

The State of the Work
Free Methodist Church of North America
The Board of Bishops
October 2006

Our vision is that every Free Methodist Church be a healthy biblical community of holy people, multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and churches. **Our passion** is that every Free Methodist Church express Our Father's heart for the cherished missing – that *One More Soul* whom God desires to transform into the likeness of his son, Jesus. **Our prayer** is that one day every Free Methodist Church experience God's fullness and power in such measure that it becomes His transforming community of salt and light in its neighborhood and around the world.

As Wesleyans we believe in God's power to transform even the worst of sinners into the best of Christians whose presence in the world makes a profound difference. And we are hearing reports that God is awakening members and local churches to make that difference, to participate in ministry beyond and bigger than themselves. In the process they are blessed and increasingly become God's blessing to others.

The *One More Soul* initiative has ignited a passion of growing concern for the harvest, creating new hope in even some of the smallest churches. They are beginning to realize that they can make a difference in their community. We see movement in the right direction, even daring responses. There are churches where bi-vocational pastors quit their other jobs because they were led of God to do so, with no idea how to make up the difference in income, and the Lord is blessing those churches with a season of fruitfulness as never before. In addition we have new churches or small churches being served by the daring obedience of bi-vocational pastors. We desire to create an environment where such obedient responses to God's leading are common, and that this be the norm not just among our pastors but our members as well.

A western area pastor tells of a couple that is sold out to being Jesus' hands to a mother and her three kids that they bring to church each Sunday. This couple is looking for \$425/month so that the 8 month pregnant mom and her three kids could move from a one-bedroom apartment that they share with five other people into better housing. The pastor pledged to help them reach this worthy goal. We celebrate this kind of love and compassion for the poor and marginalized in our communities.

The Bucklin, KS Church decided to close its doors. Dwindling population and weariness had taken their toll. "Better to close than to keep on struggling," they reasoned. Then Superintendent Tom Mayse visited one Sunday with a *One More Soul* message. He told them, "It's harvest time in Bucklin. God wants to claim some of his cherished missing in your community!" After that message the church folk couldn't bring themselves to close the church. Instead, they would pray and see what God might do. Over the next several months, two new families (with kids) visited and stayed, and God sent 40 children to breathe the new life into their mid-week children's club. Today, no one talks about closing the church.

A Free Methodist student at Spring Arbor University is passionate about sponsoring an orphanage in South Africa, a ministry that cares for victims of HIV/AIDS and after school children at risk. A Free Methodist Church in America is in partnership with an incredible village ministry in Nepal on the boarder with Tibet. Hope Africa University is a new Christian liberal arts school in Burundi where 780 students are being prepared to be Christian “world changers” in a country recovering from 13 years of war and suffering. The Shalom Provisional Annual Conference was launched in Nagpur, India with fifteen churches from Maharashtra Village Ministries. The superintendent has a continuing passion for the more than 41,000 villages of that state.

A new Global Asian Ministries Network (inspired by Free Methodist leaders outside of the United States) is being birthed to discover and deploy the resources of the Free Methodist Church worldwide for ministry to Asians in North America and ministry from North America to Asia. Many Asians have come to the United States and we want to be partners in reaching them for Christ.

Free Methodist World Missions continues to expand with a missions presence now in 72 countries of the world and an increased long term mission force of 60 new approved missionaries in the past five years.

Eduardo and Cindi Angelo were told it would take ten years to plant a church of 25 people in the very Roman Catholic closed environment of Lisbon, Portugal. But seven years later, having begun in a garage, these Portuguese speaking missionaries now pastor two churches, one with 80 and the other with 200 people in attendance. Ministries continue to expand with a seminary of more than 30 weekend students, a worship team that has produced its first CD and three more church plants being started.

The city of Caracas, Venezuela has been overwhelmed by murders, making it perhaps the murder capital of the world. According to USA Today, its 15,000 murders will double those of Baghdad this year. Yet in this context, nine months ago the Caracas FMC bought a house to refurbish and make into a suitable place for worship services. The Free Methodists of Caracas bravely walk the paths of their dangerous neighborhood, leaning on a fence to visit neighbors, help teens shovel clean their basketball court and organize a neighborhood counsel. And in these nine months the murders in their area have slowed, the tension level has dropped and evening domino games on the street corners are common again. Darkness is defined by the lack of light. The light is on, the Free Methodist Church is home, in the neighborhood.

Here in the United States we are thankful for the passion of leaders that led to the planting of 167 new churches over the past four years. The national church has invested \$705,694 in matching funds as church planting grants.

Over the past four years the church has grown in membership by 5%, an increase of 4,634 members. Over the same period the church has grown in worship attendance by

8.24%, an increase of 7,088 people. Although we have learned that this is the highest rate of growth since we began keeping worship attendance statistics, we long for more. Further, there were 44,634 conversions reported over the past four years. We praise God for His grace extended to each one who has come to faith in Christ. On the other hand, we are concerned that only about 10% of the reported conversions resulted in membership growth in the church. We wrestle with the greater question as to how many new believers are being disciplined so that they are being transformed into the likeness of Christ and committed to His mission.

We ask even further, when we consider community transformation in the places where our churches are located, do we find divorce on the decrease, pornography waning, substance abuse falling and domestic violence diminishing? Do we find the life of our members radically different from the world that we are trying to reach? Our passion is for entire communities to be transformed by the power of the gospel. Our only hope for community transformation is an undeniable and mighty move of God. We pray for this.

The *Light and Life* magazine has now become a central piece in the life of our church. In a recent survey 93% of responding pastors considered *Light and Life* magazine to be important to the life of the local church, 78% think it is being used effectively to disciple people and 87% believe our decision to make it available to all Free Methodist homes was a wise decision.

Two significant publications this past year include *The Pastor and Local Church Leaders Manual* and a recent book on our position of women in ministry titled *The Female Pastor: Is There Room for She in Shepherd?* In addition, the *Working Together in the Twenty-first Century* booklet has been updated.

Our world is in desperate need of the Wesleyan message that we represent. We believe that the mission and vision of the Free Methodist Church is worthy of our support. God's plan is that the ministries of the church be funded through the tithes and offerings of our people. We are committed to teach the stewardship of life that brings all of our resources into the service of the Kingdom.

Three recent financial challenges have raised concerns across the church: the limited current gifts for the *One More Soul* initiative, the 2005 Free Methodist World Missions shortfall, and the Alpha Omega health insurance plan failure. None of these is impossible to overcome, but each of them has added financial pressures to funding God's mission for the church. We are thankful that all three concerns are being addressed, adjustments made and solutions sought.

We continue to invest in leadership development. This past year through the John Wesley Seminary Foundation and Fruitful Leader grant/loan and scholarship programs, \$170,000 has been given to 103 ministerial students preparing to serve in the Free Methodist Church.

This year the Board of Bishops completed six Leadership Summits across the United States, challenging our pastors and church leaders to reach out to *One More Soul*. Messages centered on the themes of Awakening, Winning, Discipling and Sending. The messages with study guides have been distributed to every Free Methodist Church.

Although not always noted in the State of the Work Report, we thank God for the impact for the Kingdom of our six Free Methodist Educational Institutions, five Free Methodist Networks, ten Human Service Ministries, 79 active chaplains, Men's Ministries International and Women's Ministries International. These networks, associations, and auxiliaries provide unique ministries of support, enrichment and expansion of the work of the church.

As leaders in the church we continue to encourage our pastors to equip God's people for works of service.

“Christ gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach the unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13)

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Roger W. Haskins, Jr.
David W. Kendall
Joseph F. James
Richard D. Snyder

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