

Welcome Remarks to Assistants to the Bishops

By the Rev. Dr. Liberato Bautista

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Good morning, friends and colleagues.

On behalf of Bishop Julius Trimble, General Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society, I warmly welcome you to the United Methodist Building—a historic landmark in United Methodism. Built in 1923, this building represents our Church's dedication to justice, peace, and public witness. It is more than just bricks and mortar; it stands as a living symbol of our presence in the public square, our engagement with the world, and our commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I also extend my greetings as the Assistant Secretary-General for United Nations and International Affairs. My office is at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York. That building, built in 1963 under the leadership of Church and Society, is also a bold statement of our Church's commitment to global engagement.

Both the UMB and the CCUN are located near symbols of power—UMB on Capitol Hill and CCUN directly across from the UN headquarters. Their locations enable our church to engage in democratic discourse in the public square, aiming to contribute to the realization of peace with justice, human dignity and human rights, sustainable development, and the rule of law under democratic precepts.

Both UMB and CCUN serve as daily reminders that our faith isn't limited to churches—it belongs in places of power, in the streets of activism, and in the conversations shaping our shared future.

In fact, both structures have chapels that have seen historic events unfold and influence the moral direction of nations and peoples.

It is a privilege to be with you today, as those who serve alongside our bishops—as trusted advisors, strategic thinkers, and faithful stewards of their leadership.

You are more than assistants. You are essential connectors in the body of Christ, linking the episcopacy to the wider Church, including its program agencies, such as the General Board of Church and Society.

This morning, I am pleased to be joined by my colleagues, The Rev. Camille Henderson-Edwards. At Church and Society, we are called to be a prophetic voice in the world—demonstrating through advocacy programs and organizing efforts how we can live out our faith, seek justice, and pursue peace, even in a war-weary world, a world in surplus of fear and in deficit of hope.

Under the leadership of Bishop Trimble, GBCS has forged strategic partnerships, most recently an MOU with Africa University and a Co-Programming Agreement with the Philippines Central Conference-Board of Church and Society. These strategic partnerships are supported by timely resources produced by our communications colleagues.

Our work is deeply connected and thrives on relationships, especially with those who support and resource our bishops. We are grateful for your partnership as we continue this important journey.

You, as assistants, are crucial to this connection. You help make sure that the bishops' leadership is not only well-organized but also spiritually rooted and socially engaged. You support turning vision into action and linking the Church's teaching office with its justice ministries.

The bishops of our Church are entrusted with overseeing both the spiritual and temporal interests of the denomination. They serve as teachers of the faith, general superintendents of the connection, and prophetic witnesses

advocating for justice and unity. However, they do not carry out these duties alone; you are their partners in this sacred endeavor.

Two of the most powerful tools at our disposal are the United Methodist Social Principles and the Book of Resolutions. Their development, interpretation, and implementation are essential duties of the General Board of Church and Society, serving as vital resources for the entire Church as we fulfil our role as the international public policy and social justice agency of our church.

These documents are much more than a compendium of statements of belief—they embody a prayerful and studied dialogue of faith and practice, grounded in sound biblical and theological foundations. They articulate the Church’s ethical commitments and its prophetic voice on issues of justice, peace, human dignity, and so much more.

The Social Principles offer a framework for teaching and moral guidance, while the Book of Resolutions offers detailed positions and concrete steps on urgent social concerns.

Both are intended to be taught, preached, and lived out. They are indispensable in equipping our bishops, for their teaching office and their role as general superintendents, ensuring that the Church’s witness remains both faithful and transformative in the world.

You can help ensure that these principles and resolutions go beyond just denominational documents or conference sessions. You can aid in their integration into the daily practices of episcopal leadership—guiding decisions, setting priorities, and inspiring action.

Additionally, you can support bishops in applying these principles in local contexts, allowing them to connect with the realities of their communities while staying true to their foundational ties to our global network.

We are experiencing a time of profound change, in our church and in the world. The Church is being encouraged to grow—not away from its core

values, but even more into its true purpose. Although we are a global community, we also treasure our local roots. The exciting challenge—and opportunity—is to embrace both aspects fully. To build connections not just through structure but through shared spirit. To celebrate the diversity of our different contexts while remaining united in our commitments to justice, compassion, and grace.

This is where your role truly shines. You gently guide bishops as they navigate the rich tapestry of ministry across diverse cultures, languages, and political landscapes—an organizational culture we need even more as we move into contextual connectionalism.

Here's an important truth: our global connection reflects the interconnected world in which we live. The United Methodist Church is a worldwide community by choice and purpose. It's actively working to define what being a worldwide church truly means today.

This sense of globality is unfolding amidst rapid globalization and extraordinary changes across nearly every aspect of our lives. You, as assistants, play a vital role in helping bishops navigate this reality—making sure our global structure isn't just about governance, but also a vibrant expression of our mission and ministry that beautifully responds to the challenges and opportunities of our time.

The international nature of The United Methodist Church represents both a mandate and an aspiration. It constitutes both a theological assertion and a structural reality.

We are not merely a denomination rooted in the United States with international extensions; instead, we are a global connectional church, called to bear witness to Jesus Christ in every corner of the world.

This global outlook is not solely geographic—it encompasses perspective, influence, and how we perceive and interact with the world.

In this interconnected world, where local and global dynamics are intertwined, your role assumes increased strategic importance. You assist bishops in understanding and responding to this simultaneity. You facilitate their recognition of how local ministries are influenced by global forces and how global commitments must be rooted in local realities.

Globality is both a viewpoint and an organizing principle. It influences how we understand our mission, engage diverse audiences, and act in solidarity across borders. It challenges us to move beyond narrowness and nationalism, and to adopt a vision of the Church that is ecumenical, inclusive, and responsive to the complexities of our time and world.

You play a vital role in assisting bishops to connect with program agencies like GBCS, whose efforts include international advocacy, multilateral engagement, and grassroots mobilization. Your support helps ensure that the Church's prophetic witness is not only heard in influential circles but also deeply grounded in the everyday experiences of United Methodists worldwide.

Let us walk together—General Agencies and Episcopal Offices, bishops and their assistants, congregations and communities—to ensure that our Church is not only relevant but also transformative in its varied contexts.

Let us be the Church that the world needs: one rooted in grace, propelled by justice, and receptive to the Holy Spirit's call to transform our church and society.

Thank you for your ministry, partnership, and for helping our bishops lead with courage, clarity, and compassion in a world that is both local and global, broken and beloved.