



PURPOSE

The members of the Steering Committee that has been charged with the responsibility to plan and implement this venture in theological education and leadership formation believe that the need for a “summer intensive” in Wesleyan studies—to be called the Wesleyan Connexion Project—is rooted in the church’s mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. As denominational leaders have candidly stated, “reform of the church and the nations and the spread of Scriptural holiness across the lands remains an unfulfilled vision” for the 21st century heirs of John Wesley and “the people called Methodists” (see the 2003 foundation document, “A Wesleyan Vision for Theological Education and Leadership Formation for the 21st Century,” available at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry Web site). It is important to state this affirmation at the outset lest this effort be misconstrued as serving other ends and purposes.

In that same document, members of the Council of Bishops and selected deans and presidents of United Methodist seminaries stated the need for new collaborations to meet such challenges. As the

authors of “A Wesleyan Vision” also observed, “Clear vision and missional focus require leaders who know Scripture and tradition.” We believe that the Wesleyan Connexion Project offers one way for this annual conference and this church-related university to respond to the need that has been identified for “new and renewed connections in the church that support theological education and leadership formation.” Namely, it is a new collaboration between the South Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church and the University of Indianapolis for purposes of theological education and leadership formation.

As such, the Wesleyan Connexion Project supplements already existing curricular programs in theological education, and it is intended to assist the annual conference with the leadership formation of persons who are seeking ordination. We also know that this intervention does not address all the ways that the witness of the United Methodist Church needs to be strengthened as “a sign, foretaste, and instrument of God’s reign in the world,” but we also trust that this endeavor can serve as a source of encouragement to the participants as well as to those clergy and laity who support them in their preparation for service in the name of Jesus Christ.

During the “pilot project” phase of development (2006–2008), the leadership formation model being developed by Andy Kinsey will be tested with twenty ministers in training. We hope that by the time we are ready to enroll a second cohort of candidates for ministry that we will be in a position to expand this venture to include all persons who are candidates for ordained ministry in the Indiana Area of the United Methodist Church. In the meantime, we are committed to fostering excellence in ministry through the Wesleyan Connexion Project.

Fortunately, we are launching this initiative at a time when clergy from various Christian traditions are relearning how to articulate what it means to embody excellence in ministry. See, for example, the book *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* by L. Gregory Jones and Kevin Armstrong (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006). As indicated by the parenthetical references in the following list of aims and objectives, the Steering Committee members of the Wesleyan Connexion Project (WCP) have found this book to be helpful in spelling out the vision that informs this venture.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE WESLEYAN CONNEXION PROJECT

- **Leadership Formation:** This pilot project enables the creation of a time and space in which participants will have the opportunity to rediscover and be enriched by our Wesleyan heritage of doctrines and practices as they prepare to offer themselves in leadership as part of the mission of the United Methodist Church.
- **Collaboration:** This collaboration between the Board of Ministry of the South Indiana Conference of the United Methodist Church and

the University of Indianapolis is intended to strengthen preparation for ministry for those persons who are certified candidates for ordained ministry in the SIC UMC.

- **Supplemental:** The WCP is not intended to replace seminary education but rather to serve as a supplement to already existing programs of theological education that are administered by accredited seminaries near and far.
- **Mentoring:** The WCP makes it possible for leaders in the annual conference to actively mentor a cadre of elders to be. By lingering “alongside” (Jones & Armstrong) persons whom God has called into service, we foster the kind of ethos of encouragement and excellence that also will strengthen the South Indiana Conference as a whole.
- **Holy Friendships:** The WCP provides a limited but significant opportunity for candidates for ministry to begin to form “holy friendships” (Jones & Armstrong) with fellow candidates for ministry in their particular cohort as well as colleagues with longer tenure in the annual conference. We trust that this venture will help them to form the kinds of habits and relationships conducive to sustaining friendships with fellow clergy across their lifetimes.
- **New Partnerships:** The linkage that we are creating can be seen as part of the reconfiguration of theological education that is taking place during the first decade of the 21st century. As such, the WCP can be regarded of as one of the ways that annual conferences, seminaries and church-related universities are engaged in the process of “raising up and letting go” (Jones & Armstrong) in faithfulness to God.

For more information, please contact the Dean of the Wesleyan Connexion Project:

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