

SUMMARY REPORT

CONNECTIONAL CONVERSATION PROJECT:
A JOURNEY ACROSS THE U. S. CONNECTION

MAY 25, 2004

From the Conference Leaders Team

Discipleship Ministries Unit

General Board of Discipleship

The United Methodist Church

CONNECTIONAL CONVERSATION PROJECT FINAL REPORT

On behalf of the General Board of Discipleship, the Conference Leaders Team of the Discipleship Ministries Unit undertook a project of sending a team of two staff members into fifty-seven annual conferences meeting with the bishop and a team of leaders. The information collected in those conversations is reported here.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Connectional Conversations was:

“To share a conversation among annual conference leaders and General Board of Discipleship (GBOD) staff members about the hopes and challenges of each annual conference and to discern opportunities for partnerships, support, and resources.”

PROCESS

Four pilots were conducted from June to December 2002. Fifty-three other conversations were held from February 2003 to March 2004. (For participating conferences, see Appendix A).

The GBOD staff interviewed the bishop [Questions in Appendix D] and held a conversation with six or more conference leaders [Bible study and questions in Appendix E and Appendix C]. A report summarizing the conversation and stating strengths of the conference was sent to the bishop and director of connectional ministry. The data from the questions and the observed strengths was put into the database.

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

There were 5954 responses to the eight questions and the listing of annual conference strengths. The responses of the bishops were included along with the responses of the leaders in each question. Each question was looked at separately, and results are reported below.

QUESTION 1

“What excites you about what is happening in your annual conference? How do you see/experience God’s movement in your annual conference?” (1,007 responses)

The leaders shared what God was doing in their conference. The list was varied and extensive, although God seemed to be doing similar things in some conferences. For a listing of major areas of response, see the full report.

QUESTION 2

“In the midst of God’s movement, what are you learning about the work of the annual conference and your role as a conference leader?” (829 responses) The leaders were

learning many and varied things. Many of the responses were similar. For a listing of major areas of response, see the full report.

QUESTION 3

“How does what you are learning shape your hopes and dreams for your annual conference?” (612 responses) These responses varied more widely than the first two, although there was some overlap. A listing of responses can be found in the full report.

Here are three examples:

- There are three leadership roles: disrupting (status), honoring (the doers), aligning (new directions).
- Figure out how to sustain effective ministry throughout the conference and let go of anything that hinders this.
- I’m confidently and comfortably letting go of my thinking that I know what this conference should look like in the future. I have no idea what it will look like, but it will be something good.

REPORT NOTATIONS

For the purpose of our work in the General Board of Discipleship, the more useful information was found in the last five questions.

General Reporting:

- Responses were broken up into categories for reporting, and categories are listed in alphabetical order. An asterisk (*) indicates that a particular or very similar response has been given again.
- In some instances where a response crossed categories, the response was put in both categories. For example, “Stewardship as a spiritual issue” was put in both “Spirituality” and “Stewardship.”
- Each response in a conference counts as one, so if three people all said, “Leadership Development,” then “Leadership Development” would be recorded three times.

QUESTION 4

“What issues and challenges do you face as an annual conference in moving into God’s future?” (934 responses) Despite unique contexts and other realities in annual conferences, similarities in this category were easy to define.

The five categories with the highest response were:

Leadership Development	93
Leadership/Pastor Issues	150
Funding	80
Funding/Stewardship	98
Diversity	59
Pastor Issues	57
Revitalization of Local Churches	47

In the area of **Leadership Development**, the basic issues and struggles were:

- Lack of trust in leaders,
- Training,

- Identity of leaders, especially the spiritual identity,
- The need for new styles of leadership,
- Intentional recruitment of younger leaders.
- “What do we need in our leaders?”
- “How do we recruit, train, nurture, develop, and deploy leaders?”

Funding was the second highest in number of responses. The issues were:

- Finding funds for the essentials and fundamentals, for programs, and for new and challenging ministries;
- An attitude of scarcity rather than abundance,
- Finding new sources of funding,
- The tremendous costs of health care for clergy, and
- The increasing disparity between “haves” and “have nots.”

Third highest was **Diversity**.

- Ethnic diversity, multiculturalism, ministry to new populations, etc.
- Theological diversity and differing, strongly held opinions

The basic question here is “*How do we live together in community with people who are different from us or who have different views and ways of thinking or living?*”

Issues relating to **Pastors** had the fourth highest number of responses to this question.

Issues included:

- Recruitment and training of quality clergy,
- Effectiveness,
- Itinerancy,
- Morale,
- Lack of good physical health,
- Misconduct,
- Finding success and fulfillment where they are,
- Too many or too few clergy,
- The rising number of local pastors, and
- Classism among persons in the various categories.

The fifth highest number of responses was in the area of **Congregational Revitalization**.

Issues were:

- The lack of clarity about the mission of the church,
- Lack of focus on the mission field right outside the doors,
- Relevance,
- The absence of the poor,
- Unresolved conflicts,
- Not enough options for struggling churches.

The question here is “*How can existing congregations be transformed?*”

QUESTION 5

“What resources (human and material) have you found most helpful in your work?” (902 responses) The responses varied widely. The material was organized into the four categories listed below in bold and underlined – **GBOD Resources, Other General Agencies/Church Resources, Annual Conferences, Other Resources**.

Of the many **GBOD Resources** mentioned, the five most often mentioned were:

“Walk to Emmaus” and “Chrysalis”	27
<i>Companions in Christ</i> and the training	20
General comments about resources	18
<i>FaithQuest</i>	11
School for Congregational Development	9

For the **Other General Agencies/Church Resources**, the most often mentioned were:

General Church	66
United Methodist Publishing House	63
UMCOM	39
General Board of Global Ministries	37

In the **General Church** category, two things stood out;

- The Bishops Initiative on Children and Poverty and the materials for it and
- The various networks [for example, people working in congregational development or assistants to bishops] and learning across conference lines, often jurisdictionally.

For the **United Methodist Publishing House**, the only item that was mentioned more than five times was

- *Disciple Bible Study*, which was mentioned 36 times, more than half of all the responses in this category.

United Methodist Communications had one item mentioned more than five times.

- “Igniting Ministries,” which was listed 19 times—just over half of all their responses.

The **General Board of Global Ministries** also had one response that occurred more than 5 times.

- Women’s Division, United Methodist Women and their materials

Many resources were listed in the category of **Annual Conferences**. Most often mentioned were:

Leadership	88
Other Things	38
Training	22

In the **Leadership** category, two items were mentioned more than five times.

- The conference office and staff 16
- The cabinet/district superintendent 6

The **Other Things** category had no two responses alike. However three times there was appreciation for:

- Grants or funding for programs. 3

Several different kinds of **Training** were specifically mentioned. The only two mentioned more than once were:

- Lay Speaking training and the 3
- “Center for Pastoral Effectiveness”
(program of the Louisiana Conference). 2

In **Other Resources**, the five categories with the most responses were:

Persons	59
Other (resources)	54
Programs and Associations	51
Books, Newsletters, and Curricula	48
Technology	27

Of the **Persons** listed as being helpful, only one was listed more than three times.

- John Winn (Louisiana Pastoral Care Specialist), 5

The category of **Other** had only one item mentioned more than once and that was:

- Money. 3

Again, in **Programs and Associations**, most were mentioned only once. Notable exceptions were:

- Bill Easum and his programs 5
- Natural Church Development 4

In **Books, Newsletters, and Curricula**, there were two that had five or more responses:

- *Alpha* 7
- *Forty Days of Purpose* 6

Multiple listings under **Technology** were:

- Websites 6
- Lumicon 2
- Need for more up-to-date visual and video resources 2

The wide assortment of responses give us an unexpected result: annual conferences and congregations are using a wide variety of resources to meet specific needs, but there is not a coherent strategic plan that United Methodists can point toward. The closest we get to a group of universal resources being used are *Disciple*, “Walk to Emmaus,” and

“Igniting Ministry.” In short, there is not a core group of resources and training that is used widely across the church.

QUESTION 6

“What resources do you wish you had?” (565 responses) Several of the answers were more related to the particular conference than to the work of general agencies. Therefore, the answers were broken down into two broad categories. One is **General Church Level** and the other is **Annual Conference Level**. The responses to Question 6 were much more varied than on previous questions. Categorization was more difficult, and many responses were listed together in “general” subcategories because of the variety.

The **General Church Level** categories with the highest number of responses are listed here along with the number of responses.

Written and Video Resources – GBOD	187
Curricula Comments	53
General Comments and Ideas	50
GOBD Training Resources and Issues	36
Diversity	33
Interagency Coordination and Cooperation	32

Within **Written and Video Resources – GBOD**, again there was a wide spread of the responses. Here are the categories with the highest number of responses.

General	44
Worship	18
Evangelism	16
Small Church and Shared Ministries	15
Stewardship	15

General ranged across the board including:

- Wanting less expensive resources,
- Better communication about the resources,
- A better delivery system,
- Materials at a more elementary level, and
- Several about additional materials about The United Methodist Church heritage, traditions, and theology.

Worship resources desired are:

- Multicultural worship,
- Praise worship,
- Contemporary worship,
- Strong traditional worship,
- More music resources, and
- Having availability of resources through CDs, downloadable clips, and other technology.

The resources requested for Evangelism included:

- How to share one's faith,
- Materials and particularly not including it with new church development materials, and
- Videos and materials that recognize the complexity of evangelizing in the 21st century.

Responses in Small Church and Shared Ministries asked for:

- Resources on cooperative ministries,
- More small church resources,
- More affordable resources,
- Shared ministry resources,
- Resources on the web,
- Models of successful small churches and
- Resources on forming and using lay pastoral leaders.

Requested materials in the area of Stewardship were mostly:

- Stewardship materials. A few specifics were included:
- Materials not based on husband and wife sharing a passion for the church, materials for children and youth,
- Financial stewardship and
- Some way to review possible stewardship materials.

Curricula Comments included:

- Eleven about *Disciple Bible Study* wanting structural change or some similar material in quality on a shorter time span.
- Comments favored shorter (4-6 weeks).
- Other comments asked for a rotation model for youth,
- Quality videos,
- Curriculum for use in impoverished areas and in other parts of the world,
- More multimedia components, and more choices.

The next highest number of responses was in **General Comments and Ideas**. Among the resources requested were:

- Help in producing videos,
- Being better connected,
- Receiving information electronically,
- User-friendly websites and phone systems,
- Teaching churches and
- *The Book of Discipline* in "Scriptographic" booklet form.

GBOD Training Resources and Issues include:

- Educational opportunities,
- A training center for pastors and laity,
- Use of regional trainings,
- Effective conflict transformation practices,
- Registering online for events,
- Expert coaches and trainers for conference leaders,
- Downloadable training, videos, or Internet training, and
- Tools for retraining pastors and laity.

Among the 33 responses to the **Diversity** category were:

- More resources in non-English languages that are culturally appropriate,
- Cross-cultural and multicultural materials,
- More Hispanic resources,
- Additional materials on anti-racism and on white privilege, and
- Materials to help congregations relate to impoverished populations and interpret ethnic communities in their midst.

In the category of **Interagency Coordination and Cooperation**, one of the basic requests was for:

- One place to call for all United Methodist resources. Other responses included
- A resource about the work of general agencies,
- The name, phone number, and area of expertise of general agency staff,
- Materials online to be in one place,
- A comprehensive resource on grant funding in the church,
- A search engine for all United Methodist resources.

Some of the wished-for resources fell more to the conference level for implementation and so are not dealt with as thoroughly here. Under **Annual Conference Level**, the two categories with the most responses were:

Conference Organizational Issues	20
Money/Stewardship Issues	19

QUESTION 7

“What else does the staff of GBOD need to know about your annual conference?” (453 responses) Many of the answers were of a general nature, making suggestions or raising questions that were not specific to an annual conference. These answers were organized together under the first heading of “General Responses” and further under categories. Others of the answers were more specific to a particular conference. These responses were organized by annual conference under the heading of “Specific Responses.”

In **General Responses** the five categories with the highest number of responses are:

GBOD Resources	51
GBOD Relationships	26
Conference Leaders	21
Understandings	17
Training Events	16

Some significant responses under **GBOD Resources** are:

- Releasing materials in more than one form (e.g. both book and CD),
- More on DVDs,
- More variety and diversity needed,
- Share new materials with four churches and have them write Amazon.com-type reviews and list other books they have bought,
- Stay current with resources as do other denominations,
- Resource conference leaders,
- Improve delivery system,
- Have DSs bring folks to events about GBOD resources,
- Meet market needs,
- Communicate about your resources,
- Come in and do pilot projects and training,
- Market directly to local church leaders, and
- “We need some understanding of your GBOD track record with development (resources and outcomes from the resources – people, etc.).”

Particular resources asked for here were:

- Partnering with other churches;
- Understanding culture and re-engaging one’s community,
- Making disciples in children and youth and mid-age adults;
- Peer learning materials;
- Curricula for children, youth, and young adults;
- Large-group processes;
- Family and parenting; life issues;
- Equipping disciples and clergy development;
- The change process; preaching; and
- Cross-cultural ministry.

Under **GBOD Relationships** responses included:

- Going to see them,
- Listening and itinerating among them;
- The need for excellent communications;
- Needing to know what is available and what GBOD staff can do;
- Wanting consulting or long-term relationships (versus one-time meeting or event);
- Being invited to use their experience, and
- Fostering partnerships and networking among conferences.

The responses under **Conference Leaders** included:

- Our connecting people where things are being solved with other conferences;
- Better communications, especially with conference staff;
- Focusing on district councils and leadership;
- Using coaching to follow up after working with leaders;
- Better connections to conference offices; and
- Rather than publishing and events, develop networks and relationships with annual conferences.

The **Understandings** category represents areas where attitudes need to be changed.

Some of the issues listed here are:

- Embracing the concept that clergy are appointed to a community, not just a local church;
- Information and exposure to what happens in urban churches compared to suburban settings;
- How do we measure growth and vitality?
- We help people know Christ but do not help them get past knowing Christ to being Christ.
- We need education about change.
- What is the process of disciple formation? What are some ways to help congregations take disciple making seriously? What's the core? What are the ingredients of a discipleship system?

The responses under **Training Events** indicate that:

- The large events we do are important;
- We should be looking well into the future to know what training/leadership will be needed then;
- Regional training events rather than national ones;
- Training in what it means to be a disciple today;
- How to reach the communities around us;
- How to celebrate;
- Coaching conferences with resource updates; and
- To make our training and materials practical and relevant.

For questions and comments specific to an annual conference, see that conference at the end of Question 7 in the Final Report.

QUESTION 8

“What else does GBOD need to know about future possibilities of partnership, networking, and working together?” (420 responses) For a full listing of the responses of each annual conference, see the Final Report. The answers were very diverse. The largest category was “Ideas and Thoughts,” which was a category to catch the variety. Here are the six categories with the highest number of responses:

Ideas and Thoughts	106
Test Locations and Partnerships	42

Connection and Communication	29
Marketing	27
Networking	24
Resources Needed in General	23

Ideas and Thoughts was the category for ideas and comments that didn't seem to fit elsewhere easily. Some of the ones that were offered were:

- We learn best from people who have done it.
- Develop more e-mail networks like Kevin Witt's camping one.
- GBOD resources and staff present at annual conference sessions.
- GBOD can offer central clearinghouse for United Methodist connection (globally) around leadership and learning for networking purposes.
- We need to communicate on ways to partner around issues and provide follow-up.
- Focus on how we re-energize, and the formation of clergy.
- GBOD should provide compelling, comparative research for annual conference leaders.
- Continue Connectional Conversations to listen to annual conferences.
- Resource conference leaders – especially staff – regularly. Educate us on GBOD products and services.
- Help congregations evaluate where they are.
- See the resources that are in the annual conferences.
- You offer good resources to deal with what we've got. We need support in creating a future.
- We need help in how to teach churches to change. It's a systems issue – like a church getting ready to be hospitable.
- How do you raise awareness of folks around including other people, being able to move to heart and action; how do we set the stage and equip new pastors?
- Facilitate learning across state/conference/jurisdictional lines.
- Suggest that the staff at GBOD concentrate more on being brokers for information rather than trying to have resident experts who traverse the whole church.
- One way to structure the Board's work would be to look at the needs of the church by size.
- GBOD has to decide if bishops are part of their constituency (I think they should be) and then, if so, to resource them in anything they need.
- Help us develop a talent bank and use it.
- Come in and do a consultation. Say something like "There are 14 different ways to do continuing education and knowing your conference, we'd recommend . . ." Help us know where to get money and how to do it.
- We have more information than we can currently absorb. You can send all the information that you want, but it may not be read.
- We need someone to work with a leadership group to resource a long-range plan that has follow-through. We need both short-term success and long-term follow-up.
- When conferences are in crisis, they need general agencies gently to offer help and keep the purpose of the church before them.

- How do we help people understand a life commitment to spiritual growth and church?
- Question: Are we going to use theological and/or secular language? Is GBOD clear about the clients' understanding of the language chosen?

There were many offers to be **Test Locations and Partnerships**, including offers from Alaska Missionary, Detroit, Greater New Jersey, Illinois Great Rivers, Kansas East, Kansas West, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, New England, New Mexico, Northern Illinois, Oklahoma, Pacific Northwest, and Red Bird Missionary. Among the areas of expertise, interest, or need that were offered to GBOD for partnership were:

Vision aligned with GBOD's	Detroit
Multicultural and racial ethnic programs	Greater New Jersey
Small-membership churches	Mississippi and Red Bird
Disciple-making and discipleship systems	Kansas East
Risk-taking and creative funding on a shoestring	Kansas West
New settings for Christian education	Mississippi
Systems of life-long learning	Missouri
Reaching younger generations	Missouri
Independent way of doing things	New England
Cross-cultural ministry	Northern Illinois and Pacific Northwest
Congregational development	Northern Illinois
Assistance with visioning	Pacific Northwest
EMLC starts	Oklahoma
Creative ministry and congregational styles	West Virginia

- Other ideas were: GBOD might want to partner with the Gallup organization,
- Working with a cluster of annual conferences,
- Providing a helpful model of linking and networking,
- SEJ mission secretaries who are doing work on poverty and attitude for a possible CD, and
- Partnering with five conferences to provide effective, focused, in-depth resources to effect change.

Some of the responses under **Connection and Communication** asked for:

- Our help to be connected;
- A quality relationship with us including visits and other regular contacts proactively, especially with conference staff and leaders;
- Help in knowing what GBOD has to offer with a more user-friendly access to the agency; for us to receive input from conference leaders consistently;
- Help with networking across conference lines;
- Help for age-level coordinators and staff, and
- Contacting the conference office when events will be close as a courtesy.

Responses under **Marketing** included:

- The need to have better marketing of GBOD resources;

- How to get resources to the people in the pews;
- The need for information on who has used programs and how they work;
- Information about what's new;
- The invitation to be tactical rather than strategic and think of ways to respond faster such as downloadable materials, Power Point presentations on CD, and so forth;
- A subscription service so that conferences or churches could receive a copy of all new resources published throughout the year;
- CD demos of resources;
- The need to communicate better about the work of the staff and our resources;
- People do not know what GBOD does; and
- "I'm looking for 6-7 opportunities that mesh together without killing the pastor or administrator. Do you have a system of resources with components that fit together?"

Under **Networking** the call to help leaders know what is working in other places is loud and clear. Many see GBOD as being able to facilitate this. Networking includes:

- Not needing to re-invent the wheel;
- Sharing people;
- Networking across conference lines and jurisdictionally;
- Information about conference staff configurations;
- A place to call to ask who's doing what; and
- The need for a national networking database for varieties of expertise and ministries.

Responses to the category **Resources Needed—General** included:

- The need for depth in materials, especially around reconciliation,
- Inclusivity;
- Support materials for clergy orders and morale;
- Relevant resources for people living in poverty;
- Adding a social component to spiritual formation resources;
- Materials at different levels that are culturally appropriate;
- Cross-cultural, ecumenical and interfaith resources that build community;
- Help for an annual conference in developing its own resources;
- Simple, straightforward resources for new Christians; and
- More resources about what it means to save the earth.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Leadership development leads the list of needs of conferences. Along with that were responses indicating the need specifically for leadership development of pastors and of laity.
2. Conferences are really struggling with funding.
3. Diversity is a crucial issue and appears in two forms—being in ministry in ethnic communities and in neighborhoods into which a different ethnic group is moving, and living with the diversity of theology and belief about social

issues. Responses related to diversity were high in both what conferences are struggling with and in resources they wish they had.

4. Local church revitalization is also of large concern.
5. GBOD resources are valued in many places.
6. We need to communicate better and market better the products and services that we have.
7. The training we do is valued, and we need to keep it geared to needs.
8. There is a long and loud call for our resources to come in new forms, such as DVDs, CDs, videos, downloadables, multimedia, online registration, Internet training, and more user-friendly websites.
9. A large number of conferences are interested in partnership with us and desire a relationship.
10. We are seen as an agency that could help with networking across conference and jurisdictional lines.
11. Two new directions emerge from the edges. There are not large numbers of responses calling for these yet. But it would be good for us at least to keep them in mind.
 - Coaching—having many of our staff becoming proficient in it to assist conferences in various ways.
 - Advocating for one source [website, phone number] where all United Methodist resources can be accessed and cooperation among the general agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. GBOD staff should review the entire report and discuss implications for their work (especially noting where some of our practices need adjustment).
2. Board of Directors should receive the Connectional Conversation Summary Report prior to September Board meeting with reflection questions. Adequate time must be set aside at board meeting for units and entire board interaction and discussion.
3. From these findings, recommendations and priorities should be developed for GBOD and a timeline developed for action.
4. CCP and CRM databases should interface. Eventually CRM should be open to this type of input about field service (relational data).
5. Maintain database for field staff to see before travel and input data after work.
6. Actively seek partnership with conference leaders when developing resources for greater church.
7. Findings of the Communications Audit and Chesapeake's research should be integrated.
8. Communicate findings to key United Methodist leaders, including annual conference leaders and other agencies.

APPENDIX A

ANNUAL CONFERENCES THAT PARTICIPATED

We are deeply grateful to the bishops, directors of connectional ministry, and other conference leaders who participated in the Connectional Conversations. They have taught us much. The 57 of 63 conferences that participated are listed here.

Alabama-West Florida	North Alabama
Alaska Missionary	North Central New York
Arkansas	North Carolina
Baltimore-Washington	North Georgia
California-Nevada	North Texas
California-Pacific	Northern Illinois
Central Pennsylvania	Northwest Texas
Central Texas	Oklahoma
Dakotas	Oklahoma Indian Missionary
Detroit	Pacific Northwest
East Ohio	Peninsula Delaware
Eastern Pennsylvania	Red Bird Missionary
Florida	Rio Grande
Greater New Jersey	Rocky Mountain
Holston	Southwest Texas
Illinois Great Rivers	Tennessee
Iowa	Texas
Kansas East	Troy
Kansas West	Virginia
Kentucky	West Ohio
Louisiana	West Michigan
Memphis	West Virginia
Minnesota	Western New York
Mississippi	Western North Carolina
Missouri	Western Pennsylvania
Nebraska	Wisconsin
New England	Wyoming
New Mexico	Yellowstone
New York	

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPATING STAFF

We are deeply grateful for the various General Board of Discipleship staff members who participated in the Connectional Conversations. They are listed below in the various capacities in which they served.

Design Team

Carol Krau
Francine Taylor Thirus
Julia Kuhn Wallace
Susan W. N. Ruach

Event Leaders

Conference Leaders Team Members

Carol Krau
Craig Miller
Francine Taylor Thirus
Horacio Rios
Julia Kuhn Wallace
Sandy Zeigler
Susan W. N. Ruach
Wesley Daniel

Others

Betsey Heavner
Bill Crenshaw
Dan Dick
David Bell
Diana Hynson
Kimberly Pace
Mary Jane Pierce-Norton
Marilyn Magee
Safiyah Fosua
Sang E. Chun
Soozung Sa
Sunnam Choi
Susan Hay

Data Input

Carol Templeton
Nancy Dunlap

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR THE CONFERENCE LEADERS

1. What excites you about what is happening in your annual conference? How do you see/experience God's movement in your annual conference?
2. In the midst of God's movement, what are you learning about the role of the annual conference and your work as a conference leader?
3. How does what you are learning shape your hopes and dreams for your annual conference?
4. What issues and challenges do you face as an annual conference in moving into God's future?
5. What resources (human and material) have you found most helpful in your work?
6. What resources do you wish you had?
7. The General Board of Discipleship sees its work to be about making disciples through providing training and other resources for church leaders for Christian formation and leadership development. Our vision is disciples made, Christians formed, leaders developed, the church renewed, and the world transformed.
With that information, what else would the staff of GBOD find useful to know about your annual conference?
8. What else does GBOD need to know about future possibilities of partnership, networking, and working together?

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONS FOR THE BISHOP

1. What Bible stories, passages, or characters reflect where you see the annual conference right now?
2. How do you see/experience God's movement in your annual conference? What excites you about what is happening in your annual conference?
3. As the episcopal leader, what are you learning about the work of this annual conference?
4. How is what you are learning shaping your hopes and dreams for this annual conference?
5. What issues and challenges do you face as a conference in moving into God's future?
6. What resources (human and material) have you found most helpful in your work in this conference? What resources do you wish you had?
7. What else would the staff of the General Board of Discipleship find useful to know about your annual conference?
8. What ideas or insights about future possibilities of partnership, networking, and working together would you suggest to the General Board of Discipleship staff?

APPENDIX E

BIBLE STUDY USED TO BEGIN EACH CONVERSATION

Biblical Reflection

John 21:1-12 (NRSV)

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord.

Reflection questions:

As you consider this passage, where in the story would you place your annual conference:

- | | |
|--|---|
| A. Going fishing | B. Fished all night and caught nothing |
| C. Fishing from the other side of the boat | D. Eating breakfast with Jesus on the shore |

How might God be speaking to you as an annual conference leader through this passage?

How might God be speaking to your annual conference through this passage?