

General Secretary's Report – October 2024

Roland Fernandes, General Secretary

Welcome again to this first meeting of the new quadrennium, which is the second time our two boards have met jointly. It is just over a hundred days since I took on the role of general secretary for GBHEM in addition to GBGM. I have chosen a text from Isaiah as the theme for this meeting, not that I am trying to compare our situation in the agencies or the church to Isaiah's time, but there are lessons for us to learn from his writings. The prophet Isaiah lived through a complex, difficult and shifting time in the history of the Jewish people. His ministry spanned from at least the death of King Uzziah of Judah through the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel and to the siege of Jerusalem by Assyria. This was a time of political instability in the ancient Near East. It was a time of internal injustice and inequity within the kingdom of Judah. Yet it was also a time that saw various efforts at religious revival and reform, including those led by Isaiah himself. The Book of Isaiah reflects this complicated time, with its combination of judgements against foreign nations, condemnation of Judah's own systemic sins, proclamations of God's providence and prophecies of the triumph of God's reign of peace and justice.

[SLIDE] It is in this context that we find the affirmation of hope that serves as our theme verse for this meeting:

Isaiah 33:2:

Lord, show us favor;

we hope in you.

Be our strength every morning,

our salvation in times of distress.

I chose this verse as our theme because of its message of hope in challenging times. “We hope in you,” Isaiah proclaims, even “in times of distress.”

One need only scan the news for signs of times of distress in our own day – violence among nations, polarization within countries, climate change-fueled natural disasters, harsh rhetoric and policies toward migrants, the rise of anti-intellectualism, increasing isolation and loneliness and all-too-persistent and ever widening inequalities between those with resources and privilege and those without. Certainly, there is distress within parts of the church as well, whether that comes from the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts over disaffiliation, an increasing lack of transformative and moral leadership, the pattern of long-term decline in church membership in the West or the connection of the church to those who suffer from disease, poverty, violence and hunger in developing nations.

Yet it is precisely in this context of distress that we need to hear God’s word of hope. We might think of Jesus’ words, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor, but sick people do.” It is not when everything is going along smoothly that we most need hope. This is the time when we must dig deep in our faith in God and hold on tight to hope, trusting in God to “be our strength every morning,” whether on a personal, organizational or global level.

[SLIDES] When we ground ourselves in hope, when we allow hope and not anxiety to direct our sight, then we notice that there are signs of hope around us too. We see instances of people partnering together to share food and medical care and care for one another. We see transformative leaders courageously stepping forward to lead congregations and conferences into new expressions of church, even amid turbulence and multiple challenges. We see mission partners recommitting themselves to be in relationship with one another for the sake of serving the world. We see educational leaders boldly responding to the moral issues confronting the church and society. We see long-standing traditions and new ideas joining together to inspire and enlighten minds and hearts. UMCOR has used the words “hope in action” to describe its work. I think that phrase can apply to the work of not just UMCOR, Global Ministries and

GBHEM but to the whole church as well. When we approach situations of distress confident in our hope in God, then we can be hope in action too. We have all been called here for a time, this time, and may we do the best we can in what we have been called to – to serve the church and the world.

Change of the quadrennium

This is the first board meeting of the new quadrennium, and as such, it is a chance to pause and reflect on what we see going on in the world around us, where we are as a church and where we find hope amid the distress and challenges of our day.

[SLIDE] The General Conference held earlier this year was a momentous one, and as always, we celebrated a missionary commissioning there, as you can see on the slide. Reactions to the significant changes General Conference ushered in have varied by location, though. Across the church, there is hope that regionalization will be ratified and will lead us into a less colonial way of being the church together. In the United States, there has been much rejoicing over the removal of restrictions in the Book of Discipline that excluded members of the LGBTQ+ community from full participation in the church. Elsewhere, especially in Africa, those same changes have caused suspicion and conflict. While most United Methodists in Africa have indicated that they will remain United Methodist and use the freedom provided by regionalization to keep their traditional views on marriage and sexuality, others have indicated their intention to leave. The Côte d'Ivoire Annual Conference and Bishop Yohanna in Nigeria are two high profile cases, but they are not the only ones. In several places, there has been significant conflict, with violent overtones, misinformation and slander. The church in Africa needs your prayers. West Africa, which has been the most turbulent area since General Conference, will hold its Central Conference from Dec. 5-8 this year, and I will be attending it. Global Ministries supports all three central conferences in Africa with funding to hold the central conference meetings. It is

unfortunate that our systems have developed this dependency, and we hope to see more sustainable models developed for the future.

Directly related to the work of Global Ministries, the Vietnam Mission Initiative has announced their intention to become independent following General Conference. Of course, mission initiatives are not intended to stay mission initiatives forever. The goal is to establish churches that can either function independently or become full, regular parts of the UMC structure, so this is not a bad outcome. The church in Vietnam will be independent, and it will not join another denomination. It will continue to have a relationship with Global Ministries, though we are still determining what that will look like. We will celebrate its independence at its annual meeting next month. We continue mission initiatives in Mongolia, Laos, Honduras and the Central African Republic. While GBGM has responsibility for mission initiatives, GBHEM has been a close partner over the years in matters related to credentialing and training. Agency staff are currently in conversation with several central conferences to develop contextual and sustainable training and certification programs and to ensure that those appointed to their region are equipped and empowered to flourish in their ministry.

While we fully support and celebrate the changes approved at General Conference, we also recognize the need for and right to different regional expressions of the church. We respect the wish to live fully in the local, cultural and theological context. We are, therefore, very open to any proposal from mission initiatives that would seek to make them more missionally effective and unified in their contexts. This could include becoming autonomous or even enabling them to seek unity with other local Wesleyan traditions that might already exist in their countries.

The actions of General Conference also included a substantial cut to our apportionment receipts, specifically a 50% plus reduction in World Service dollars to both agencies. I will say more about the budget later, but this action certainly alters the landscape for the agencies.

And of course, the new quadrennium brings the usual turnover in boards, committees, commissions and other bodies, as is evidenced by our own meeting here this week. A third of

our directors on the two boards this quadrennium have previous experience with one of the boards, though two thirds are new.

Yet amid conflict and change, this new quadrennium is also a new opportunity, a new chance for putting our hope in God to lead us to a better future for the church and the world. It is a chance to renew our commitment to a spirit of connectionalism and to practices that will strengthen our connection. It is an opportunity for us to live into our values and to live out our theology. It is an opportunity for us as agencies to continue to listen, to clarify our focus on our work, measure its impact and share this story with others. In this way, we can build better and stronger partnerships with episcopal areas, annual conferences, congregations, other UMC agencies, ecumenical partners, educational institutions and other partners throughout the world.

Where are we going?

[SLIDE] Let me be clear, the general boards of Global Ministries and Higher Education and Ministry are here to support the mission and ministry of The United Methodist Church and its partners. We are not here to pursue our own agenda or to carry out our own plans separate from the priorities, assets and needs of the church. Our work needs to be relevant to what the church needs and not for our survival. We are agencies of the church, and we exist to support the church in its participation in the *missio Dei*, the mission of God. **When I make that reference to the mission of God, I am referring to the missional nature of the work that both agencies do.** Sending missionaries and carrying out disaster relief and recovery is related to mission, but so is the church's support of education and the work of raising up leaders who will lead the church forth in mission. We must have a holistic understanding of mission that encompasses all the work of both agencies.

We must also have a view of mission and ministry that is not divided by geography or administrative structures. Both GBHEM and Global Ministries have long but different histories of working in the United States and in other countries. For most of that history, we have made a

strong distinction between work in the United States and work in other countries. That time has passed. We must come to see our work in a holistic way, encompassing work in all places. There are important differences in context and culture from one place to another, and these must be considered. But to think of the United States as being in a special category or as the center of the church was never a proper model and is an expression of colonialism. We must move past this model and, in some cases, learn to rethink with the whole world in mind.

Similarly, we need to learn to think beyond the administrative structures of the church and especially of the agencies. It is important to have structures and to have clarity in who is responsible for what – for that is how we organize ourselves for the mission. But we cannot allow our administrative structures to become silos, which has often been the practice, though progress has been made to move past this. At the level of the board, we must think holistically about the work of both agencies and the broader church.

I come back to what I said yesterday – that the goal for alignment between the two agencies is a unified presence and an integrated structure for both agencies. We need to have a unified presence so that as we are interacting with partners around the world, information can flow smoothly across agencies and units. This will help us best respond to and support our partners in their mission and ministry. We need to have an integrated structure so that the alignment is owned by all involved throughout the two agencies among directors, staff and missionaries, not just me as general secretary for both agencies. This is the goal toward which we will be working in the months and years to come. Your support for this work and direction is critical, and my belief is that we can, God willing, model and live into this engagement across the fullness of our church.

Overview of agency structure

Having framed the work of our two agencies, I want to turn now to how the agencies are structured in terms of program, staff and board committees.

[SLIDE] At Global Ministries, we have been talking about our work falling into two main categories: connecting the church in mission and alleviating human suffering. Last quadrennium, we talked about 17 programs in four main program areas. That work is carrying over to this quadrennium within the framework of these two main emphases.

Connecting the church in mission includes our work in sending missionaries and in mission engagement, including multiethnic ministries. Last quadrennium, we used the term “evangelism and church revitalization,” but we have shifted away from that language, not because we believe that evangelism is unimportant, but because we recognize that it is primarily our partners who carry out that work of evangelization. Global Ministries is there to engage with and support them in their work. You can see there the list of eight programs within this area of connecting the church in mission.

Alleviating human suffering includes our work through UMCOR and Global Health, or more appropriately, in the areas of humanitarian relief and recovery and global health. You can see there the list of programs. Those who have been on the board previously may notice that this list has decreased from nine programs to seven. We have combined our international and domestic disaster relief into a single program, recognizing that we cannot let geography divide the work that we do, as I said earlier. Our Imagine No Malaria program is ending at the close of this year, so it is not included here. Imagine No Malaria was originally supposed to end in 2020, and the money for that program will be spent down in the next year. Antimalaria work will be folded into the wholistic health programming work of our Global Health unit.

[SLIDE] Just as Global Ministries has two main categories for its work, so does GBHEM. Those categories are connecting the church and the academy in a common mission and developing transformational leaders for the ministry of the church and moral leadership in the world. Broadly, these two categories capture the educational side of our work and the ministry side of our work. We have a list of the many activities that GBHEM leads and is engaged in under these two broad categories. We are working to develop a list of programs similar to the

list of programs for Global Ministries so that both agencies can have clearly identified programs that we focus on. That list will be completed in time for the spring board meeting in 2025, and we will share more with you then. To be clear, it is not that the programs do not exist, but how we share information in an aligned way is what we are moving toward. You will get a sense of the work of GBHEM and GBGM through the orientation sessions today and in the committee work tomorrow.

[SLIDE] On the staff side, Global Ministries has about 130 staff, and GBHEM has 40 staff. We have shared the main programs of both agencies earlier, and there are support services in both agencies, which include Operations, Finance, Communications and Fund Development with several functions under them. We are working on staffing structures within each agency that will be heavily influenced by our alignment work and the evolving nature of the role of each of the two agencies. You will hear more about this later today and over the next days.

[SLIDE] For both boards, a variety of committees help to carry forward the work of the agencies. Both boards have program committees that oversee the programmatic work of the agencies. On the GBHEM side, the two program committees are the Education Committee and the Ministry Committee. On the Global Ministries side, the two program committees are the Mission Programs Committee – which covers Mission Engagement and Missionary Service – and the UMCOR Committee, which covers the Humanitarian Relief and Recovery work and the work of Global Health. There will be an Administrative Matters Committee for each agency that will meet jointly. There will also be joint meetings of the committee that is called the Worldwide Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (WIDEA) Committee on the GBHEM side and the Committee on the Elimination of Institutional Racism (CEIR) on the Global Ministries side. There will be joint meetings of the two executive committees, which will also serve as the joint Personnel Committee. In addition, there are a few other subcommittees. We look forward to the

chairpersons of these joint committees modeling the work of alignment as our agencies journey along this path together.

[SLIDE] By Book of Discipline requirements, the two boards are different in size. Global Ministries' board has 39 members including three non-voting members from United Women in Faith (UWF) and the general secretary, whereas GBHEM's board has 23 members. However, we want to keep committee membership roughly equal across agencies. Therefore, GBHEM's board members will primarily serve on one committee – either Education, Ministry or Administrative Matters, and then some members will also serve on either the WIDEA Committee or one of the subcommittees. Global Ministries directors will serve on only one committee – Mission Programs, UMCOR, Administrative Matters or CEIR. There are also subcommittees for Global Ministries. The design of future board meetings will primarily include plenary sessions, so even though you serve on one committee, you will all get the opportunity to learn and lead the full spectrum of the programs and strategies of the two agencies. Committees and subcommittees will meet outside of the board meeting dates.

Budget

[SLIDE] You will receive additional information on budgets for both agencies through the financial review later today as well as through the Executive Committee report. There will be an overview of the budget for the Administrative Committee members as well. However, I want to say a few words about budgets now. For both agencies, we have made minimal changes to the 2025 budgets relative to the 2024 budgets. Global Ministries budget for 2025 will be \$48 million; GBHEM will be \$30 million; and UMCOR including Global Health will be \$39.5 million. This is even though 2025 is the first year of 50%+ reductions in apportionments, which are a major source of revenue for the two agencies.

As we knew that budget reductions would be coming, both agencies acted prudently to cut expenses over the past few years. Therefore, we have reserves to cover the deficits in the

short term. We are able to spend some of these reserves in 2025 and perhaps a little longer. Spending these reserves will help protect key programs of both agencies. However, we will need to work over the next year to determine how we can balance the budget in the long run. This will be difficult work involving mission and people but spending reserves next year will allow us to do it deliberately and prayerfully over time.

[SLIDE] In terms of sustaining key programs, the GBGM board last month approved a recommendation we made to set aside \$20 million for future funding for the Yambasu Agriculture Initiative, health work in Africa and general programming work in Africa. The funds actually spent will follow the normal approval process, but this was done as a general allocation. Similarly, the GBHEM board allocated the earnings from the sale proceeds of the Kern property for sustaining key educational and leadership programs of the church.

Strategic conversations, strategic planning

In light of budget realities, it is important for our agencies to be clearly focused on their core work. Strategic planning is one of the ways that we gain clarity in our work. Both agencies have been working on strategic planning processes since 2022, though the natures of those two processes are different based on the unique history of each agency. That work has continued for both agencies, and we have updates for both agencies that fit their distinctive planning processes up to this point. What is fascinating are the lessons we have learned by reviewing the previous strategic plans of each agency. Each strategic plan invites from the other agency potential growing points, which we are leaning into over the coming two years.

[SLIDE] On the GBHEM side, the planning process over the past two years has focused on developing the Balanced Scorecard, which you can see behind me. The Balanced Scorecard is a strategic planning tool that helps organizations clearly communicate their values, mission, vision and overall strategy to employees and stakeholders; align work to their overall vision and strategy; prioritize initiatives and resources; and measure progress. This Balanced Scorecard

process was launched in April 2022. It included input from all staff and various other constituents through several stages. The resulting Balanced Scorecard was shared with the GBHEM board in October 2022 for discussion and affirmation.

The current focus for GBHEM's strategic planning is to build from the Balanced Scorecard work while focusing in on the nature of GBHEM's programmatic work and its impact for agency constituents. Previous strategic planning work has focused especially on organizational capacity and financial stewardship at GBHEM, so now it is time to get greater clarity around structure and programming. Directors can find the document describing the current strategic planning process that we are living into in the OnBoard (internal sharing software) section for the General Secretary's Report, and I will briefly describe it here.

[SLIDE] There are three steps: the first step was to produce a comprehensive list of GBHEM's activities and to sort these activities into broad types. The second step was to take the intended results identified in the Balanced Scorecard and to refine them through discussion by the Executive Leadership Team. The third step, which is still ongoing, is to use these two pieces to create logic models that describe how groups of activities are linked together into programs by a shared theory of change that explains how they contribute to one of the intended results. The development of these models will give us increased clarity on how we think about and communicate our programmatic work, and they will help us in evaluating the impact of that work. All our key programs will be reviewed for effectiveness and relevance to the church at this time, and as we do this, changes should be expected.

[SLIDE] For Global Ministries, three years ago, we developed a strategic plan document that covered 2022-2024, and you can see the cover of that document behind me. The focus of that plan document was the identification of the 17 programs I mentioned earlier, now reduced to 15, and the four priority areas that grouped those programs together. In a way, this is similar to the process that GBHEM is now undertaking. We started with a long list of activities and worked to figure out what the essential programs were that united those activities toward

sharing outcomes. As part of that process of identifying programs, I worked with our Monitoring and Evaluation unit and relevant program staff to identify programs and outcomes associated with those programs.

The focus of our recent strategic planning work at Global Ministries has been to develop a new strategic plan for 2025-2026 that builds on the previous plan, just as GBHEM's planning process builds on the Balanced Scorecard. The new strategic plan of Global Ministries reflects the grouping of our programs and priority areas into the two broad categories of connecting the church in mission and alleviating human suffering, which I mentioned earlier. It lays out more clearly the shifting context in which the agency does its work. And it elaborates more fully on the administrative and support work of the agency that makes its programmatic work possible. In this way, the current GBHEM and Global Ministries strategic planning work reflects a convergence on a similar end from different starting points.

For both agencies, the focus of our current strategic planning work is to carry us through 2025 and into 2026. Beyond that, we will need to see how we adapt and adjust to what the church is requiring of us and how our structure, plans and programs adapt to the new realities of the denomination. It is my hope that the two processes will merge together within the two years as our work becomes organically aligned. And of course, strategic planning is an ongoing process of setting intentions, measuring progress and reflecting on what we have achieved, what needs to be changed and what still lies before us. You can therefore expect to hear about and be engaged in this work throughout the quadrennium

Role of ecumenism

[SLIDE] I want to share now some reflections on the role ecumenism has or should have in the work we do as agencies. Both agencies have been engaged ecumenically for a long time. This summer, I had the opportunity to participate in a series of ecumenical conferences and meetings. These included the Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies; the

International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities (IAMSCU); the World Methodist Conference, and you can see their new general secretary, Leão Neto, on the left; a visit to the World Council of Churches (WCC), and a meeting with Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay, the WCC's general secretary, whom you can see on the right; and a meeting with Church World Service (CWS) president and CEO, Rick Santos. Of course, the first three of these were ecumenical in an intra-Methodist sense – bringing together Methodists from different denominations and traditions. The WCC brings together over 350 churches from a variety of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox and African Indigenous backgrounds. Church World Service is a humanitarian relief and development organization supported by three dozen American denominations.

These meetings were a reminder to me that it is so easy to fall into narrow thinking when we assume that what happens in The United Methodist Church is the central and most important part of the church. The UMC is only one part of a much larger and more diverse global church. When we can look beyond our own borders and organizational structure, we see additional opportunities for partnership and for furthering the mission of God. The ecumenical meetings I attended and the conversations I had this summer strengthened the sense and practice I have long held that we need to continue to increase our ecumenical footprint. The church across the globe is generally becoming smaller, the needs are getting greater and, ecumenically, we can do much more than we could do alone. I am in conversation with the UMC ecumenical officers as well about this.

[SLIDE] To give a sense of the fruits of ecumenism, UMCOR signed a letter of intent to be a Covenant Member of Church World Service, of which we have been a founding member since its inception 78 years ago. Both the WCC and the World Methodist Council released statements on the atrocities in Gaza and the West Bank, and these statements had more impact than if only a single church had issued them. We are in active discussions with the WCC and the Methodist Church in Britain around partnering on a rolling pilgrimage program in Palestine

and Israel starting next year. We are also partnering with the WCC in other areas of the world around Peace and Justice issues. Actively engaging the International Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities (IAMSCU), as well as the representative Leadership, Education and Development (LEAD) Hubs around the world, will allow us to extend these ecumenical conversations throughout our various constituencies. While it has always been a value for the two agencies, over the past couple of years, I have placed a lot of emphasis on Peace and Justice work. There is no greater area of need at this time that intersects with all our work and where collaborating ecumenically will have the most impact. Global Ministries experimented with ecumenical training of our mission volunteers earlier this year. GBHEM supports ecumenical conversations through the various regional educational and ministry associations around the world. There are many opportunities here, many of which still need to be worked out, but it is important to name our intention to further increase our ecumenical collaboration.

[SLIDE] In September this year, we were visited by the China Christian Council, which leads the 38 million Christians in China. They have asked for a renewing of our relationship after a gap of several years, which we will definitely pursue and engage the boards' leadership in as well.

Additional program updates

I have a few additional program updates:

- [SLIDE] The unique structure of having UMCOR under Global Ministries provides the opportunity of bringing mission and service together. It is indeed something that both entities have benefited greatly from, though numerous attempts have been made to try and separate the two over the past three decades. I have been in conversations with leaders from other denominations or agencies who regret not having a similar structure. You will hear more about the programs covering disaster response, global migration,

health, the Yambasu Agriculture Initiative and environmental sustainability today and tomorrow. Beginning Oct. 7, Jim Cox is the new executive director of UMCOR. Jim comes from Helen Keller International, where he served as chief operating officer. Jim is not new to UMCOR, having served for almost 10 years in various capacities, including country director in the Republic of Georgia, executive director for UMCOR international programs and executive director for UMCOR's Katrina response. Jim's expertise in program management includes emergency interventions, livelihoods and health initiatives in partnership with vulnerable communities, major donor agencies and private foundations. I will continue to be the general secretary of UMCOR, but Jim will play a key role in helping me lead UMCOR.

- **[SLIDE]** One of the major projects for GBHEM is the revision of the Course of Study to provide more equitable, flexible, contextual and affordable access to theological education. The Course of Study is an alternative theological educational program for licensed local pastors, those who have been certified for ordained ministry and those who are under appointment in The United Methodist Church. GBHEM is responsible for setting curricular standards for the Course of Study, and GBHEM, seminaries and others offer programs that fit with these standards. There will be a working group convened under board leadership to provide input into the revision process. This group will involve constituents from various stakeholder groups.
- **[SLIDE]** The Study of Ministry Commission is another critical area that GBHEM plays a key role in. As in the past, GBHEM has been tasked by General Conference to support the Study of Ministry Commission with staffing. This is work that will proceed in cooperation with the Council of Bishops and other groups within the church. According to the legislation passed by General Conference, the commission should "lead in the development of the church's understanding of a theology of ordained ministry and consider innovations that further The United Methodist Church's mission in the world."

This is significant work, and I am in conversation with the COB around the formation of the new commission, which will include board leadership. I look forward to sharing updates with you at future meetings.

- **[SLIDE]** The ministry side of GBHEM provides a great opportunity at this time to help the church reimagine what is needed to help form transformative and moral leaders for the future. My hope is that the agency will listen and partner closely with partners across the denomination to create space and opportunity for more effective leadership and ministry.
- **[SLIDE]** General Conference also approved the creation of a new education-related fund, the Central Conference Higher Education Fund (CCHEF), without naming a source for the fund. This is different from the Central Conference Theological Education Fund (CCTEF), which is funded through General Conference. GBHEM is responsible for identifying resources for the CCHEF and administering it. We will begin to establish it in 2025 by redesignating funds from the Kern Building sale. We have assigned \$5 million from the Kern funds, the amount approved by General Conference, for the CCHEF, and the interest from that sum will pay for grants and activities. This was approved by the GBHEM Executive Committee.
- **[SLIDE]** In the area of education, there is a lot that can be done throughout the worldwide connection, and we need discerned focus to have more effective impact. For example, GBHEM has been working since 2017 with leaders in higher education and theological education in Africa to establish the Africa Senate for Methodist Education. Similar to the University Senate in the U.S. and the Philippines, the Africa Senate provides contextually appropriate standards, policies and procedures for the evaluation and support of Methodist institutions throughout the continent of Africa. The link between ministry and education is critical to the work we do. We also need to continue to bring the church and the academy together to enable a vision for higher education that

extends beyond historical roots into what can be relevant today for both. The role of bishops and of this board can help guide this discernment.

- **[SLIDE]** A significant ministry of the church is the Black College Fund, and GBHEM has the privilege of working with 11 HBCU's to administer this program. With the reduction in apportionments, this fund is also significantly affected. GBGM's Multiethnic Ministries unit works with the Community Developers Program, three plans – Korean Ministry Plan, Asian American Language Ministries Plan and the Pacific Islanders Plan, in addition to other programs that support multiethnic ministries in the United States. This is an area of focus for both agencies and likely alignment.
- **[SLIDE]** A key area of work for both agencies is in granting and scholarships. While GBGM does more granting, GBHEM has been administering scholarships to students for over 100 years. As one area of key collaboration, all scholarships are administered in one unit staffed by GBHEM. We are still working through several areas around scholarship alignment and strategy, and we will have an update to the board at the next meeting. GBGM has been issuing grants for decades through several areas including UMCOR and health. We have been working diligently to bring all our procedural work into one unit instead of our processes being spread out separately in various units. This will help us both internally and with partners. GBHEM is also in the process of bringing granting work together into one unit, and sometime in the near future, all grants across both agencies will be administered from one unit staffed by GBGM. I should note that as a part of this meeting, you have received a document listing all the grants that have been awarded since our last board meeting. That is a helpful document for understanding the scope of our granting.
- **[SLIDE]** As was shared earlier, one of the key shifts in the work of Global Ministries over the past few years has been around engagement with our partners around the world. A Mission Engagement unit was created over a year ago, and our global mission

relationship work, including work in the U.S., is now part of this unit. This work has been engaging for us and our partners, and I look forward to how we work together as the current context of mission continues to evolve across all our regions. The intersection of the global and regional work around the world by both agencies is key to what we can do together, and you will hear a report from the joint alignment teams today. The opportunities that this alignment brings globally is significant but will take time and hard work.

- **[SLIDE]** Sending missionaries is a key part of what Global Ministries does. I hope you will all get to be part of at least one missionary commissioning service during the quadrennium. Missionary placements and numbers have been declining for various reasons, but missionaries are still a key program for the agency. One of the greatest challenges is getting visas for missionaries in various countries. It has become very difficult. And since a majority of our missionaries are now from Africa, the shockingly discriminatory visa practices of countries around the world against African passport holders has made this a significant challenge. We used to speak of missionaries as being “from everywhere to everywhere,” but that ideal is not as feasible in today's context as we cannot place any given missionary where there is a need expressed by our partners. We are also looking at missionary placements strategically so that they support the plans of our partners where the placement is located.
- **[SLIDE]** Those of you who were around in the previous quadrennium will remember the consultations with African mission partners and U.S. mission partners that Global Ministries organized in 2023. There was also a consultation on Guiding Principles of Missionary Service. Staff from both agencies were part of those consultations. We are following up on implementing the recommendations from those consultations. Next year in July, our agencies will host a consultation with mission partners from Latin America and the Caribbean. This consultation reflects the continued importance that Global

Ministries and GBHEM place on their partnerships with the autonomous affiliated Methodist churches in Latin America and the Caribbean, and you can see in the picture the dinner with partners from the region at General Conference.

There is only so much that I can cover in this time, and there are several programs in both agencies that I have not spoken about specifically in this section. That does not in any way imply they are of lesser value or impact, and you will hear more about them through the orientation in these next couple of days.

Fundraising

[SLIDE] Earlier I talked about the budget and reductions and the impact this will have on the agencies. Global Ministries has had a fund development function for a while. As Global Ministries oversees the Advance for the church, fundraising has been part of its history. With the significant reductions in apportionments, it has become imperative for both agencies to focus on fundraising for the future and decrease dependence on apportionments. Earlier this year, we hired a fundraising firm to assess our current fundraising practices at GBGM. This led to staff changes. Fundraising is currently being led by the same consulting firm until we have a staffing structure in place, which we are working on. Aside from gift officers, we will be looking for a chief development officer who will serve both agencies, and I would request your help in recruiting one. We have also engaged in a major fundraising campaign, and you will see the appeal itself in OnBoard. The goal is to raise \$17 million for both agencies together. We are combining this work for both agencies, as GBHEM did not have a fund development function. We are also creating an advisory committee to help with fundraising. The Administrative Matters Committee will hear more from our consultants, and we will have a deeper report on fundraising at the spring board meeting next year.

Communications

[SLIDE] I want to say a couple of things about communication. Even as our means for communication have multiplied through social media, etc., the need for better communication is still critical because it always depends on intention. We are trying hard to improve both our internal and external communications, and it is a journey. We have made progress, but much more needs to be done. We will make communication updates a regular part of our board meetings. As with fund development, we hope to have a more informed strategy on communications to share with you in April next year. You will hear a brief report on communications on Thursday.

Conclusion

[SLIDE] You will hear a great deal more about the work of the two agencies over the next two days. I am sure at some points the information will seem overwhelming, especially if you are new to the agencies. One of the key purposes of this meeting is orienting you to the work we do, so if you feel overwhelmed this week – know that we are available to answer your questions, even outside of this meeting. My hope is that these initial meetings will be a time for orientation and understanding of the work so that you can participate with a fuller understanding through the rest of the quadrennium. I do believe that engagement of the board is key, so we hope to enable this more in future meetings. We are on this journey together. Your honest feedback and guidance will be important for us to move this work forward. We are all learning and evolving as the church goes through this turbulent yet hopeful period. I hope you will leave this meeting feeling enthusiastic about the possibilities even in these challenging times, and I pray that none of us grow weary in doing good, for at the right time we will see the harvest.

(Galatians 6:9)