**Executive Summary**

Global Wesleyan Alliance, Missions Group—March 9-10, 2017—Fishers, Indiana

The 2017 meeting of the missions leaders was hosted by Dennis Jackson, of Global Partners, the missions organization of the Wesleyan Church. Due to some health issues, Dr. Ronald Duncan was not able to be present and facilitate the group’s discussion. And Dennis Jackson was called at the last minute into a series of meetings by the general superintendent of the Wesleyan Church. Dennis asked Stephen Lewis, associate director of Global Strategy for Church of God Ministries, to step in and facilitate.

Those in attendance included Dennis Jackson, as he was able, and his COO, Ian Swyers; Stephen Lewis, of the Church of God (Anderson); William Walker, of the Evangelical Methodist Church; Mark Surbrook, of the Church of God (Holiness); Tami Swymeler, of the Missionary Church; David Lattimer, of the Churches of Christ in Christian Union; Deb Miller, of the Free Methodist Church; Gary Briden, of the Independent Methodist Church. Benjamin Shular, of the Church of God (Anderson), and Verne Ward, of the Nazarene Church, had both expected to attend, but last-minute events kept them elsewhere.

One of the key reasons for such a meeting continues to be the encouragement of members in a like-minded community, people who understand you and the challenges you face; the candid discussion of problems and challenges that can occur in such a safe, noncompetitive space; the sharing of knowledge and proven resources; and the encouragement that comes from talking with those on similar paths. All in attendance expressed appreciation for this kind of space to discuss missions and the challenges faced. The meetings opened with a round of introductions, which included the sharing of a highlight and of a challenge from the past year by each person. Each of these organizations is pursuing different ministries, different approaches, and their individual experience provided valued input to one another.

After a brief discussion, it was clear that the single issue demanding attention was that of fundraising and of developing donors. So deep and broad is this issue that the entire Thursday afternoon was devoted to its discussion after introductions. While the groups represented ranged from quite small to quite large, changes in American culture and in the American church are challenging current approaches to fundraising and donor development. All of those present, regardless of denominational model, provided witness to a significant trend: the increasing ascendance of individual donors and the slow decline of church giving to missions, both to missionaries and to projects. And most noted that the drop in church giving is partially due to increased competition from outside the denominational framework. A second important trend affecting this is the desire of donors to give directly to projects they care about rather than to a general missions budget line, whether that’s within the local church or within a missions organization. A third trend is that of a change in giving patterns caused by a generational gap, with significant differences between older and younger donors. A fourth trend, particularly among younger donors, is to give single-time gifts rather than commit to a recurring gift. And a fifth trend is the way that changes in technology and social media are changing the donation patterns, particularly the use of online giving and social media.

The experience of these missions organizations is that no one strategy to fundraising and donor development, of any kind, works; rather, they must tailor a variety of strategies for different audiences and different places. The changing trends also mean that none of these organization can rest, but they must remain alert and aware of the changes and be willing and able to be flexible. Increasingly, these organizations are offering missionaries two types of training: one for approaching individuals and one for approaching churches. And it’s increasingly apparent to many that ongoing training is required to address the ever-changing environment.

A sub-topic of the donor discussion focused on how to build relationships with larger churches, many of which has weaker ties to the denomination/movement and don’t see a need for working with missions organizations. This discussion was particularly relevant to the Free Methodists, the Missionary Church, the Wesleyan Church, and the Church of God (Anderson).

Other topics of discussion included prayer initiatives, medical missions, student debt and strategies for alleviating this among missionaries, the changing roles of short-term mission teams, and vetted resources (print, online, and technological).

With the changing nature of the current church and cultural environments, none of these issues is going to go away. The issues of fundraising, trends, and best practices will continue to be one for discussion. One of the challenges that was briefly touched on and which will be one for ongoing discussion is the growing use of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural missions teams and the challenges those pose, as well as the changing nature of Western missions as the indigenous church increasingly carries out the work of missions.

THE DATE FOR 2018 MISSION DIRECTORS MEETING IS March 22-23 at The Missionary Church headquarters in Ft. Wayne, Indiana.