentioning the violence in Colombia and in other countries, are sufficient to show that the Caribbean and Latin American region needs urgent attention. The changing economic and political contexts increase the demand for social assistance from the churches in the Latin America and Caribbean region. Regretfully, most churches are suffering financial crises due to the impoverishment of their membership. For example, in Argentina, pastors' salaries are not paid in full, even if they serve large congregations.

The Call

There is an urgent need for a coordinated strategy within The United Methodist Church in collaboration with CIEMAL, the Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) and other Methodist churches and ecumenical organizations in the Latin America/ Caribbean region. We are encouraged that the 2004 General Conference has mandated a Study on the Relationship of The United Methodist Church and the Autonomous Churches of Latin America and the Caribbean, and has approved the Special Programs Holistic Strategy for Africa and Holistic Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean. We reaffirm the implementation and ongoing coordination by the General Board of Global Ministries of the Holistic Strategy for Africa in partnership with the Council of Bishops. Unfortunately, the lack of assigned funds did not allow the implementation of the Holistic Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean beyond the work of the General Agencies during the quadrennium 2005-2008. We hope that this will be the beginning of a fruitful dialogue that will address in a significant manner the increased needs of the region. We call upon the program agencies of The United Methodist Church to increase their support of ministries responding to the deteriorating social conditions of the growing number of the population who live in severe poverty.

We call upon the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) to implement the Holistic Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean in partnership with CIEMAL, by inviting the General Agencies and MARCHA to attend the annual meetings of the Directive Board of CIEMAL, which brings together representatives of all Methodist Churches of the region and the Council of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean. We call on the Holistic Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean to report to the Connectional Program Committee proposed by the Committee on Study on the Relationship with the Autonomous Churches in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We call upon the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) to advocate in the US Congress to obtain a financial aid package for the Latin American and Caribbean countries in financial

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crisis without compromising their sovereignty or undermining their responsibility to provide for the needy. Measures of structural adjustment imposed by international creditors increased the suffering of the poor. Countries are not able to pay their external debt and provide services urgently needed by the population. GBCS should continue its advocacy for debt relief, including education of the UMC constituency regarding these issues.

We call upon the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), the General Board of Discipleship and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministries to seek ways to undergird effectively the ministries of the emerging Methodist churches in Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Venezuela. The relatively new churches are in great need of opportunities for leadership development. We ask these agencies in collaboration with the Council of Bishops to call for an event where representatives of the annual conferences doing work in different parts of the Caribbean and Latin America and other interested persons could share experiences and strategies to increase our level of support and enable local churches in the US to grow by being directly involved in mission.

We call upon United Methodist Communications (UMCom) to provide more coverage to the news coming out of church sources in the Caribbean and Latin America. Also, United Methodist Communications is asked to help in the mission education of United Methodists by informing them of the mission realities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We call upon all annual conferences and every United Methodist to pray for and support the development of church programs in the Latin America/ Caribbean region. We are grateful for all the persons who have sent their contributions to the permanent fund Encounter with Christ in Latin America and the Caribbean (GBGM Fund 025100), contributed to the Advance, or participated in VIM teams or other mission teams to be in ministry in the Latin American/Caribbean region. All these forms of collaboration need to be increased and new ones established in response to the needs of the region.

MARCHA proposes the 2008 UMC General Conference address the needs of the poor around the world and build bridges among the poor in different regions of the world. Jesus is among the poor inviting us to respond in Christian love to their needs.

Proposed Implementation of the Holistic Strategy on Latin America and the Caribbean

The Holistic Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean will meet once a year in conjunction with the meetings of the Directive Board of CIEMAL and including representation from the

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Methodist Church of the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) and MARCHA. The expenses for the participation of the representatives of The United Methodist Church will be covered by the respective sending agencies. The expense for an additional day of the meetings of the Directive Board of CIEMAL and for the participation of MARCHA will be covered by The UMC, through funding allocated by General Conference through the General Board of Global Ministries.

Funding Request: \$20,000.00

Submitted by MARCHA

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