

## **The History of the INTER-ETHNIC STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT GROUP (IESDG)**

In 1983 The United Methodist Church was completing two quadrennia of the Missional Priority of Developing and Strengthening the Ethnic Minority Local Church. The General Council on Ministries (GCOM), which had the responsibility to study and recommend to the General Conference Missional Priorities and Special Programs, was formulating a new missional priority of "Church Alive". This priority would focus on new church development, while keeping ethnic ministries as a major component.

Several of the general agency staff were skeptical whether it would be possible to maintain an emphasis on the development and strengthening of ethnic ministries if General Conference approved a new missional priority. It had taken the church almost 8 years to recognize EMLC as a denominational priority, and would it get lost in the shift.

In November 1983 the racial/ethnic caucus chairs and executive directors, along with general program agency staff, met at Mount Alverno Retreat Center near San Francisco. They decided to petition General Conference to continue the Ethnic Minority Local Church as the denomination's Missional Priority. This unprecedented effort to bring together the four national racial/ethnic caucuses was a bold, but risky step. If they failed, they could alienate not only the GCOM, but also others who were promoting church growth and the primary need of the church. Also, there were several that felt that after eight years, it was time to use another strategy to strengthen racial/ethnic ministries.

The four racial/ethnic caucuses put forth "Developing and Strengthening the Ethnic Minority Local Church for Witness and Mission" as an alternative Missional Priority. It would require the racial/ethnic caucuses *on their own* to write, print, and distribute their proposal to the General Conference Delegates. The Inter-Ethnic Strategy Development Group (IESDG) was created to put forth the EMLC Missional Priority. Dr. Roy I. Sano was the primary writer of the document. Several general agencies were supportive of the racial/ethnic caucus efforts.

At the 1984 General Conference, the legislative committee recommended Church Alive as the Missional Priority. The EMLC Missional Priority petition became the minority report to the plenary session. After vigorous debate the vote was taken. The vote was so close that the presiding bishop could not determine which side prevailed. He called for a standing count vote (this is before electronic voting). When it was totaled, there were more votes than there were delegates. A third vote was taken. Developing and Strengthening the Ethnic Minority Local Church for Witness and Mission was adopted at the Missional Priority.

This was a clear indication of the strength and influence of the racial/ethnic caucuses to move the General Conference to continue the EMLC Missional Priority. The General Conference also approved a resolution from the General Commission on Religion and Race to sponsor a national Convocation on Racism and Convocations on Racism in each of the five jurisdictions.

The IESDG continued following General Conference and was active in the implementation of the Missional Priority through membership on the Missional Priority Coordinating Committee.

The work of the MPCC and the EMLC Missional Priority was funded through the Missional Priority Fund apportionment.

At the beginning of the 1992 quadrennium, the IESDG adopted a purpose statement with eleven elements:

1. To build solidarity among racial-ethnic minority groups in The United Methodist Church.
2. To provide the vision and strategy for inter-ethnic cooperative efforts within The United Methodist Church.
3. To discuss, interact, reach for ethnic concerns and reach consensus as a group for empowerment and ministry of all ethnics in the Church.
4. To develop strategies for empowerment of racial/ethnic minority persons.
5. To advocate for racial/ethnic staff in all levels of the Church structure.
6. To resource and advocate to each other and church.
7. To work together orchestrating ethnic minority concerns and ministries with The United Methodist Church.
8. To maintain racial/ethnic agenda in front of the Church.
9. To act as a clearinghouse for proposals. To be a forum for discussion of issues pertinent to each group.
10. To strategize toward the renewal of The UMC in recognition of the gifts of racial/ethnic minority persons.
11. To advocate for justice ministries within the Church and the world.

Beginning in 1984, through the IESDG the racial/ethnic caucuses have sent monitors/observers to each General Conference to advocate for the needs and concerns of racial/ethnic persons and ministries. It has provided a practical learning and training experience for up and coming racial/ethnic leaders. The general agencies have provided funds to enable this educational experience.

We care passionately about the future of our church. We want The United Methodist Church to grow and flourish. In order to do so requires that ministry be designed to meet the growing challenges and serve growing populations.

Changing demographic characteristics in the United States clearly show the tremendous growth of racial ethnic persons, especially younger persons and families. Racial ethnic communities offer the greatest opportunity for new ministries. At the same time this opportunity poses challenges.

- Three out of every four new persons in the United States are racial ethnic persons. Although the growth varies by region, every jurisdiction will see an increase of racial ethnic populations in the next 20 years.
  - New immigrants have heard about the UMC through the wonderful mission work around the globe and through the work of UMCOR. The UMC has the reputation as a church that provides care and shelter. Many turn to the United Methodist Church for help and support as they navigate through an often confusing and sometimes strange social context.
  - Many leaders across the globe have received educational advancement through United Methodist mission schools, our colleges and universities. The United Methodist Church has offered scholarships and training to help develop new leaders.
  - Racial ethnic communities are sprouting up in previously “all-white” communities, so that virtually every US annual conference has a presence of racial ethnic groups within their boundaries. Many of these communities are not equipped to relate to these new populations.
  - Many racial ethnic persons seek gathering places to practice their cultural traditions and meet their spiritual and social needs. Churches are often called to serve as a gathering place, a place to belong.
  - Many racial ethnic communities wish to teach cultural ways to their children and grandchildren to help them gain a self identity and to have an appreciation of their cultural heritage.
  - The racial ethnic caucuses and their leaders stand ready to help the church to minister to this growing population with relevant ministry programs and services that will grow the church and empower new leaders.
- The history of the United Methodist Church and its predecessors has long been engaged in ministry with diverse populations in a variety of settings. The United Methodist Church organized settlement houses, mission outposts, and ministries which sought to reach these persons. As a result ethnic and language congregations grew and flourished.
  - In the past our church sent missionaries out into the world to evangelize and bring new believers into the church. Today the world has now come to our doorstep. It affords an opportunity for the UMC to be engaged in ministry with our neighbors around us.
  - Racial ethnic congregations provide social and spiritual care in a context which many of these persons can feel welcomed and appreciated. Worship comes alive when in a familiar cultural context. Youth and children are guided spiritually while affirming their own culture and traditions. Families are brought together through prayer, Bible study, worship, and through nurturing activities that affirm the individual as well as the group.
  - Five indigenously created ethnic plans have been overwhelmingly and repeatedly affirmed by the General Conference as a way of serving the needs of racial ethnic people:
    - National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry
    - Strengthening the Black Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century
    - United Methodist Council on Korean American Ministries
    - Asian American Language Ministry
    - Native American Comprehensive Plan

These five plans have advanced ministry by starting new congregations and strengthening existing ones. They have extended our reach into new communities.