

Paper Proposal for the IAMS 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

Title: "The Worldwide Nature of The United Methodist Church: A Missiological Reflection"

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Study Group Session: Theology of Mission

The United Methodist Church and its predecessors have long grappled with their worldwide nature and structure. Since almost the beginning of the twentieth century, there have been efforts to address their worldwide connection through various study commissions and General Conference deliberations. However, there have only been slow, reluctant, and modest modifications and no integral changes in the worldwide structure of the Methodist Church. The United Methodists in the U.S. would need to take a hard look at themselves and ask why such has been the case. They would need to see whether they might not have failed to recognize and confront neocolonial paternalism that still lingers within their understanding and practice of mission.

The most focused and sustained study on the global structure of the Methodist Church was undertaken by the Commission on the Structure of Methodism Overseas—also known as COSMOS—in the 1960s, during which twenty-eight churches in Latin America and Asia became autonomous. The COSMOS reports and the responses are worth revisiting and probing, as their critical reflections on the relationship between the U.S. Methodist Church and the Methodist churches in other parts of the world were perceptive and insightful, and are still relevant to the current discussion. This paper intends to examine the issues of power and dependency in relation to mission. It will explore and investigate the reports of COSMOS, whose administrative records are now kept at the United Methodist Archives and History Center at Drew University, regarding the issues of connectionalism, autonomy, and interdependence.