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Key Verse:
Defend the weak and the fatherless;
    uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.
Rescue the weak and the needy;
    deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

Psalm 82:3-4

Psalm 82 is a plea for justice; God is reproving those who hold power for not ruling justly and failing to care for the defenseless in their charge. In this psalm, God has called a divine council to judge those who have not judged justly and who have not cared for the defenseless. This is considered a psalm of Asaph and as such, this psalm may have been sung. We too are called to defend the weak and the needy.¹

Questions:

♥ As a single individual, how can you “Rescue the weak and the needy”?

♥ Read Psalm 82 in its entirety (8 verses). Will rulers or people in authority be held to a higher standard?

♥ What are some ways that you as an ordinary person can “uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed”

¹ Based on the study notes for Psalm 82 from The New Interpreter’s Study Bible, New Revised Standard Version.
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The key idea for this week is “I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to people in need.” But what does that mean for us as United Methodists. The articles below begin with a section called “How We Serve” which contains the four areas of ministry focus which have been around since 2008. In particular, we will look at two of these four areas.

How We Serve

United Methodists continue to heed the lessons John Wesley taught his followers: to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed; being a compassionate presence, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel.

We achieve this goal by serving throughout the world in different ways. In 2008, church leadership designated four areas of ministry focus for all levels of the church. The Four Areas of Focus are:

- Ministering with the Poor
- Improving Global Health
- Growing Vital Churches
- Developing Christian Leaders

The church also has always been deeply committed to disaster relief and advocacy efforts. It is part of our Wesleyan DNA. All of these efforts to serve God also serve our neighbors and fulfill our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Questions:

- Read Matthew 25:31-46. How is this passage a model for how we serve?
- Can you think of recent examples where the United Methodist Church has provided assistance through disaster relief or advocacy efforts?

http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve
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In particular, let’s look at the following two sections: Ministering with the Poor and Improving Global Health to see how the United Methodist Church is called to action through compassion.

Engaging in Ministry with the Poor

Christ calls us to be in ministry with the poor and marginalized. Our emphasis is on “with” – standing with those who are regarded as “the least of these,” listening to them, understanding their needs and aspirations, and working with them to achieve their goals. It also means addressing the causes of poverty and responding in ways that lift up individuals and communities. United Methodists believe working side by side with those striving to improve their situation is more effective long term than top-down charity.

Questions:

- Think about a mission trip that you have taken in your past. What did you find most fulfilling?
  - Did the trip emphasize the “with” - standing with those who are regarded as “the least of these,” listening to them, understanding their needs and aspirations, and working with them to achieve their goals?

- How can future mission activities improve opportunities to come alongside the individuals you are ministering to?

The following information comes from the Ministry with the Poor website found at http://www.ministrywith.org/index2.html. This website is an interactive and connectional space to share news, stories, best-practices, and a range of historical,

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3 http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/four-areas-of-focus-overview
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educational, and multimedia resources regarding poverty and Ministry with the Poor.

**What Is Ministry With the Poor?[^1]**

Ministry with the Poor involves ministries of love and justice, where appropriate action is defined and taken in right relationship with, among, and by those who are impoverished—materially, spiritually, and otherwise. One way or another, all experience suffering and poverty, all are in need of grace, and all are called to minister to and show grace to others. Guided by love and grace, Ministry with the Poor requires mutuality of relationship with, by, and of the poor.

Ministry with the Poor is one of the Four Areas of Focus of The United Methodist Church. For more details on the purpose of this and the other Areas of Focus, visit the Four Areas of Focus page on UMC.org.

Ministry with the Poor is about answering Jesus' call to discipleship in God's mission of love and justice. Following Jesus' example of servant leadership, those who enjoy greater privilege are called to listen to, learn from, walk humbly with, and empower those at society's margins. We are called to work as partners with the marginalized in eradicating poverty and transforming this world into a just and caring Kingdom of God.

Ministry with the Poor is led by an Interagency Task Force in collaboration with a Bishop’s Tasks Force.

**Questions:**

- Why is important to serve those who are impoverished—materially, spiritually, and otherwise?

[^1]: [http://www.ministrywith.org/about/what.html](http://www.ministrywith.org/about/what.html)
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❤️ The paragraph above states “all are called to minister to and show grace to others”. How can you respond to that call to action?

Ten Facts about Global Poverty

1. Seventy percent of the world's poorest people live in rural areas and depend on agriculture. (Millennium Development Goals Review)

2. Globally, 20 percent of the world's people in the highest-income countries account for 86 percent of total private consumption expenditures – the poorest 20 percent a minuscule 1.3 percent. (UN Development Programme)

3. Globally, 115 million children of primary school age are not in school; 61.6 million of those are girls. The greatest numbers of out-of-school children were found in sub-Saharan Africa (45 million) and South Asia (42 million). (UNESCO Institute for Statistics/UNICEF)

4. Almost half of the world – over three billion people – lives on less than $2.50 per day. (Global Issues)

5. As of 2005, an estimated 1.4 billion people in the Global South were living in extreme poverty, on less than $1.25 per day. (UN, The Millenium Development Goals Report 2010, Section 2:4)

6. Globally, almost 854 million people lack clean drinking water; 2.5 billion people have no access to hygienic sanitation facilities. (UN Development Programme)

http://www.ministrywith.org/learn/
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7. In the Least Developed Countries, 850 million people are illiterate; nearly two-thirds are women. (UN Development Programme)

8. An estimated 925 million people in the world suffer from hunger. (Bread for the World)

9. Poor nutrition contributes to more than 1 out of 2 deaths (53 percent) associated with infectious diseases among children under five years of age in the Least Developed Countries. (World Health Organization)

10. With just six cents per United States citizen per day, hunger could be cut in half within five years in the United States and within 15 years worldwide. (Bread for the World)

Questions:

♥ Which fact is most striking to you?

♥ In reviewing this list, what are some ways to get at the root of the problem (e.g., teach a man to fish)?
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**Improving Global Health**

"I was sick and you visited me." — Matthew 25:36

As United Methodists, we care about the health and wellbeing of all people. In the Wesleyan tradition, the Christian faith is not a solitary journey. We are part of a larger community — our church families, our neighborhoods, and the world.

The Global Health Initiative is major area of focus for the ministry of The United Methodist Church, which aims to combat diseases of poverty such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis as well as provide health education, advocacy and infrastructure. We have long been a key player in the fight against malaria through the hospitals, clinics and missions centers we have operated across Africa for more than 160 years.

**Questions:**

- ♥ How can we give hope by focusing on improving global health?

- ♥ Why should we care about the health and wellbeing of all people?

- ♥ Can we improve the general health of individuals by combatting poverty?

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Our Work

A history of responding to need

The people of The United Methodist Church have a powerful record of joining together to develop a commanding response to issues of need. We are a denomination that has played a significant role in abolishing slavery and advocating for child labor laws, women’s suffrage and civil rights. Our prevailing message is that we have the hope, the people and the power to facilitate change.

John Wesley understood the deeply intertwined relationship between poverty and poor health. Wesley’s practical theology set high standards for disciples seeking to live in the example of Jesus Christ, who reached out to those on the margins of society, healed them and sent them back into their community for a greater good. As a faithful response to our discipleship, The United Methodist Church provides health care and aid in more than 27 countries through hospitals, clinic work, parish nursing programs and other volunteer opportunities.

Unfortunately, many of the health issues of Wesley’s time are still a part of the 21st century landscape. Many people and communities throughout Africa, in particular, lack access to the basic rights of nutritious food, clean water, adequate shelter and essential medicines. Through drilling boreholes, building water-purification systems, and developing agricultural resources and adequate housing, the people of The United Methodist Church work tirelessly to help provide a better quality of life for others around the world.

In addition, the General Board of Global Ministries and its Division on Health and Welfare Ministries, United Methodist Committee on Relief and Women's Division have been active for decades in galvanizing people and resources to respond to three particularly devastating diseases of poverty: malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. This work has made health care accessible to more people regardless of age, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation or religion.

Renewed focus on eliminating diseases of poverty

There is much more work to be done. The time and opportunity have come for us to look forward to our next movement, a project that will bring the people of The United Methodist Church together to champion global health and change the world.

7 http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/global-health-our-work
for those living in dire poverty. In many places around the world, malaria, AIDS and tuberculosis are medically interconnected. As one disease is addressed, the others are affected. For example, as we strive to prevent malaria, a killer disease of poverty, we open the door to tackling larger issues in global health.

In response, The United Methodist Church is launching the Global Health Initiative to focus and mobilize the people of The United Methodist Church into action against the diseases of poverty. At a point of great and historic opportunity, we are working with the United Nations Foundation (U.N. Foundation) and others to develop a partnership that will bring our existing health programs to a new level.

In Washington, D.C., on Dec. 18, 2006, The United Methodist Church and its leaders from around the world convened a Global Health Summit in partnership with the U.N. Foundation. The Summit sparked enthusiasm among religious leaders and dedicated lay people who subsequently committed to an enlarged and renewed focus on global health.

**Beginning with malaria**

To launch the Global Health Initiative, the church is exploring a major education and fund-raising campaign to focus on one of these diseases: malaria. This effort - Imagine No Malaria - will strengthen our existing in-country clinics and hospitals and assist in the prevention and treatment of malaria in developing nations.

Malaria is preventable, but infects nearly 500 million people each year and kills more than one million of those who become infected. Ninety percent of deaths caused by malaria occur in Africa where the disease is a leading killer of children. Every 60 seconds a child dies from malaria. Children who are able to survive the disease are faced with physical and mental impairments, such as poor growth and development. Moreover, every day 25 million pregnant African women risk severe illness and harm to their unborn children from a malaria infection. Malaria contributes to low birth weight among newborn infants, one of the leading risk factors for infant mortality.

In the long term, the United Methodist campaign to conquer malaria will create a powerful foundation that will build a stronger and more broad-based community health infrastructure to help the Global Health Initiative in the fight against other diseases of poverty such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis.
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Our efforts may have started with sending nets, but they do not stop there. In addition to preventing malaria with bed nets, eliminating deaths caused by this disease will require educating communities and health care workers, developing health care infrastructure and making advancements in health care communications. Imagine No Malaria will create a stronger and more broad-based community health infrastructure to help The United Methodist Church in the fight against diseases of poverty. Nothing But Nets remains a key component of the campaign against malaria.

Questions:

❤️ How can we continue to maintain John Wesley’s “high standards for disciples seeking to live in the example of Jesus Christ”?

❤️ How can we as individuals or as a community of United Methodists best combat poverty and disease?
   ○ Should we focus on one or the other or both?

❤️ From the Imagine No Malaria website (http://imaginénomalaria.org/#malaria-101), which of the following facts stands out to you as the greatest accomplishment?
   ○ 2,300,000+ Bed Nets Distributed
   ○ 4,600,000+ Lives Impacted
   ○ 300+ Clinics Maintained
   ○ 11,600+ Health Workers Trained
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Currently there are efforts within the United Methodist Church to help respond to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The deadly virus has claimed lives in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Nigeria.

The church effort involves treatment, prevention, communication and public education. The response is a joint effort by West African United Methodist church leaders and regional health boards, denominational health facilities, missionaries and the denomination’s general agencies.

Why care about Ebola?

Ebola is not a major threat in the U.S., but it is devastating to countries who had little health care infrastructure before the virus came and have far less now, said Dr. Tim Jones, state epidemiologist for the Tennessee Department of Health, and a lifelong United Methodist.

Even though the U.S. has just experienced the first case and death of someone infected with Ebola in West Africa but diagnosed after coming to the U.S., Jones is certain the disease will never spread here as it has in countries that have few resources to fight the outbreak or treat patients.

What weighs heavier on his mind is the awful price Ebola is extracting on our neighbors in West Africa.

“From a Christian perspective of caring about and taking care of our neighbors, it is easy for us not to appreciate how much this is affecting the general society there.”

People are losing family members and then being shunned by their communities. There are food shortages, schools are closed and people are being told to stop many of their cultural norms, such as hugging or kissing the dead.

“When you have people deeply entrenched in social customs and suddenly someone is saying you can’t go to your mother’s funeral ... we need to be remembering that in our prayers,” Jones said.

“I think there are going to be a lot of long-term devastating consequences to this even when the medical aspect comes under control,” he said. “For every case there is a family, a community, church members ... all of whom are going to experience deep needs.”

Responding to the need

A humanitarian response is desperately required. “It is really important for everyone, including the safe community, to do everything we can to support and respond to the need,” Jones said.

He said several of his colleagues who work with the Center for Disease Control have been deployed to West Africa.

President Barack Obama has sent the military to build 17 hospitals. Jones said he could be needed if the frontline medical people are so overburdened that they start asking for other experienced health care volunteers.

“This is really a situation where volunteers are great and resources of various groups and agencies is great, but we absolutely ... need to avoid any situation where people are going over there independently and not coordinating with other agencies (like the CDC),” he said.

Volunteers also must consider how fragile the health care systems are in these countries.

“Liberia started with a fragile medical situation in the first place, but right now there is one hospital in the entire country that is still open for anything other than Ebola,” Jones said.

People are probably at more risk of getting into a car accident or having a medical emergency such as appendicitis because there is nowhere to go in Liberia for medical care.

Jones warns that people shouldn’t think they can easily get back to the U.S. if there is a medical emergency.

“So far, each of the folks (humanitarians who have gotten Ebola) who have come back have been approved all the way through international regulations. I don’t want to scare people but it is not a situation where you can say ‘I have insurance and I can be medevac’d out’ because that is not the case for these three countries right now.”

Different crisis

This health crisis is not like a typhoon or earthquake, Jones said. After the earthquake in Haiti, thousands of people flocked to the country to help – and they could. People know how to clean up and rebuild.
The bright media lights are turned on West Africa now, but those lights will dim. “We see lots of sad pictures, we put a check in the mail and then we forget quickly,” Jones said. “I think anytime there is a situation like this our prayers and response is really important.”

Questions:

❤ Why should we care about something like Ebola that is not a major threat to the United States?

❤ What action can you take today to help our neighbors in Africa in regards to Ebola?
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Compassion is considered to be a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts are not our talents or skills. They are the grace of God at work within us, empowering us to match our deep passions with the world’s deep need. The gifts are given to individuals, but they are given to build and strengthen community and to meet the needs of those around us.  

**NOTE:** Every child of God is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, specially gifted to play a unique and valued role in the body of Christ. No one is without gift or purpose.

**Spiritual Gifts: Compassion**

The gift of compassion moves people to action on behalf of those in need. Compassion is not a simple caring about others, but such a radical caring that we have no choice but to make sacrifices for others. Those with the gift of compassion rarely ask “Should I help,” but instead focus on how to help. Compassion makes us fundamentally aware of the Christ in others and springs from our desire to care for all of God’s creatures and creation.

**Reflection Questions:**

- ♥ How can the gift of compassion be used at home, at work, in relationships with friends?

- ♥ How does the statement “Compassion makes us fundamentally aware of the Christ in others” make this a call to action?

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10 [http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/spiritual-gifts-compassion](http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/spiritual-gifts-compassion)