

Press release

United Methodist Agency to Reshape Its Global Mission and Ministries

New York, NY, October 3, 2014—The United Methodist Church's global mission agency will create a network of offices around the world linked and accountable to headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia, beginning in late 2016. Part of the plan requires the approval of denominational financial and program coordinating entities.

Directors of the General Board of Global Ministries in a historical action on October 4 voted to set up offices in Africa, Asia and Latin America. A new Georgia-based headquarters would also have mission responsibilities in the United States.

"Mission today in the United Methodist Church is from everywhere to everywhere," said Bishop Hope Morgan Ward of North Carolina, president of the board. "It is a means of grace in which all give and all receive. We want to embody this theological understanding in our operations for the sake of more fruitful mission engagement."

The agency's main office is currently in New York City, where it will remain for the next two years if the plan receives the needed endorsement. The Atlanta office is slated to be in property bought from a local church, which will continue to use a part of the facilities. The property purchase is subject to the approval of two denominational entities, the General Commission on Finance and Administration and the Connectional Table, which serves a coordinating role for the church's several agencies.

Global Ministries' goals are to make disciples of Jesus Christ, strengthen churches and communities, alleviate human suffering, and foster justice, peace and freedom. The United Methodist Church has 12.5 million members worldwide, with seven million of those in the US.

A master plan of mission to be developed over the next two years will be adapted to the several contexts represented by the regions and the US, according to Thomas Kemper, the Global Ministries chief executive, who is a German layman and former missionary in Brazil. "Offices could have a combination of programs suited to local and regional opportunities," he said. "We have many details to be worked out regarding the network of offices and the headquarters."

The exact locations of the three regional offices will be announced later, according to Bishop Ward, but the one in Africa will most likely be in a French-speaking country in recognition that The United Methodist Church is multi-lingual. The directors gave authority to decide on the locations to its executive committee, in consultation with the agency's staff cabinet. In two resolutions approved on October 3, directors approved the regional operations plan and voted in principle to buy the property of Grace United Methodist Church in Atlanta for the headquarters. The regional office measure was unanimously approved by directors; the property purchase received one negative vote. Thirty one of 36 directors were present and voting.

"O God, we stand unified in these decisions and ask you to guide those who will carry them out," Tonya Murphy, a director from Atlanta, said in a prayer following the votes. "Guide us so that you God are glorified and our work leads people to you and to salvation."

Scope of Mission

The agency at present has 340 missionaries in 60 countries, including the United States. It has personnel, projects and partners in a total of 120 countries. Missionaries are from all parts of the world as mission-founded churches in the Global South take their places as full partners in global evangelism and social service. UMCOR engages in major domestic and international disaster response and development work. A global health unit relates to more than 300 Methodist hospitals and clinics around the world and supports programs to eradicate preventable disease, such as malaria and AIDS.

Bishop Ward commented in an interview on the move of mission headquarters to Atlanta from New York City, where Global Ministries' predecessor agencies date to the first quarter of the 19th century. "New York has been a wonderful mission home, serving us well for many years, and there is indeed a sense of grief in leaving it," she said." However, as we embrace our calling to lead the church in mission engagement into the future, we considered the need for a location that is more accessible, economical, land advantageous for partnership in mission.

"We are working with a downtown church to purchase its facility at a favorable price. This location is in a diverse and vibrant area, is accessible by public transportation, has on-site parking, land offers proximity to collaborative institutions, particularly in the fields of mission, theology and global health. We will transform the facilities beyond the sanctuary into ecologically responsible office and meeting space. The lower cost of living in Atlanta will be helpful in the process of professional and technical hiring as we move into the future."

Global and Local Mission

"Grace United Methodist Church in the Midtown section of Atlanta has voted in principle to sell us its property, almost a full city block, with the provision that it be given a cost free lease to continue its ministry from the site," Kemper explained. He and board financial staff explored the offer, finding it would substantially reduce office space costs on an ongoing basis. An education building joining the sanctuary can be renovated over the next two years. "We are excited by the possibility of working in a context where the local and the global come together in mission," Kemper said of the shared space arrangement with the Grace congregation. "Midtown Atlanta is an area where communities join, making for a multiracial, multicultural and mixed income neighborhood. I see it as a laboratory for local-global mission engagement."

Bishop B. Michael Watson of the North Georgia Annual Conference welcomed the decision of the Global Ministries' directors to accept the Grace church offer and locate the agency's headquarters in Atlanta. "The United Methodists of Georgia are deeply committed to mission, to spreading the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ throughout the world and to serving all people in Jesus' name. Having the headquarters of the General Board of Global Ministries within our community will strengthen our mission outreach and encourage us to connect our mission enthusiasm with that of other United Methodists."

Encouragement to locate the headquarters in Atlanta, according to Kemper, came from major United Methodist and other universities and international centers in that area, including two of the denominations theological seminaries, Candler School of Theology of Emory University and Gammon Theological Seminary, a part of the historically black Interdenominational Theological Center. Other potential partners are the Carter Center, an international development organization, and a number of colleges, including Clark Atlanta University, a historically black United Methodist-related school. Emory's Rollins School of Public Health is an anticipated partner for the agency's renewed emphasis on Global Health.

"We at Candler and Emory are thrilled with the opportunity for new forms of collaboration with Global Ministries," said Dr. Jan Love, dean of Candler. "We look forward to the ways in which the expertise that each brings to the table will enhance God's mission around the world."

Dr. Love noted that Candler has historically included mission and evangelism as key components in its curriculum and that partnership with Global Ministries "will further expand opportunities in these areas in the future." The board for several years more than a decade ago had a missionary training center in Atlanta, using staff resources from Candler and Gammon. Kemper, the mission board executive, noted that the several colleges and universities in the area will be important to both training and recruitment of young adults for mission service, including its new Generation Transformation program.

Global Ministries currently has 166 executive and support staff member at its New York headquarters. Roland Fernandes, the deputy for finance and administration, said that an undetermined number of executive staff members will be invited to relocate to Atlanta. Employees whose positions are phased out in New York because of the move will receive benefits under established United Methodist policy, and receive help in finding new positions. “We have two years to work out these details in total transparency and with due consideration to the loyal service of our employees,” Fernandes said.

<http://www.umcmission.org/learn-about-us/news-and-stories/2014/october/united-methodist-agency-to-reshape-its-global-mission-and-ministries>

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