

**BORN AGAIN IN EVERY PLACE:
The National Comprehensive Plan for Town and Country Ministry
of The United Methodist Church**

[Draft 9/99]

Whereas, the more than 25,000 town and country congregations in The United Methodist Church have long, rich, faithful histories of mission and ministry in the smaller communities where God has called them to serve, and across decades of challenge and change have not only worshiped, proclaimed the gospel and improved life in those places but have also contributed to the work of the whole church throughout the whole world;

Whereas, great differences exist among town and country congregations, which vary in terms of size, vitality, economic base, possibilities for ministry, and structure (single churches, circuits or cooperative parishes), some with histories of decline, some enduring through cycles of boom and bust, and some today responding to the challenges of growth; some in relative geographical isolation and others engulfed by metropolitan sprawl;

Whereas, the congregations share a strong sense of the sacredness of place, a commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ through The United Methodist Church and an abiding hope for vitality and a promising future, many town and country people share the experience--real or perceived--of being ignored, forgotten, minimized, marginalized and taken for granted by the larger systems and institutions of American society, including The United Methodist Church;

Whereas, most town and country churches were founded because of the desire of local people for a local Christian community, many across the years have become more focused on the maintenance of the church family and facilities than on the Church's mission, with many passively drifting into patterns of stagnation and survival and, by trying to save their own lives, forfeiting their vitality;

Whereas, rapid changes are occurring in town and country settings, including the looming loss of thousands of family farms; the changing face of agricultural production; the growth of ethnic/migrant populations; the emerging challenges of forestry, mining, fisheries, and other industries such as small manufacturing and prisons; patterns of use and control of rural land; the prevalence of "Appalachian-like" economics; and environmental issues such as soil conservation, water quality, and disposal of hazardous wastes;

Whereas, The United Methodist General Conference of 1996 called for a National Comprehensive Plan for Town and Country Ministry, and such a plan has been developed by a Task Force-- convened by the General Board of Global Ministries with representation from other general agencies---through extensive consultation with Church and rural leaders and assisted by surveys of local clergy and laity;

And whereas, the Task Force and its sponsors believe that the Spirit of God is stirring, calling town and country people to new faithfulness and fruitfulness in Jesus Christ, and are convinced that every church, in every place, can and must be born again to a new vitality of worship, witness and service, making disciples and proclaiming the good news of the Reign of God,

Therefore, be it resolved that The United Methodist Church, through the General Conference,

1. Praise God for the rich heritage and the strong promise of town and country congregations as places of bold Christian witness and service;
2. Commend the faithful witness of United Methodist people and churches in town and country settings, many of which today are confronted by change, uncertainty, and new possibilities
3. Adopt and celebrate the National Comprehensive Plan for Town and Country Ministry here presented;
4. Refer the Plan's analysis and recommendations for study, and implementation, including funding as needed, to appropriate church bodies -- local, district, annual conference and national -- charging every organizational level and institutional expression of The United Methodist Church to renew and increase their commitments to effective town and country ministry; and
5. Express its appreciation to the local United Methodists, rural specialists, and staff of general agencies who worked diligently and cooperatively in forging the Plan.

National Comprehensive Plan for Town and Country Ministry

Report of the Task Force to the General Conference

Outline

Introduction

- A. Biblical/Theological Foundations
- B. Vision
- I. Mandate, Research Design and Contexts
 - A. Mandate
 - B. The Church Context
 - C. The Social and Economic Context
- II. Perspectives on the State of the Town and Country Church in the United States
 - A. Rural-Urban Connection
 - B. Connectionalism
 - C. Leadership
 1. Ministry of the Laity
 2. Pastoral Ministry
 3. Cooperative Ministry
 - D. Spiritual Formation
 - E. Evangelism
 - F. Community Outreach and Involvement

- G. Children Youth and Young Adults
- H. Rural Mission Personnel and Program Resources
- I. Financial Resources
- J. Communications
- III. Recommendations
 - Index of Entities to Which Resolutions are Addressed
- IV Task Force Members

INTRODUCTION

I. Biblical/Theological Foundations

The biblical concepts of “shalom” and “new birth” provide the theological foundations for this Plan.

Shalom is a word that the ancient Jews used in their greetings and in their farewells. To the Hebrew people of Biblical times, it meant much more than our interpretation of "peace." Shalom meant total spiritual and physical well being. It called up visions of a society perfectly ordered by Yahweh, marked by love and justice. Shalom was life as God had meant for it to be. It was a world in which the needs of every person were met and where each one had enough of whatever was required to live a joyful life before the Lord.

Jesus initiated His ministry by declaring that the Kingdom of God was at hand (Matt. 4:17). By the Kingdom of God, He meant a world in which all that was suggested by shalom would be realized. This kingdom was to be composed of people delivered from sin and guilt, and freed to love on another. It was to have its social institutions reshaped according to the will of the heavenly Father [sic], and would be a society marked by justice, offering to all peoples everywhere the opportunity to live with dignity. Its citizens were to be spiritually "reborn" through the transforming work of One who was not of this world, and they were to be in this world as agents through whom God would change the world from what it is into what it ought to be.¹

When Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again," (John 3:1-8) he was talking to a religious insider of long standing. Nicodemus was heavily invested in the religious establishment of his day -- he knew the rules, played by the rules, and taught others the rules. It was for *Nicodemus* that Jesus prescribed the necessity of new birth, not for the fishermen, or the "tax collectors and sinners," or the woman at the well, or the rich young ruler. Today's

¹ Foreword by Tony Campolo, in Fuller, Millard No More Shacks. (Waco, TX, Word Books, 1986) p. 9

Nicodemus could be the chair of the Administrative Council, or the Sunday School superintendent, or a bishop, or a general agency executive, or a district superintendent, or the pastor, or the congregational matriarch/patriarch or the dedicated youth group member. It is to the insiders of The United Methodist Church—rural, urban, and suburban—that Jesus says, "YOU must be born again!"

B. Vision

A National Comprehensive Plan for Town and Country Ministry requires a comprehensive theological vision, one relevant but not limited to a particular context. No segment of the Church--geographical, racial/ethnic, social or economic--is ever separate or separable, from any other. Those persons charged with drafting this Plan found it a mandate of faith to set forth an inclusive vision. The primary objective of this Plan is to apply this vision to rural and small town churches and their communities in the USA, and to dare in faith to raise questions and make proposals about a comprehensive role for the United Methodist Church in town and country ministries. It is within the inclusive vision that US town and country churches, indeed, the whole Church, finds its relatedness to rural peoples and congregations around the world.

This Plan envisions a United Methodist Church,

*That is a connection of congregations, institutions, boards and agencies that are joyful and vital centers for
In which each member, every congregation, and every community experience a new birth of faith, hope, and
That honors the life and ministry of every congregation regardless of size, location, age, ethnicity, culture
That recognizes the special opportunities, challenges, gifts and needs of congregations in town
and country settings, and that develops a vision for addressing them, while respecting and responding to
and natural resources;*

*In which each congregation is responsible for
enabling persons to experience a life-changing encounter with God in Jesus Christ so
they may experience the gospel within the Reign of God,
nurturing each person in a faith relationship with God as a Christian disciple through
life within a faith community,
discovering the personal and spiritual gifts of all disciples and deploying them in
mission and ministry to all the world,
confronting racism and other perspectives that exclude and discriminate,
working with other congregations, faith groups, community organizations and persons
of good will to further God's mission in their communities;*

*In which districts
develop the leadership of laity and clergy, through training, resourcing and support for
their mutual ministry in the church, the community and the world,
foster covenantal relationships among congregations and their leadership, especially
where distances in geography are great;*

*In which the annual conferences supply to each congregation effective and appropriate pastoral leaders
called forth by discernment of effective gifts for leading the Church's ministry
trained to work fruitfully where appointed,
supported by compensation that is adequate for needs, commensurate with
responsibility, and represents justice in relationship to all clergy,*

sustained by mentorship within the covenant of clergy and by support within the community of laity, accountable for the growth of the congregations in faithful discipleship and effective mission, deployed to match the gifts and abilities of clergy with the needs and opportunities of the Church's mission within communities, maintained in place for sufficient time to bear fruit for God's kingdom, but flexibly responds to changing and emerging needs of the mission of the Church, marked by respect for a wide diversity of ministries, training and credentials, able to work cooperatively with laity, congregations and denominational groups;

In which the structures of the United Methodist connection support and resource in every place the birth of new communities and ministries, That challenges political and economic powers that threaten to fragment and destroy local communities and persons as neighbors, That actively addresses longstanding patterns of racism, exploitation of the poor and the powerless, and That views the whole world as "our parish", all Christians as partners in mission, and all persons as neighbors.

II. MANDATE, RESEARCH DESIGN AND CONTEXTS

A. Mandate

The 1996 General Conference mandated the development of a National Comprehensive Plan for Town and Country Ministry. The plan was to grow out of a process overseen by the General Board of Global Ministries and involving local church and annual conference leadership and appropriate staff from other general church agencies. These were to include, but not be limited to Discipleship, Church and Society, Religion and Race, Higher Education and Ministry, Communications and the General Council on Ministries.

In August 1998, the General Board of Global Ministries named a Task Force of ten persons representing town and rural constituencies and appointed as the overall coordinator for the Task Force the staff person of the office of Town and Country Ministries. In addition, all but one of the above-named other general agencies named a staff representative to the Task Force. *(The names of Task Force members appear at the end of this document.)*

B. The Church Context

Three challenges loomed large in setting out to forge a National Comprehensive Plan for Town and Country Ministry: (1) the absence of a coherent definition of "town and country," (2) the lack of data about town and country churches within the United Methodist connection and (3) congregational diversity--the difficulty of evaluating the variety of current and potential ministries.

1. Town and Country Ministries. The term, unique to the United Methodist vocabulary, has been current for many decades but has no definition that can encompass the variety of social realities usually termed "rural." Is it simply a synonym for "rural" and, if so, what definition of rural is appropriate to the church?

The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines "urban" as territory, persons and housing units in places of 2,500 or more persons, implying that "rural" is everywhere else. However, when considering cultural patterns and self-identification, many communities of more than 2,500 are clearly rural. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church has defined "town and

country” as including “...rural and town areas with under 50,000 population. These shall include small cities of 10,000 to 50,000 and rural areas under 2,500...” [1996 Discipline, par631.5.f] This is directed to the Annual Conference Commission on Parish and Community Development as guidance in program planning and fund allocations. Cultural patterns, economic realities and ways of life frequently also come into play when speaking of “rural,” “urban” or “suburban.”

In this Plan, “town and country” is not based on numerical compilations but means:

Communities and churches located in rural areas, towns and small cities, especially those for which the social environment is characterized by a direct relationship with nature and natural resources, but which may also include small industries, manufacturing, and tourist activities.

2. Data Issues and Research. Statistics kept by the denomination do not identify or track “town and country” congregations, or even “rural,” “urban” or “suburban” churches. No such categories appear on the report forms; therefore, there is no way to review town and country membership trends, church closures or rural professions of faith.

To expeditiously obtain input from the widest range of town and country congregations and constituencies across The United Methodist Church in the USA, as the General Conference mandated, the Task Force developed written questionnaires. In most cases, three district superintendents in each US annual conference and the ethnic/language conferences were contacted by phone and asked to select three congregations in their districts--one described as "struggling," one as "typical," and one as "exemplary." Each of the pastors was asked by the superintendent to complete the clergy questionnaire and invite three lay persons in their congregation to complete the laity version of the survey. In addition to congregational input from the selected districts, special efforts were made to obtain research data from predominately African American, Asian American, Hispanic and Native American town and country congregations.

The questionnaire was made available to special town and country groups, such as the United Methodist Rural Fellowship (UMRF), the Rural Chaplains Association (RCA), the National Association of Associate Members and Local Pastors (NAAML), and town and country regional and jurisdictional gatherings. This process produced data from five different samples, 1) the "comparative sample", clergy/laity from congregations selected by district superintendents, 2) the NAAML respondents, 3) the UMRF respondents, 4) the RCA respondents and 5) other information and insights were gained through discussions with selected groups of town and rural leaders at meetings in California, New York, Missouri, and Wisconsin, to note a few. The Task Force also contacted the thirteen United Methodist seminaries seeking information on how they prepare clergy for ministry in town and country settings.

The questionnaires were distributed and the results tabulated by the Heartland Network for Town and Rural Ministries. The responses were coded by members of the Task Force and by volunteers from the Community United Methodist Church in Columbia, Missouri.

Below are tables showing the number of conferences, districts, clergy and laity represented in the survey and the distribution of respondents across the jurisdictions:

Breakdown of Responses from Questionnaires

General Information from Questionnaire	Comparative Sample	NAAML P	UMRF	RCA	Other UMs
Number of Conferences (includes data from a total of 61)	59	52	24	19	12
Number of Districts	120	146	43	27	28
Clergy	328	191	48	21	28
Laity	952	--	34	9	12
Total respondents in each category	1280	191	82	30	40
The grand total of questionnaires	1623				

Percentage of Respondents by Jurisdiction
--

	NC	NE	SC	SE	W
Comparative Sample	23.2	21.0	24.7	20.4	10.7
AML P	13.3	25.4	18.8	34.8	7.7
UMRF	62.8	9.3	18.6	5.8	3.5
RCA	43.3	30.0	13.3	6.7	6.7
Other UMs*	5.9	88.2	0	5.9	0

*Includes respondents from Appalachian Development Committee and the Northeastern Jurisdictional Town and Country Association

(See Recommendations 1,2,3)

3. Congregational diversity. The churches that fall within the town and country definition above represent a vast variety of single and multi-point charges, cooperative parishes and, sometimes, multi-denominational congregations; old and new, large and small, and served by every conceivable type of pastoral leader. A majority of the pastors and lay persons responding to the questionnaires were Anglo (white), but African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans and Native Americans were also represented. The oldest congregation in the sample was established in 1773, the newest in 1996. They ranged in average Sunday worship attendance from eight to 499, with half of the 326 congregations averaging less than 70 persons. Half of the churches had less than 35 in Sunday school on an average Sunday and half had more. Twice as many persons at worship were over 55 years of age than were under 18 years old.

Many town and country churches are stable or growing; many are weak and struggling. The survey indicated that some feel hampered by inadequate facilities and some have more space than they need. A large majority have units of United Methodist Women; a minority have United Methodist Men. Twice as many of the exemplary congregations as the struggling ones have both of these and an organized United Methodist Youth Fellowship. Bible study is important in all the respondent churches and 28.9 per cent specifically cited the use of the Disciple Bible Study series.

(Thirty-eight percent of the "exemplary" congregations cited use of the Disciple Bible Study, 26 per cent of the "typical" and 21 per cent of the "struggling.")

Rural churches are facing perhaps the most difficult challenge in their history. For some, great numbers of new persons are moving into their territory, while for others many people are moving away. Meanwhile, many church leaders, including pastors, are inexperienced and inadequately trained, and possibly not even resident in the community. Lay people understand the tremendous value of the presence of a church in their own neighborhood. The church is often the only organization there to express love and caring, and to maintain community. Yet many rural churches, given their situations and spirits, seem incapable of witnessing to the power of the Gospel to new persons moving in - especially those who are "different" from the established congregation. Some say they are "trying."

Views on community "quality of life" are subjective and depend on when and to whom the question is asked. Of the laity in the survey, most think that the local quality of life has stayed the same or improved in recent years. Clergy were marginally but not significantly less positive about the quality of local life.

C. The Social and Economic Context

Remarkable social, cultural and economic diversity characterizes the communities of the rural USA. Communities founded around fishing off New England and the Gulf Coast, around forestry in the Northwest, around ranching on the High Plains, grain and livestock farming in the Midwest, mining in Appalachia and the inter-mountain West, poultry processing and manufacturing in the South, Native American reservations across the country, the "oil patch" of the Southwest, the industrial-scale corporate farms in Texas and California, as well as the communities founded around rural retirement and recreation, and around urban-fringes --- all of these communities speak to the great diversity of the economic base of rural areas of the US.

Accompanying this diversity of economic base is the great diversity of the people. The many nations of Native Americans, the numerous European settlers that migrated seeking land to farm and jobs in the mines, as well as the African American farmers of the rural South, have been joined by a great variety of other immigrants to rural areas. Hispanic workers have for many years migrated across rural America working with seasonal crops, usually on large corporate farming operations. In recent years, many of these immigrants have been joined by people from many countries, especially Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia and Africa, often to work in huge livestock feeding operations and in the accompanying meat-packing and processing plants. Their more permanent presence has changed the culture and social institutions of many rural communities.

Other more recent rural in-migrants include the "tele-commuters" who want to live a

rural lifestyle while maintaining their professional commitments via new communications technologies. Some in-migrants are people who are willing to commute by car from as far as 60 to 100 miles one-way in order to "live rural and work urban." Rural retirees move to the small towns and rural places for reasons of family connections, security and/or cost of living. The increasing number of recreational developments in rural areas has brought not only the users of resorts, campgrounds, parks, casinos, and rivers and lakes, but also people seeking employment in those service industries. Some of the later include "economic migrants," often low-income families who find that public assistance and even income from low-wage jobs may allow their families a somewhat better standard of living than in urban areas.

Into this context of dynamic diversity has come a significant clash of social values. Such traditional rural values as the sacredness of place, the importance of locally owned and managed family farms and businesses, the preservation of locally controlled social institutions, and the preservation of rural environments collide with the values that have globalized the world's economies, industrialized production agriculture, and effectively devalued many rural places, environments, communities and peoples. Policy decisions, both governmental and corporate, have led rural residents to feel that all things rural are of value to others only in so far as they produce goods and services for the rest of the country and/or the global economy, rather than possessing intrinsic value.

As the economies of rural communities have become increasingly controlled by transnational corporations and other urban-based entities (i.e. banks, healthcare organizations, transportation firms, denominations, etc.) and as decision- and policy- making powers are displaced from rural citizens, feelings of alienation, apathy, frustration, disenfranchisement and powerlessness increase. Some have described this as living in an "economic colony." Sadly, decision-makers in other places can easily ignore or claim ignorance of the lifeways, values, and social realities of town and country people. This leads to distress for and/or the destruction of community relationships, local cultures, and the natural environment.

Value conflicts also occur among rural people, sometimes over issues arising from urban interests. People clash over land use, care for the environment, and private property rights as urban areas expand onto agricultural lands, as the need for landfills for urban trash and sites for toxic waste dumps increases, as prisons proliferate in rural areas, as wealthy investors buy large tracts of lands for personal recreational purpose, or for such environmentally threatening uses as industrial-sized hog or poultry confinement operations, forest clear-cutting or mountain-top-removal mining. Control and use of water resources--whether by agriculture for irrigation, by wildlife and recreational interests for fishing and water sports, or by increasing demand by urban populations and industries--is another cause of friction. As more of the profits from rural economies leave rural communities, enriching investors in distant places, major questions arise about the future capacity of such communities to maintain healthy, fully-functioning institutions and services.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE STATE OF THE TOWN AND COUNTRY CHURCH (USA)

A. Rural-Urban Connections

Through the great mobility and mixing of the American people, thousands of former farm

and ranch people have moved to towns and cities. Urban dwellers move to suburbs and beyond, creating the phenomenon of urban sprawl. Former rural villages find themselves being changed into bedroom communities for culturally urban people who wish to live "in the country" while enjoying the amenities of the city. And all are impacted by the same mass media and communications technology. Even as the dominant mainstream culture affects every locality, communities can still embody particular cultural expressions that distinguish them from other places and ways of life, and real differences do exist between rural and urban today--differences in the ways people live, interact and make their livings. While rural residents may be suspicious of urban agendas, urban and suburban dwellers can easily disregard rural areas as space to travel through on the way to other places, or as vacant, anonymous territory.

The church--the concept and reality of the People of God, joined in Shalom and constantly renewed by grace--provides a powerful, unifying link among individuals and communities that are in many ways distinct. The urban-rural connection within The United Methodist Church was once more self-conscious and visible than it is today, the city representing the struggles of all people to organize and achieve peaceful human interaction and the rural symbolizing the natural world, the fruitful earth. Rural Life Sunday was introduced decades ago to bring the Church together around seedtime and harvest, the creative hand of God in nature, just as other occasions reminded the whole of the church of its unity in global mission, race relations, relief for the suffering in inner city. Rural Life Sunday continues but as a shadow of its former profile.

Rebirth in God's Spirit calls for renewed attention to the rural-urban connection, not alone for the sake of rural congregations and communities but for the wholeness of the church itself, as a necessary link between the natural world and the technological culture.

Food is an excellent example of an issue that clearly connects rural and urban congregations and peoples at the start of the twenty-first century. "Give us this day our daily bread," Christians pray. The church gathers around a sacramental meal of bread and wine, around Christian fellowship suppers, and likewise is united in a desire for a safe, abundant and affordable food supply available on a daily basis to all of God's children. Many mission activities and funding programs, both local and worldwide, involve providing food, and/or the means to produce it, for the poor, the landless, and the oppressed.

How does the church react to the consolidation of power to control all "daily bread" in the hands of a half-dozen clusters of biotech, livestock, grain and food processing firms which not only control the grain, but also the global production of oilseeds and livestock? This is not only a rural issue, although it continues to have devastating impact upon family farms and rural communities.

The patenting, (ie the private ownership), of genetic stocks of seeds and livestock raise profound ethical, moral, social and theological questions, as well as economic and political ones. As resistance to the encroachment of this monopolistic system increases around the world, farmers and consumers, scientists and politicians, and congregations of many faiths in rural and urban settings are voicing their concerns about the injustices it is creating, its unsustainable nature, and the anti-democratic character of a system that allows so few to have so much power over the health and well-being of every human being.

What roles should the church play in fostering alternative food systems: Farmer's markets, food circles or subscription agriculture, typically creating direct relationships between rural producers and urban consumers? Might such alternatives result in deeper knowledge and greater understanding among people of different social and cultural realities, and also engage and challenge monopolistic forces that harm rural communities and limit the nutritional choices of urban and suburban consumers? (See **Recommendations 4,5,6,7**)

B. Connectionalism

The connectional system is a benchmark of Methodism, inextricably linking all aspects of church life. Especially on the local level, it defines the source and nature of pastoral leadership, congregational structure, expenditure of funds, and national and global mission opportunity, and also sets forth various theological, ethical and social standards toward which members and institutions strive.

United Methodists of town and country churches are well acquainted with the system and generally appreciative of its values and loyal to its Wesleyan roots. However, some pastors and laity wonder, according to the survey results, whether they and their congregations are still taken seriously within the system--by annual conferences, national boards and agencies and a legislative process (the General Conference) dominated by urban and suburban dwellers.

More than sixty-seven per cent of the congregations in the survey paid **all** of their apportionments for the last three years. Among laity in the survey, the number one way in which congregations share the gospel with the world is through support of denominational and United Methodist approved missions. (Clergy were less likely to mention this form of evangelism and outreach.)

The laity made two overwhelming appeals to the connectional system: "give us quality pastoral leadership" and "listen to us about matters affecting church life and potential in our communities." Clergy training, tenure and support are critical matters in rural churches, notably in the smaller and more isolated situations. (These issues are discussed in more detail in the section on Pastoral Leadership, below.)

Both clergy and laity would like for the town and country context to be taken into account in preparation of the content and graphics of resource materials on congregational development or educational curriculum. Town and country churches are sensitive to the fact that small numbers may result in cost penalties in ordering United Methodist materials, such as when a bulk rate applies at 20 copies and congregational x can use only 15. Many rural churches use and others would like to use the Disciple Bible Study but find the resources and the training too expensive.

The town and country congregations want to know more about where the apportionments go and would like clearer information on the ministries and programs of national boards and agencies. They want training sometimes brought to them rather than rural people always having to "to go to the city." They want a chance to be included, and heard, not with special pleading but with broad insights and commitments, in the councils and committees of annual conferences and national agencies. The Nurture-Outreach-Witness (NOW) approach to the development,

organization and evaluation of ministries has borne fruit where it has been tried. NOW is both a visioning process as well as an administrative tool.

Flexibility of administrative structure is popular in town and country charges. The surveys indicated appreciation for the 1996 General Conference action providing for a streamlined Administrative Council structure as a basis for local church organization, and a flexible "create your own suitable structure" option as well.

Such congregations are seeking help within the connection on how to relate to diverse, often new populations. Interest in bi-lingual and multi-cultural resources and ministry forms was small but measurable in the survey. Said a pastor from the Western Jurisdiction, "We are actively trying to change the perception that this is a declining, self-interested Anglo congregation. The community is becoming predominantly Hispanic and African American, but no outreach has been done." The clear implication is that the church wants to reach out but needs help in doing so. (This topic is further explored under the section on "Evangelism.")

Many pastors and lay persons responding to the survey mentioned their concern that urban-based, "liberal" leaders have moved the United Methodist Church away from its Wesleyan theological heritage. A lay woman from the South Central Jurisdiction summed up this sentiment, in saying what the annual conference could do to strengthen the local church: "Go back to the roots of our church beliefs." Yet a diversity of views on contemporary social and ethical issues confronting the United Methodist Church was also reflected, as for example, on sexual orientation. The survey produced both adamant opposition to the acceptance of same-sex relationships and appeals for acceptance of diverse lifestyles. It was clear from the survey that town and country church people take seriously the issues before the denomination and, because they take them seriously, want their voices to be heard--to be taken seriously within the United Methodist connection. (See **Recommendations 8,9,10,11**)

C. Leadership

1. Ministry of the Laity

The laity shares with clergy the responsibility of nurturing church members and carrying out evangelistic and mission outreach to the local and global communities, thereby achieving what the Book of Discipline terms the "authentic church." This requires both faith and the honing of spiritual and technical skills appropriate to various times and places.

In the days of Methodism's expansion across the United States in the nineteenth century, lay men and women in rural areas and small towns took major responsibility for Christian education, gospel witness, church administration and social outreach because the circuit riders were usually non-resident, coming only periodically to offer the Sacraments and review Christian discipleship. Such days may be returning as increasing numbers of town and country churches have nonresident pastors, or share clergy leadership, or depend upon retired or part-time pastors, or go through periods with no stipulated pastoral leader at all. (In the rural survey, 76.8 per cent of the pastors of all classifications lived in the community they serve. In the "struggling" congregations the figure was 66.7 per cent compared with 86 per cent of the "exemplary.") Lay leadership is essential to enable many town and country churches to endure.

Commitment and capacity are two characteristics of effective lay leadership and witness. Repeatedly in the survey responses laity said that they themselves need to strengthen their spiritual discipline and to achieve greater skills in ministry. The call for training is a persistent refrain of respondents, along with remarkable candor about failures to reach out to new persons and populations and a hesitancy to veer off familiar paths. Said a young African American male layman from the Northeast Jurisdiction: “We need to get the following phrases out of our heads, ‘We never did it that way before,’ and ‘We can’t.’”

Some of the rural laity hold to traditional theology and cultural forms. Some, according to the survey, are fearful that “liberal” trends will destroy the Methodist tradition. They are forthright about these anxieties. Yet a majority of the almost 1000 lay respondents in the survey are not angry; they display a tenacious commitment to the Wesleyan theological heritage and the polity of their ancestors or their choice.

In the main, the town and country lay respondents would like for pastors, district superintendents, bishops and other national church leaders to listen to them more attentively--to learn well and care more visibly about rural problems and promises, and to help them to believe more firmly in their own ability to witness to Jesus Christ. They would like to believe that the church recognizes their need for quality pastoral leadership that is well-prepared for the rural sociological and geographical contexts. (See **Recommendations 12,13,14,15**)

2. Pastoral Ministry

One of the most critical issues facing the church is the quality of pastoral leadership. Nowhere is this more acute than in town and country ministry. Many town and country churches are assigned pastors who do not come from town and country churches, do not understand town and country ministries, and are not training for or adequately supervised in town and country settings. Many seminary trained pastors are assigned town and country churches as their first appointment, and after a period of two or three years are moved to other churches before having completed their basic orientation to town and country ministry or reaching their full potential in that setting. Town and country churches are routinely training entry level pastors but often fail to receive experienced, well-trained pastors who can lead the town and country church to new levels of mission and ministry.

It is clear from survey responses that having a resident pastor in place for more than four or five years makes possible growth and vitality in rural churches. The ways in which bishops and cabinets make appointments have great impact upon these factors. The itinerant system of The United Methodist Church will not serve town and country churches well until ways are found to supply churches with pastors who are sensitive to the issues, effective in their leadership and present in the congregation long enough to make a difference.

Part of the challenge is to provide an adequate salary base for pastors so that leadership is not constantly being removed in order to supply other churches that have a stronger financial base. If annual conferences could develop a basic salary plan, longer pastorates in town and country church would be possible. With such a basic salary plan, bishops and cabinets would be enabled to make strategic appointments of effective pastoral leadership for town and country churches with particular missional needs and opportunities. Such appointments could also

interrupt patterns of short pastoral tenure that do so much harm to rural congregations and to clergy and their families.

Yet salary is not the only issue that must be addressed to strengthen pastoral ministry in town and country churches. Mentors must be found who can walk with and support pastors entering ministry in town and country churches. The spiritual life of pastors needs to be cared for through the development of covenant communities and covenant relationship among clergy, particularly local pastors who are not participants in the covenant ministry found in the Order of Elder. Until pastors in town and country churches can participate in meaningful support groups and mentoring relationships, they will continue to live in isolation without a sense of their own strengths and needs, often overcome by the feelings of doubt and despair associated with burnout.

There are significant changes in the demographic profile of clergy in town and country churches that have many implications for the future of The United Methodist Church. Over 25% of all charges in United Methodism are now supplied by local pastors and associate members, most of them in town and country churches. In some conferences the number of charges being served by pastors trained through the Course of Study now exceeds 50%. As the number of people being ordained as elders shrinks and their rate of retirement remains historically high, the number of pastors being trained through the Course of Study has increased dramatically. There now are over 2,000 such pastors being trained for pastoral ministry in The United Methodist Church.

In addition to local pastors and associate members, conferences are increasingly dependent upon ministers from other denominations quite unlike United Methodism, as well as retired clergy, bivocational pastors, and a variety of unlicensed supply pastors including lay speakers, lay missionaries, and lay preachers. Some of the increase is a result of strength in town and country churches where circuits are subdivided because of new growth and new churches are created to serve new communities. However, some of this change is a response to the weakness of the itinerant structure when faced with an insufficient supply of trained pastoral leaders. The danger is that in supplying town and country churches with pastoral leaders who are inadequately trained, supervised, and supported, the mission and ministry of town and country churches will be devalued and their potential will never be realized.

These changing demographics are forcing a change in the way the Church recruits and deploys pastors for town and country ministries. Legislation passed by General Conference in 1984 and 1996 recognizes the increased role and responsibility of local pastors. Local pastors are now clergy members of the annual conference. The Course of Study now provides an alternative to seminary preparation for full conference membership and ordination as an elder. Local pastors and associate members increasingly are being appointed to charges formerly served by elders.

Preparation for rural ministry is on the radar at most United Methodist theological seminaries but is a major emphasis at few. (Ten of the 13 United Methodist seminaries replied to Task Force inquiries about rural ministry as an component in their programs. A separate report on this topic will emerge from these responses.) Patterns of instruction and practical engagement in town and country ministry vary greatly from school to school. Only one (Saint Paul School of

Theology) has a rural ministry specialist on the faculty. Several others (Candler, Duke, Iliff, Methodist Theological School in Ohio, United Seminary in Ohio, and Wesley have regular term courses, sometimes on a biennial basis, often taught by adjunct instructors; others (Claremont, United) have interim-type courses. At still other schools (Garrett-Evangelical, Perkins, as well as several heretofore named), rural ministry figures prominently in internship and field placement programs. Garrett-Evangelical has a sustained relationship with the Wisconsin Annual Conference; Duke's extensive rural placement program benefits from the Rural Church Division of the Duke Endowment; Iliff relates to the Western Small Church/Rural Life Center, and Iliff has a relatively new rural program--including courses, internships and continuing education--made possible by a foundation grant. United Theological Seminary, Methodist Theological School in Ohio and Wesley Seminary participate in the Appalachian Ministries Educational Resource Center. Wesley Seminary assists preparation for rural ministry through its Student Pastor Track. How many students these programs reach is not known. Several seminaries are also sites of summer programs of the Course of Study. (See **Recommendations 16,17,18,19,20,21**)

3. Cooperative Ministries

The experiences of the last two-thirds of this century have shown that in many situations local churches can provide a more vital and far-reaching ministry if they join hands with neighboring congregations in a cooperative approach. The basic concept of this idea is for congregations to do together those kinds of mission and ministry that are enhanced by partnership. The faithful motive for cooperative ministry is not survival but mission.

Practitioners involved in the cooperative approach believe that cooperative ministry is the most helpful and promising way of going about ministry within the United Methodist connection. Cooperative ministry is more a style of ministry than a particular structure or organizing technique. It is a form that helps focus on both the health and the strength of the local congregation and on witness and outreach across a larger geographical area.

A study published in 1995 on rural and urban cooperative parishes reported that there were at that time approximately 729 cooperative ministries within the denomination. Some variety of cooperative parish ministries was found in 34% of the 504 districts reporting. These ventures form a strategic base for the rebirth of town and country churches to new lives of nurture, outreach and witness.

An interest in exploring cooperative ministries, and in receiving help from districts in the exploration, was mentioned by small percentages of both clergy and laity in the research for this Plan. In the Northeastern Jurisdiction Town and Country Association, many respondents mentioned cooperative ministry. (See **Recommendations 22,23,24,25,26,27,28**)

D. Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation and ongoing spiritual renewal are essential in the process of the church, its congregations and its people being "born again in every place." The survey indicates that 85 per cent of the laity and 88 per cent of the clergy (in the comparative sample) say their congregation has grown spiritually over the last five years. The results further show that town and country United Methodists have been spiritually formed by many traditional means: Sunday Schools, church camps, meaningful congregational worship, Vacation Bible Schools, revivals,

retreats, UMYF, UMW, service projects, and denominationally-produced devotional aids, and these means continue to be valued.

Newer models of formation, such as weekday children's programs, or small group ministries, are being tried in some localities and have also proven effective, sometimes in ecumenical environments. The Disciple Bible Study has become an important resource (and was used by 28 per cent of the congregations in the comparative survey) for leadership development and church renewal. The Walk to Emmaus received enthusiastic mention in the survey but also evoked some complaints as a source of conflict when participants assume superior spiritual attitudes. The spread of lay renewal programs in rural areas, such as Emmaus or the Ministry Inquiry Process (which explores the meaning of Christian vocation), requires careful planning because of distances and relatively small numbers. There is a tendency to fall back on the familiar, and changing this habit will take local, district, annual conference and general church cooperation. (See **Recommendations 29,30,31,32**)

E. Evangelism

American Methodism achieved greatness as a frontier faith. Thomas Webb and Robert Strawbridge share the honors of planting Methodism on the eastern shores in the 1760's. By 1798 John Clark preached the first Methodist sermon west of the Mississippi, at present-day Herculaneum, Missouri. As the covered wagons moved west the Methodist circuit-riding preacher was with them, or ahead of them, starting "preaching points", and using laypersons to keep the faith while he rode the circuit. Philip William Otterbein, a name indissolubly connected to the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, participated in the ordination of Methodist Francis Asbury. Together those two groups moved west, with the United Brethren starting mostly rural congregations.

Calculations suggest that for some time the groups that now make up The United Methodist Church were starting as many as two new worshiping congregations a day, year after year. But when the Pacific Ocean was reached some of the fire of enthusiasm and creativity seemed to go out of the movement, institutionalization set in, and a membership that was some eleven million in 1964 has declined to 8.4 million. Many of the churches that have been closed have been rural. (* GBGM Research office indicates General Conference Minutes show 10,293,036 at the end of 1965 and 8,499,744 at the end of 1997.)

Low energy, discouragement, and hopelessness prevail in many rural congregations, but new frontiers are appearing in the form of the new neighbors that are flooding into a considerable number of rural areas. Some of these persons include:

The ethnic labor force moving in to serve agricultural communities, Hispanic and southeast Asian workers, many work for huge corporate hog, poultry and beef operations and packing houses, or for v
Home-office professionals, millions who are finding that, with modern communications systems, they c
Commuters, who are willing to drive as much as 60 to 100 miles from a rural home to a metropolitan jo
Retirees, sizeable numbers of persons who "made it" in the city and want to return or move members amon
Seekers of Leisure and Recreation, on lakes, snow-topped mountains or in casinos or resorts, bring fast shifts in population, incomes and lifestyles.

Economic migrants, "welfare" and other low-income families that may be pushed by economic realities or may be seeking a safe, somewhat lower-cost environment in which to raise children.

Just as many inner city churches have difficulties adjusting to new populations and cultures, so do rural congregations. The idea of "new people" can be as threatening as the thought of "no people." Some rural congregations tend to be long-established, small by comparison to suburban churches, conservative, and with older members in leadership. Buildings are often simple and not adapted to today's expectations of space and utility.

Outward expressions may communicate a desire to grow, but the reality often is that the established leadership is reluctant to give way. Evangelistic efforts have often relied on "revival services" and the receiving of members from the offspring of long-time members. "Church pillars" tend to resent urban ideas of how to "do church." Many survey respondents indicated an awareness of new people and an obligation to become more inclusive; at the same time, the items mentioned as examples of "sharing the gospel" were mostly traditional in internal, especially among laity, who tended to see "mission" as financial support of denominational programs.

The problem is as old as Pentecost, and as new as tomorrow: new opportunities require new ways. Most of the examples of "sharing the gospel" mentioned in the survey were traditional, with laity tending to equate "mission" with financial support of denominational programs. At the same time, there was awareness of the challenge of evangelism on the local scene. Respondents frequently asked for help in becoming "more open to new people", "more inclusive, more caring". They especially were concerned about immigrants moving in and how to foster mutual fellowship with them. As Nicodemus surmised, being born again is not easy. (See Recommendations 33,34,35,36,37,38)

F. Community Outreach and Involvement

To thrive spiritually, grow numerically and even to survive organizationally, a church must serve its community. Any congregation that only tends the sheep already inside the fold has a loose grip on Scripture. This is a new discovery for many town and country churches and therein lies a hope for the future. The survey indicated that a significant number of "exemplary" congregations had multiple community involvements, a factor that seem to translate directly in the respondents views of how the church is viewed in the community. (Respondents from "struggling" churches saw themselves as less positively perceived as "loving and caring," but it may also be the case that strongly congregations naturally have more community involvement and, therefore, consider themselves to be more highly regarded.)

Vast majorities of the respondents clerical and lay say their churches have grown in community involvement over the last five years. Without giving too many specifics, they frequently mentioned support of community needs and, also, the sharing of church space with other community groups. Less formal research testifies to the variety and growth of town and country ministries "beyond the sanctuary walls"-- churches engaged singularly or ecumenically in community economic development, affordable housing, commercial development, social service provision, transportation, ministries of racial reconciliation and the leveraging of capital. Or, a 45-member Michigan congregation serving lunch six days a week, or a California church turning 10 acres into just the park the community needed (a space for the living, larger than the

adjoining cemetery), or a Minnesota church gardening project that drew in new ethnic population and also became an outdoor classroom for a local school, or a North Carolina church's act of faith in buying a closed school building led to new facilities for the elderly and children, or a Kansas church that spearheaded a successful effort to reopen a closed café that had served as a community meeting place, or a cooperative parish in Alabama that initiated a thermal window company.

In order to faithfully and effectively engage in such community ministries, a congregation must learn to "read" its community. Without an accurate and current picture of the community, a church may engage in projects satisfying to members but fail to address the lived realities of people. Research on both the assets and the needs of the community gives a clearer picture of who is there, including other religious and secular partners, and what is possible. Can the United Methodists work with the Baptists or the Roman Catholics in helping unemployed, or underemployed people, find living-wage work and health care? Can the church work with the county, the state or a federal agency in creating a crafts cooperative? Can the local United Methodist leaders persuade a bank to give a low interest loan to a community development corporation. Can the church set up a subsidiary to run a publicly-funded home weatherproofing project? Rural churches are doing all of those things--at least some few are.

Without correctly "reading" the community, the people of God may wander in the wilderness without a guide, or become captive to nostalgia. All of the new population groups described in the Evangelism section above (when they are present) are in need of some form of community ministry, or are potential partners in such ministry. How can the church relate to "economic migrants" for cities? How can the church recruit the skills of the active retired, the home office workers, and the vital recreation-seekers?

The community correctly can have life-given results. A small South Dakota church, slated for closure, with an attendance of only 11, took a risk. It looked around and saw a lot of children with no church and nothing to do in the summer. So, those 11 people organized a Vacation Bible School. Forty-seven children showed up, and the church is still open! (See **Recommendations 35,39,40,41,42,43,44**)

G. Children, Youth and Young Adults

The importance of children, youth and young adults to the strength and future vitality of a congregation is self-evident. Both lay and clerical respondents in the town and country survey indicated keen awareness of this fact, but all too often decried the shortage of such persons, not only in the church but also in the community as a whole. "Our membership is older" was a frequent comment, along with some laments over continuing out-migration of young people. Communities in exurbia or the metropolitan fringe, or small towns with large communities of immigrants are the most likely to have larger youthful populations than the open country, even if they may not be significantly represented in United Methodist congregations.

The mandate of the church to respond to the social and economic needs of children, youth and young adults--wherever they are--is likewise clear. Persistent rural challenges include hungry children, jobless youth and young parents, a shortage of prenatal and child-serving medical facilities, domestic violence and racial/ethnic discrimination.

While some lay and clergy in the survey identified the presence of youth and children in their churches as a current “strength,” a considerably higher proportion mentioned younger participants as a “hope” for the future. Increased participation by children and young people was the second most mentioned of 21 sign of hope by laity and third most mentioned by pastors. Not surprisingly, congregations classified as “strong” were 30 per cent more likely (82.2 per cent compared with 52.3) to have United Methodist Youth Fellowships than “struggling” churches. Sixty-six per cent of the “typical” congregations had UMYF. (Organized rural church youth groups, according to the data, are more likely to be found in the North Central and the South Central Jurisdictions, and least likely in the Western Jurisdiction).

“Assistance with children and youth ministries” was the number one suggestion of laity when asked for ideas on what the Comprehensive Plan should stress. A significant number of lay persons would also like for their districts to help support local youth works. A greater focus on children, youth and young adults for the second most mentioned local church “change” laity would like to see (this ranked lower for clergy), and large percentages of both groups would put more younger people on local church committees and administrative units. Several respondents reported changing Sunday worship to make it more appealing to young persons. A variety of sources indicate that some of the most effective rural youth outreach ministries are ecumenical, the cooperation providing the leadership capacity and the numbers of young people needed to generate popular appeal.

Some examples of outreach and social justice ministries geared particularly to children, youth and families surfaced in the surveys, and awareness of the need for more outreach was clear. There were perhaps an equal number of regrets about a paucity of concrete programs, such as after-school activities, foster grand parenting and recreation that might reach beyond the immediate church family.

All of the highly publicized social and economic realities adversely affecting children, youth and families are found in town and country settings--realities such as drug/alcohol abuse, school violence, the impact of the electronic media and technology and weakened family structures. Advice from a sixty-six year old Texas laywoman might well be heeded by the whole Church: “We must put our message in a form young people can relate to. We must speak their language and provide a way for them to actively participate...Our younger generation is geared to a more active involvement. We are a more visual, hands on society. The message is the same; the way we convey it needs to change.” (See **Recommendations 45,46,47,48,49**)

H. Rural Mission Human/Program Resources

Persons, often individuals, form and carry out mission--through prayer, presence, gifts and action. The initiative of individuals and small groups is especially important in town and country settings with few professionally-staffed institutions look after spiritual and material needs. Among these essential persons are lay mission personnel.

The General Board of Global Ministries has historically assigned mission workers to town and country areas. From its inception in the mid-1920's until 1970, Rural Workers (now called Church and Community Workers) were placed in disenfranchised rural areas to provide leadership development and programming. Once there were over one hundred workers; there are now fewer than fifty, with about half of those assigned to urban settings and specialized

ministries beyond the local church.

Deaconesses, professional lay women commissioned to lifetime service, often serve in rural ministries, as do some (short-term) US2's in the program designed primarily for young adults.

The Rural Chaplains are a newly-formed special type of mission personnel (certified but not assigned by the Board) for rural communities. These are clergy and laity who sense the call from God to work with town and rural individuals, families, churches, churches and communities in responding to issues of justice, liberation, inclusiveness.

Numerous volunteers related to the general agencies, jurisdictional and annual conferences provide services in town and rural churches and communities that assist with the elimination of conditions that threaten the health and safety of individuals and families. Especially significant in rural congregations is the mission experience gained by Volunteers in Mission, who perform tremendous service in fields around the globe, while broadening perspectives on mission for both themselves and their congregations.

The Parish Nurse, or health ministries concept utilizes the gifts and skills of medically trained persons already present in local congregations to provide effective basic care and preventative health services to aging constituencies and undeserved populations of all ages.

Three Rural Training Centers sponsored by The United Methodist Church provide human resources for the benefit of town and country ministries. The Hinton Rural Life Center, the Heartland Network for Town and Rural Ministries, and the Western Small Church/Rural Life Center offer program and consulting resources to clergy and laity across the nation, as well as in their own regions.

The General Board of Discipleship and General Board of Higher Education and Ministry provide resources and consulting services for churches of small membership, many of which are in town and country areas. All general agencies attempt to be responsive to requests for all congregations. (See Recommendations 50,51,52,53,54)

I. Financial Resources

The financial resources available to any congregation depend upon the commitment and resources of its members, its location, and the global and local financial situation. The closing decade of the twentieth century has been one of an usually strong economy in the United States, but the expansion of wealth has neither affected every area or population group in a positive way nor necessarily translated into prosperity for town and country congregations and cooperative parishes. In fact, in many areas, the prices paid for basic commodities of food, fiber and minerals have been severely depressed, creating economic distress for the producers.

Generally speaking, rural people have been positively impacted by the low unemployment and low inflation of the 1990s, though it must be noted that low unemployment does not translate into prosperity. For example, in Appalachia, while not reaching the national

averages, employment and personal disposal income grew each year between 1989 and 1998, according to the Appalachian Regional Commission, an economic development agency sponsored by governors of Appalachian states. Still, many economically depressed counties exist in that large region, which has thousands of small town and rural United Methodist churches. Similar patterns can be found in the rural Midwest, Southwest and Rocky Mountain regions.

Many town and country congregations are economically stressed, even when the local economy may be thriving, because they are small or may have a majority of members on fixed incomes. While 66 per cent of the churches in the survey have paid apportionments in full for the last three years, some have struggled to do so and wonder how long the pattern can continue. In the survey, 52.3 per cent of the “struggling” congregations paid in full for three years; as did 66 per cent of the “typical” and 82 percent of the “exemplary.”

Some calls for the lowering of apportionments were made by survey respondents; more common were questions about the use of the money paid, and interest in how the church as a whole might better use its financial means. An equitable salary system to assure “quality leadership” for **all** churches carrying the United Methodist name also received strong support. (The payment of just salaries to pastors in ethnic annual conferences is an issue of ongoing importance touching many town and country churches.) Furthermore, some respondents think that rural churches, especially “their” churches, are overlooked when funds are distributed for church development and the upgrading of building facilities.

How creative are town and country churches in raising and attracting financial resources? Many traditional small town and rural ways of outside fund-raising were mentioned, techniques such as suppers and bazaars. Few responses indicated the use of non-traditional sources for community outreach, especially public (tax supported) corporate initiatives that allow religious organizations, or subsidiaries, to conduct programs of general community benefit. More anecdotal information suggests that churches, rural and urban, of many denominations have availed themselves of federal and state funds usable for affordable housing, workforce development and small enterprise development. Such funds do not pay the preacher, but they can, where the technical capacity exists, bring new, positive visibility to congregations.

Likewise, ecumenical collaboration is a viable means of extending and increasing all forms of ministry--evangelistic, educational and community--in small churches in town and country settings. (See **Recommendations 55,56,57,58**)

J. Communication

Isolation and distance from United Methodist structures have historically been serious issues for some town and country congregations. New communications technologies – many of which were not readily available even a decade ago can now reduce problems of access that isolation and distance create for some rural churches and communities. Computers, the Internet, e-mail, cable television, radio and satellites--just to name a few means of communication --offer many rural churches exciting and increasingly effective opportunities to be connected to persons in their immediate communities as well as around the globe, strengthening the United Methodist Connection. These technologies can richly supplement the human contact more typical of town and country churches.

Rural congregations seeking information can transmit questions and needs instantaneously to other structures within The United Methodist Church via electronic mail, facsimile and the Internet. And conversely, districts, annual conferences and general agencies can now deliver resources and information instantaneously to town and country churches via those same channels. United Methodist structures can assist rural ministry by providing needed resources and by using new technologies to “listen” to this vital constituency within the denomination.

Congregations who want to know more about Christian education, age level ministries or music and worship can now dialogue with other congregations through denominational and ecumenical chat rooms. Pastors who serve in rural settings who want to participate in continuing education can register for distance learning opportunities offered by colleges, seminaries and general agencies. By making a financial investment in computer equipment that is minimal compared to travel costs, rural pastors and churches can have access to resources for such areas as worship, devotional life, Christian Education, mission development and preaching to assist them in developing new or enhancing existing ministries.

Radio and television—which have been vital communications tools for decades--can provide a strategic and cost effective evangelistic tool for rural congregations. Toward that end, United Methodist Communications offers pre-recorded radio and television spots and programs that can be customized for use by rural churches. (See **Recommendations 59,60**)

**TASK FORCE ON NATIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FOR TOWN AND COUNTRY MINISTRY**

**Ms. Evelyn Banks, Lay, African American, Church and Community Worker
Moro, Arkansas**

**Ms. Erin Carroll, Lay, Anglo, Youth, College Student
Stewart, Ohio**

**Mr. Pete Gomez, Lay, Hispanic, Retired Public School Administrator
Española, New Mexico**

**Ms. Judith B. Heffernan, Lay, Anglo, Rural Sociologist and Researcher, Director of the
Heartland Network for Town and Rural Ministries, Task Force Secretary
Rochport, Missouri**

**Ms. Judith A. Hill, Anglo, Conference United Methodist Women President, Task Force
Chairperson
Joes, Colorado**

**Rev. Edward A. Kail, Clergy, Anglo, Chair of Town and Country Ministries, Saint Paul
School of Theology
Kansas City, Missouri**

**Mr. Gary Locklear, Lay, Native American, District Chairperson of Cooperative Ministries,
Pembroke, North Carolina**

**Rev. Sharon Schwab, Clergy, Conference Staff
Worthington, PA**

**Rev. Mel West, Clergy, Anglo, Field Staff and *Bulletin* Editor, United Methodist Rural
Fellowship
Columbia, Missouri**

**Dr. Gladys L Campbell, Lay, Anglo, Deaconess, Town and Country Ministries Staff, General
Board of
Global Ministries
New York, New York**

**Rev. Elliott Wright, Clergy, Anglo, Consultant with General Board of Global Ministries
New York, New York**

**Ms. Julia Kuhn-Wallace, Lay, Anglo, Small Membership Church and Shared Ministries Staff,
General Board of Discipleship
Nashville, Tennessee**

**Dr. Robert Kohler, Clergy, Anglo, Staff for Division of Elders and Local Pastors, Board of Higher Education and Ministry
Nashville, Tennessee**

**Ms. Newtonia Coleman, Lay, African American, United Methodist Communications Staff
Nashville, Tennessee**

**Mr. Mark Harrison, Lay, African American, General Board of Church and Society Staff
Washington, D.C.**

**Ms. Constance Nelson Barnes, Lay, African American, General Commission on Religion and Race Staff
Washington, D.C.**