

action and give major attention to their congregations, using the guidance of these criteria and recommendations, major steps will be taken in helping every congregation mature in service to our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **VI. Congregational Disagreement with Annual Conference Decisions**

Annual Conference 2004 approved the report of a study committee assigned to examine a query asking how “congregations can disagree with Annual Conference decisions yet remain, as much as possible, in unbroken fellowship with their sister congregations, including how District Boards should respond in these situations.” *(Footnote)* The paper needs to be read in its entirety to get the full background and impact of the report. The following is the section giving guidance to the district for its response to disagreeing congregations.

There is an expectation that within the context of ongoing district ministries and congregational relationships, awareness of disagreement with a specific Annual Conference action might emerge early on. District leadership should anticipate potential congregational disagreement with any particular Annual Conference action before receiving official notice in the form of a letter from the congregation, and review district procedures for processing congregational disagreements. Once official notice is received, the district is encouraged to review the matter and determine a response as soon as possible. Response measures might be to:

- send a letter of response from the district executive, the district board chair, board commission chair, district Standing Committee member, or some other appropriate individual;
- schedule a visit to the congregation for respectful dialog, discussion, and interpretation;
- appoint a group or committee to meet with the congregation to discuss the disagreement;
- utilize the skills of the district Shalom Team and other reconciliation workers to give guidance and facilitate dialog;
- call for a day of prayer and fasting to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and for appropriate spiritual conduct;
- facilitate a forum at which the congregation in disagreement might present its position or understanding;
- consult with resource persons outside the district, including mediation leaders, On Earth Peace staff members, General Board members, Annual

Conference officers, Annual Conference Council members, and others;

bring the matter to the district conference only if all attempts at reconciliation have proven unsuccessful or unsatisfactory, and if the issue is such that it represents a threat to the overall unity and effective ministry of the district. Specific recommendations to the district conference might include

1. a statement acknowledging that the congregation in question is “out of harmony” with the denomination on the particular issue, but remains in support and in fellowship with the district and Annual Conference;
2. a call to prayer for all congregations within the district seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit regarding the issue, and seeking a spiritual anointing that would express love, tolerance and patience (Col. 3:12) rather than judgment and avoidance.

Each district is encouraged to put in place framework for processing a congregational disagreement with an Annual Conference action, in keeping with these suggestions. The process should be flexible enough to allow for the wide variations of each case, yet specific enough that it has accountability and direction. Each district should establish such a process prior to the recognition of the need for said process. The goal of the district response process should be to help the congregation move to an understanding of the Annual Conference action and willingness to support the action, or at least a willingness to refrain from taking any action that would be interpreted as being defiant or insubordinate. If this goal is unattainable and there is a lack of reconciliation, an acknowledgment should be made that the congregation continues supporting the larger church in other aspects of its life while disagreeing with Annual Conference in the particular matter. It is expected that reconciliation attempts will continue.

Finally, within our current polity (*footnote*), Standing Committee continues to serve as the appeals body. Any decisions that is made by a district board or a district conference can be appealed to the Standing Committee, and the congregation in disagreement retains that right. The decision of Standing Committee is final.