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For Immediate Release

April 16, 2013

United Methodist Agencies Announce Task Force on Human Rights and Investment Ethics

Glenview, IL—The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBPHB) and the General Board of Global Ministries today announced the formation of a United Methodist Church (UMC) representative task force to explore human rights and investment ethics policies. The task force convened on April 16 with members representing GBPHB, Global Ministries and other UMC agencies, seminaries and conferences. The task force plans to engage international experts on human rights to assist with its work.

Human Rights and Investment Ethics Task Force

The Task Force on Human Rights and Investment Ethics is chaired by Bishop Kenneth H. Carter, Jr. (Florida Episcopal Area) with 12 other [members](#). Its primary objective is to identify how UMC boards and agencies are exposed (directly or indirectly) to countries, corporations or other entities accused of contributing to human rights violations in various parts of the world. In addition, the task force will identify ways in which the Church and its agencies' administrative and program fiduciary responsibilities align with the Church's aspirations regarding human rights. The task force will also identify resources available to UMC investors for objectively responding to human rights violations

Task Force Goals Aligned with GC12 Resolution

The human rights focus of the task force aligns with a resolution adopted by General Conference 2012 that "asks that all United Methodist general boards and agencies prayerfully consider advocating that all companies formally recognize and adopt into their Codes of Conduct the United Nations' [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) (also known as the Ruggie Principles) and that boards and agencies prayerfully consider economic sanctions with companies that refuse to recognize and adopt the Principles." This General Conference directive provides additional guidance for GBPHB's work. The Task Force on Human Rights and Investment Ethics will develop and promote a platform for dialogue, proactive investment and other appropriate responses for addressing human rights violations by nations and/or companies wherever they occur.

UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

The international community has broadly accepted the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (Guiding Principles). The Guiding Principles suggest that businesses need a three-pronged approach to respecting human rights. They should:

- Adopt a statement of policy expressing their responsibility and commitment to respect human rights. This policy needs to be endorsed by the highest level of management in the company, be available publicly, and be “embedded” in the company’s operational policies and procedures.
- Create a human rights due diligence process to “identify, prevent, mitigate and account for” their human rights impacts. The process should include assessing human rights impacts, acting upon the assessment, tracking responses and communicating the company’s response.
- Establish remediation processes such as “operational-level grievance mechanisms.”

The Task Force on Human Rights and Investment Ethics will release periodic updates as the members address and finalize various aspects of their work.

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About the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits

The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits (GBPHB) is a not-for-profit administrative agency of The United Methodist Church, responsible for the general supervision and administration of the retirement, health and welfare benefit plans, programs and funds for more than 91,000 clergy and lay employees of the Church.

GBPHB invests over \$18 billion as the largest faith-based pension fund in the United States and ranks among the top 100 pension funds in the country. As a socially responsible investor, GBPHB is actively involved in shareholder advocacy, proxy voting, portfolio screening and community investing.

About the General Board of Global Ministries

The General Board of Global Ministries is the global mission agency of The United Methodist Church, its annual conferences, missionary conferences, and local congregations. Its purpose is to connect the Church in mission; its vision is to equip and transform people and places for God's mission around the world.

Global Ministries has Four Mission Goals:

1. *Make disciples of Jesus Christ;*
2. *Strengthen, develop, and renew Christian congregations and communities;*
3. *Alleviate human suffering; and*
4. *Seek justice, freedom and peace.*

About Wespath

Wespath is the investment management division of the General Board which is recognized as the largest faith-based benefit plans administrator and pension fund/investment asset manager with approximately \$18 billion in assets under management. It is among the top 100 pension fund managers (based on assets under management) in the U.S. This financial services institution, in operation since 1908, invests nearly \$1.5 billion of the assets under management on behalf of institutional investors such as United Methodist annual conferences and foundations, and other United Methodist-affiliated organizations. As a socially responsible investor, Wespath is actively involved in shareholder advocacy, proxy voting, portfolio screening and community investing.