

MI CONNECT

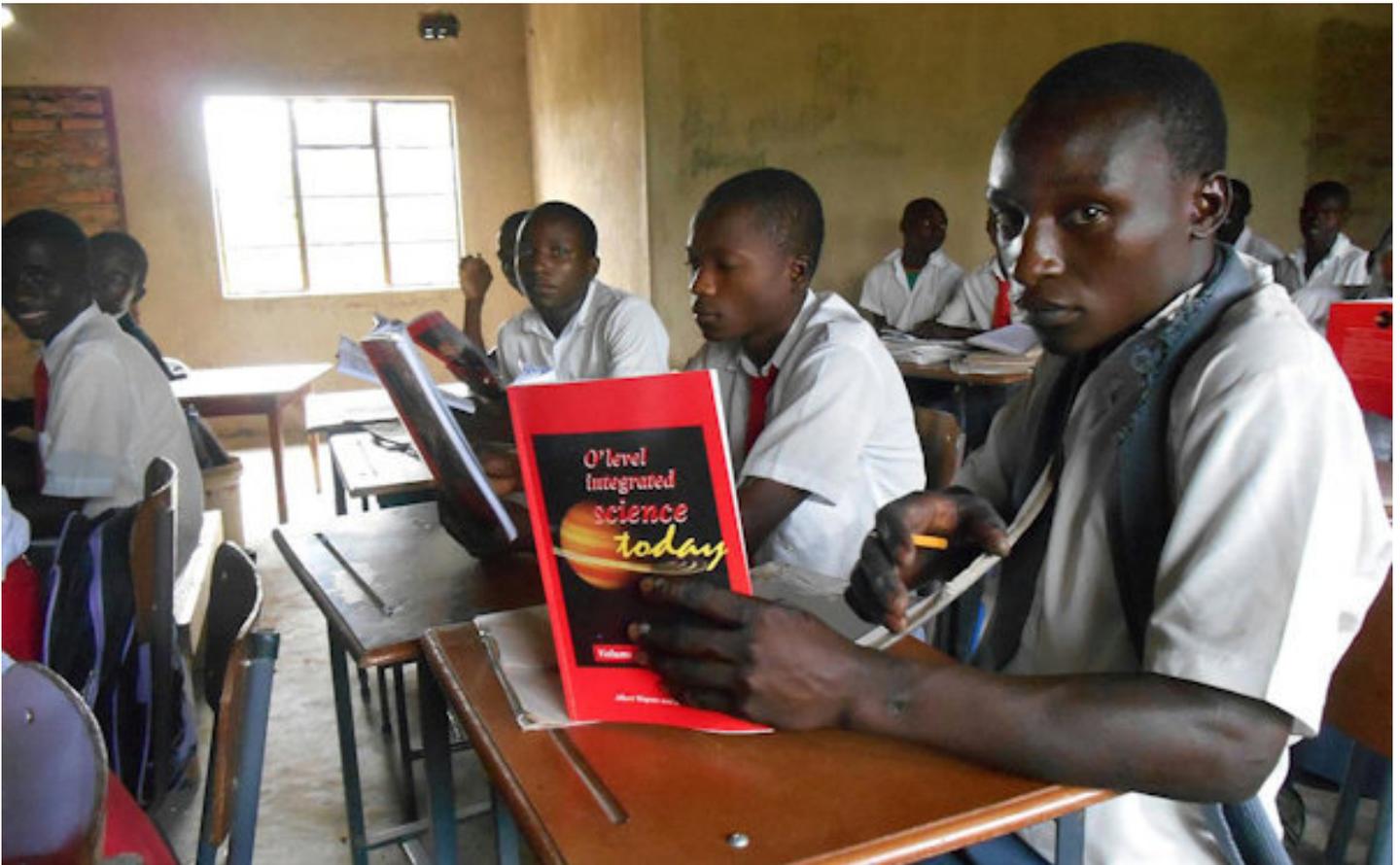
Michigan Area of the United Methodist
Church News & Information

Print Edition

MIconnect Monthly Magazine

July 2018 Review

Stevensville UMC supports young scholars in Zimbabwe



Kudzai Manyengavana (right) holds a new book donated by Stevensville United Methodist Church (Greater Southwest District) as he attends class at Arnoldine Mission in 2016. ~ photo courtesy Brian Mbwizhu

KUDZAI CHINGWE United Methodist News Service

Farai Rukunda, a member of Stevensville United Methodist Church in Stevensville, Michigan, sees himself in the young people at Arnoldine Mission, a United Methodist mission village in the Zimbabwe East Annual Conference.

It's where he grew up, orphaned at the

age of six when his parents died in a car accident.

Before their deaths in 1976, his parents became close with American missionaries Norman and Winnie Thomas, who arrived at Arnoldine in 1963. That relationship would change the course of Rukunda's life and that of his four sisters. The Thomases provided financial support for the children who were taken in by an aunt. After they graduated high school,

the couple brought them to the U.S. to attend college.

"If it was not for the Thomases who picked us up from Arnoldine, maybe no one would have realized the potential in me. I know there are many people out there like me who need similar help for their potential and talents to be realized," said Rukunda, who earned his master's

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July 2018

MIConnect provides the official news of The Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church. This printable edition is a summary of the month's top news published online every Wednesday in MIConnect Weekly. Find the "rest of the story" at MichiganUMC.org.

**Bishop David A. Bard
Publisher Mark Doyal
Editor Kay DeMoss**

We are 800 churches making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Connected in the Spirit with our neighbors, we are making a difference across the state of Michigan.

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Putting FAITH in ACTION**

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Bishop David Bard

The Joyful Jcurney

Janus is the Roman mythological figure with two faces, one looking backward and one looking forward. It is thought that we take the name for the first month of the year, January, from Janus – a time to look back to the year gone by, and a time to look forward to the new year. Allow me to offer a little January in July, some looking backward and some looking forward.

I look back in deep gratitude, again, for all those who helped make our Annual Conference the gathering it was, a gathering where we were inspired in worship and by powerful stories of ministries being done for Jesus Christ by Michigan United Methodists, a gathering where we made decisions together about structure and values, a gathering where we remembered those whose course of life has ended, celebrated those who were retiring from appointed ministry, and welcomed those coming into licensed, commissioned and ordained ministry. It was a joy and honor to share this time with you.

Gratitude looks backward. I am also looking forward. In the coming days, the final report from the Council of Bishops, rooted in the work of the Commission on a Way Forward will be released. Already there are those who have taken positions, positive and negative, on this work. There is tension and anxiety, and I expect those to increase as the special session of General Conference February 23-26, 2019 draws nearer. In acknowledging the inevitable increase in tension and anxiety, however, I also want to remind us that we are always more than our fears and anxieties. How often the biblical writers encouraged us to "be not afraid." We don't have to let our fears and anxieties lead us toward increasing anger, over-heated rhetoric, or nastiness.

I encourage us to reflect on the text from the first few verses of Ephesians 4. *Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.* The decisions we make in 2019 and at the next session of General Conference in 2020 matter. So, too, will the way we conduct ourselves. Will those watching how we are together in these sessions be able to find humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another in love?

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Members of the Commission on A Way Forward held their final meeting in May. Details of their report and proposals can be found on michiganumc.org. See story, "Plan proposals go public." ~ Way Forward photo/Maidston Mulenga

'Pioneer camper' creates nature center at Lake Louise

REV. TED HALSTED

Retired pastor, Michigan Area

Lake Louise United Methodist Camp has a new program facility. Gitcha Ninj Nebish Nature Center overlooks the lake. It is well-equipped with work tables, display cases for campers' projects, cabinets, and track lighting. Nature guides and displays identify trees, wild flowers, and animals.

Campers and visitors learn how Lake Louise was created when a glacier melted around 12,000 years ago and formed one of the deepest inland lakes in Michigan (152 feet deep).

Displays include posters from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the prow of an Indian dugout canoe found in the bottom of Lake Louise in 1936, books and identification manuals, and native American cultural displays. More nature, historical, and cultural displays will be added as they are donated or loaned.

The center explores northern Michigan Native American history, the coming of pioneers with European ancestry, and the lumbering era. Louisa Hughes, one of the first settlers, who came to the lake in 1874, said the Indians named it "Thumb Lake." If this is historically accurate, Indians may have called the lake Gitcha Ninj Nebish in the Odawa dialect of the Algonquian language: gitcha (big) + ninj (finger) = thumb + nebish (water or lake).

The renovation of a 1938-era cabin to become Gitcha Ninj Nebish Nature Center is the gift of the Rev. Ted Halsted, who answered God's call to Christian ministry 75 years ago at a campfire in the Lake Louise Bowl. Ted first came to Lake Louise as a seven-year-old in 1934 (84 years ago). In 1940 he helped his dad, Rev. Alfred T. Halsted, and brother Richard build a cabin on the north side of the lake with logs out of the woods.

Ted's gift of the nature center is in loving memory of his brother, Richard, and in honor of Richard's wife, Betty. Ted has been a camper, counselor, dean, cottager, and trustee of Lake Louise Christian Community. His father was Land Agent of Lake Louise Christian Community



Locals in Vanderbilt know it as Thumb Lake. United Methodist campers and cottagers call it Lake Louise. Native Americans fished it as Gitcha Ninj Nebish.

from 1935 to 1968.

When old bunk houses were being removed to free the sites for new ones, Ted said of what had been the W.W. Horner log bunk house, "This was the first camp structure built in the forest. It was a harbinger of things to come. The building is historic. It must be saved."

The Board of Trustees agreed, and Ted provided the funds to relocate, renovate, and repurpose the cabin. A nature center had long been a need of the camp, and here was an opportunity to create one. The story of the cabin's earlier life is told in *Spring-Fed Waters*, the history of the lake by Ted Halsted:

Prior to the building of Kresge Lodge (in 1940), the physical center of the camp had been the farmhouse called Horner Lodge at the (former) Magee-Thumb Lake Road intersection. The first step to move the camp to its present woodland setting took place following the 1937 camp season. The plan called for building 25 dormitory cabins. The December 1937 minutes state that "on the recommendation of Brother (Edward) Horner, it was voted to authorize Brother Halsted to proceed with the location and construction of one model cabin (with)...the cost to be defrayed by Brother Horner.

The Rev. Alfred Halsted, Ted's dad,

designed the cabin in February 1838 and it was built for \$325, when dollars went a lot farther than they do now. At the request of the Trustees, Alfred Halsted then designed a plan for the camp layout in February 1938, with the positioning of a headquarters building, 25 bunkhouses, program building, dining hall, maintenance building, chapel, bowl, and other structures—all on one sheet of legal sized paper! The plan was approved and, to a remarkable degree, became a reality.

Gitcha Ninj Nebish Nature Center fronts the lake east of Strong Prayer Chapel. The renovation includes a new roof, floor, front porch, log repairs, new finish inside and out, and new electrical service and fixtures. The well-furnished nature center was completed in time for the opening of the 2018 camp season.

More local history can be learned in Rev. Halsted's two books: *Spring Fed Waters: the Story of a Lake in Northern Michigan* and *Grandfather Tales of Lake Louise*. Call Lake Louise Christian Community for details on how to order. Phone 231-549-2728.

~Photo Thumb Lake by Hgjudd at English Wikipedia (Transferred from en.wikipedia to Commons.) [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>), CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>) or CC BY-SA 2.5 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/>)], via Wikimedia Commons

United Methodists help with flood clean-up in Keweenaw

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Editor-Writer MIUMC

The Michigan Conference's Early Response Team Coordinator, Bob McCormick, travelled to Houghton a week after torrential rains caused flash flooding in the Keweenaw area of the western Upper Peninsula.

One hundred UMCOR Cleaning Buckets were delivered and the Brighton United Methodist Church's Early Response Team trailer was left with the Rev. Scott Lindenberg, pastor of Hancock: First UMC. Lindenberg is serving as the liaison to the Conference Disaster Response Team.

McCormick explained that damage is localized; homes most affected were those built along hillsides in the path of heavy run-off from the flash flooding.

On June 23-24 trained Early Response Team members, along with McCormick, worked at a home in nearby Hubbell that sustained severe damage.

Bob reports: "The home, belonging to one of Scott's parishioners, had a full basement filled with approximately six feet of sand and rocks. Water had flowed downhill during the storm, carrying the sand and rocks. It broke the basement windows on one side of the home, flowed into the basement and passed through the opposite windows as it continued downhill. I have never witnessed this type of flooding before."

Excavation was done and foundation secured thanks to bucket brigades comprised of 40 volunteers who worked together on the project,



Houghton Michigan residents survey the damage of water that rose up the night of June 16. ~photo courtesy Rev. Scott Lindenberg

hand-digging, filling and dumping five-gallon pails of sand and rocks.

Local response, according to McCormick, "with an outpouring of volunteers and donations, was very organized and well thought out."

McCormick suggests that interested United Methodist ERT members offer their assistance through the system set up in Houghton. Contact the Volunteer Resource Center located at Evangel Baptist Church, 1114 College Avenue, 906-233-6621. Do not self-deploy.

Scott Lindenberg reports that ERTs from Marquette, Green Bay and Milwaukee served in the immediate aftermath of the storm. The focus will soon turn from muck-out to rebuilding. He adds, "The home owners, where volunteers spent their time on the bucket brigade, were fortunate, in that no water came into the main floors of the house, only the basement. Not all were that fortunate, so there will be some need for folks who work on reconstruction."

The pastor notes that almost

no one had flood insurance and that FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) is currently assessing the government's response. "I know of one situation in which half of a house was literally washed away," Lindenberg said. "Two other homes I worked on had significant damage. Volunteer labor will be a big help in these situations."

The Michigan Conference Disaster Relief Coordinator, Dan O'Malley stands ready to help mobilize United Methodist efforts once the go-ahead is given to organize a long-term recovery group.

In the meantime, United Methodists are encouraged to give through the Michigan Conference Disaster Response Fund. Make checks payable to the Detroit Conference Treasurer, memo Michigan Disaster Response Fund and mail to Michigan Conference Treasury, 1161 East Clark Road, Ste. 212, DeWitt, MI 48820.

Please pray for the community as they continue to come together in recovery.



Bucket brigades worked to excavate a basement filled with six feet of sand and rocks. ~ courtesy Rev. Scott Lindenberg

Drinking the Cup ... uncharted territory



REV. JOHN BOLEY
Clergy Assistant to the Bishop

We are most assuredly living in times of uncertainty. That goes for the direction of our political nation, as well as for the Church of Jesus Christ, as well as for the United Methodist Church. I don't need to dwell on these uncertainties.

But we are also going forward with confidence, at least in Michigan. The creation of the new Michigan Conference was a bold statement of confidence, akin to Jeremiah buying the field outside of Jerusalem during the Jerusalem siege. We are moving forward despite denominational question-marks and the whole transition of Christendom into new faith forms.

We will be having a staff retreat in August as we all come together in the new Michigan Conference. We will be doing team-building and visioning. One of the resources we will be using is "Canoeing the Mountains" by Tod Bolsinger. I am reading this book in anticipation of the August retreat, and am about two-thirds of the way through it. So far it is a marvelous book about adaptive leadership.

Bolsinger uses as a historical guide and metaphor the Lewis and Clark Expedition. As we all know, Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery were commissioned to explore the new Louisiana Purchase, travel up the Missouri River, and find the water passage to the west coast and the Pacific Ocean. But they came to the point where they had gone as far as they could by river and canoe, and climbing up the hills they expected to see the Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean. But what they discovered were endless Rocky Mountains. They had to adapt. "How do you canoe over the mountains?" They had to go off the charts.

We know of course that they finally made it to the Pacific Ocean, and then returned safely. Bolsinger uses this adaptation as a model and metaphor for changes taking place in the church. It is informative, intriguing, and challenging.

How does the church adapt from a time of Christendom – the accepted Christian franchise in the western world – to a new era? How do local congregations adapt to their new, less than prominent and respected place in their communities?

This entire discussion reminds me of the work of Phyllis Tickle and her description of how a new era of the Christian Faith is coming into existence – *the Emerging Church*.

In the first Chapter, Bolsinger gives his five vital lessons for leadership into uncharted territory:

1. Understanding uncharted territory: The world in front of you is nothing like the world behind you.
2. The on-the-map skill set: No one is going to follow you off the map unless they trust you on the map.
3. Leading off the map: In uncharted territory, adaptation is everything.
4. Relationships and resistance: You can't go alone, but you haven't succeeded until you've survived the sabotage.
5. Transformation: Everybody will be changed (especially the leader).

I look forward to finishing the book and using it at our August retreat. But in Bolsinger's own words, here is the essence of his overall approach (p. 35):

We are canoers who have run out of water. There is no good route in front of us, no map, no quick fix or easy answer.

But... this is good news.

This is a divine moment. This is an opportunity to express even more clearly what it means to follow and serve the God who is King of the entire world. The church at its best has always been a Corps of Discovery. It has always been a small band of people willingly heading into uncharted territory with a mission worthy of our utmost dedication.

We are in a divine moment. We are headed into uncharted territory. What an opportunity and a challenge. Can we embrace the adventure?

Michigan Conference profiles in leadership

July 1, 2018 marked the day when The Michigan Conference took on new life. Nine new districts started to function, and new staff members began ministry.

A collaborative staffing model is now in place. MIconnect shared profiles of the Directors. Now we continue with a series that introduces their Associate Director colleagues.

In this edition we feature the Rev. Paul Perez and Naomi Garcia. These comments are excerpts from full interviews that may be viewed on news.michiganumc.org.

REV. PAUL PEREZ *Mission & Ministry*



A life-long Michigianian, I grew up in Westland, MI. Both my parents had large extended families with roots in Mexico, Germany, and Ireland. My childhood memories are full of small houses crowded with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. The world seemed to be bursting with family relations, entangled in kinship. That is why I deeply believe that “we are all related.” But these relationships can be messy, so that’s why I also believe God’s

grace heals, redeems, and transforms these relationships.

Growing up, my family attended Newburg United Methodist Church. It was on a Newburg youth ministry Appalachia Service Project trip that I, in the words of Wesley, began the life-long journey of ceasing to be an “almost Christian” to becoming an “altogether Christian.” Newburg UMC is committed to ministry with young people and the vulnerable.

During college, I discerned my call to ordained ministry while serving as a peer minister at The MSU Wesley Foundation and as an intern at Metropolitan UMC in Detroit through the Detroit Conference Mission Intern Program.

A one-year term of service as an AmeriCorps member at the Sinai-Grace Hospital HIV/AIDS Clinic in Detroit clarified my calling to work at the intersection of the “church” and the “world.”

Returning to Michigan in 2008, I was grateful to be hired part-time as Director of Program Development at Newburg United Methodist Church. But, it was serving as founding director of Justice for Our Neighbors – Southeastern Michigan, an immigration legal services program, from 2009-2013, that truly shaped me into the Deacon and the leader I am today. Forming and mobilizing a team to start a non-profit from scratch, embracing my gifts for gracious and responsible administration, and learning, first-hand, from the lives of immigrant clients provided lessons and leadership that continue to inform my work.



Rev. Paul Perez served as Director of Mission & Justice Engagement and Leadership Recruitment for The Detroit Conference between 2013-2018.. ~photo courtesy Paul Perez

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve on the Detroit Conference staff for the past five years. It has been a joy to get to know United Methodists across the state and to work with creative leaders on many mission, social justice, and young adult ministries.

In my new position as Associate Director for Mission and Ministry, I will continue the mission and social justice responsibilities of my former position. Major initiatives include:

- stewarding our new EngageMI mission giving program with our Board of Global Ministries;
- administering Flood Recovery-Midland and Mano a Mano Puerto Rico, our two UMCOR funding Disaster Case Management programs, with the Disaster Response Committee,;
- advocating for migrant rights in collaboration with Justice for our Neighbors-Michigan and our Board of Justice.

I am still in the process of forming short-term and long-term goals for my current position. There are a few themes bubbling up. I hope to support and empower leaders who are directly impacted by systems of injustice and oppression. Assisting congregations in engaging their local communities is a key area. I look forward to resourcing and equipping rural and urban ministries. It’s important also to develop strategies that address the pressing social issues of child poverty, racism, and environmentalism in the state of Michigan.

When Bishop Kieseey asked me to serve on the new Conference’s Design Team, the first question that went through my mind was, “When was the last time there was one Michigan Conference?” I discovered that there was one Michigan Conference for a ten-year period in the late 1800s.

With that discovery, “doing a new thing,” for me, became more than a euphemism for “merger.”

My continued hope for all the time, energy, and resources

used to create and design a new Conference is to open space for God's Spirit to generate new possibilities and new ways of being in ministry and mission.

NAOMI GARCIA
Congregational Vibrancy



I'm a fourth-generation immigrant by way of Mexico on my mom's side and a fifth-generation immigrant on my dad's side of my Latino family. Both my parents and their children grew up in Brownsville, Texas, between the Gulf of Mexico and the Rio Grande River in the southern tip of the state. My parents were among the first in their respective families of origin to earn college degrees. Both parents were public school teachers who took seriously the privilege and responsibility of being adult role models to students.

There were only seven of us—our parents and five biological siblings. Our small house often had an assortment of people coming and going. Most of them I never knew why they showed up; just that they needed something one of my parents wanted to provide. Some showed up for a short visit, some spent the night; and one distant relative arrived for a temporary stay while I was in 5th or 6th grade. He was still there while I was

in graduate school.

In my final year of earning a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Comparative Religions and Humanistic Psychology, I asked a recruiter from Perkins Seminary (Southern Methodist University) if there were jobs for educators in the church. In his thick southern drawl he leaned toward me saying in what I heard as a condescending tone, "Oh, honey, you'll have to be a minister [meaning pastor] to get paid by the church." I remember channeling my mom thinking, "Oh, yeah...?" as I mentally sat back and crossed my arms. I've come to understand and believe The Holy One always has a better idea.

I postponed graduate school to drive a bus for a private, Missionary Baptist elementary school and be its chaplain. I learned I liked children. I count this postponement as the best training for later functioning as the camp ministries executive director on the west side for 24 years.

A move to Appanoose County, Iowa, in 1986, placed me in life with people living on the land. That was the same year political voices declared the USA farm crisis over; they had no experience of what they spoke. Those three years were extremes of both the heights and depths of my professional ministry.

June 1, 1989, marked the beginning of three decades on conference staff in Michigan. A newly created position in Youth and Camping Ministries moved me to Michigan. An evolving montage of opportunities and challenges has kept my professional responses mostly faithful and steady.

In response to this position offer last December, I asked, "Why me? Why this

position?" The response was, "Because you do three things no one else does: change, family systems and conflict." I agreed. And I have embraced that clarity as both my position title and my ministry priority, "change, systems, conflict...4 good." For the record, I have my supervisor's permission to not use the title "Associate Director." In my experience, the title is more about institutional pay grade than about my ministry role.

I dream of all persons around the world living authentic relationships in all their comings and goings. Real relationships mostly shaped by each one doing the personal work to act as Jesus did toward outsiders, outcasts and the forgotten. At one time or another, each of us has or will be the outsider, the outcast or the forgotten. Each of us is the 1 straying from the 99. Being created in The Holy One's image means, in part, that each of us already has everything needed: to live courageously, to claim the expertise of one's past and humbly offering one's voice to benefit the whole.

Fully invested in intentionally creating protected places and spaces for others to do the

same. Embodying our shared belief that each one of us is equal to every other one of us is community. These ways of being together make disagreeing agreeably a relatively easy and regular faith expression. Focusing on change, systems and conflict is the best way for me to be faithful in these times of transition.

I've re-created, multiple times, how I function to assist congregations. What's different this time is the beginnings of approaching our shared call as one re-created organizational system. I'm hopeful that the hierarchical default of our former organizations will be overwhelmed by transparency and trust-worthiness for the Gospel. I'm confident that The Holy One has a better idea of how we might best imitate the Christ and channel the Holy Spirit.

What sustains and guides me? Connecting the dots of a relentless curiosity. Rediscovering the limits of an unending dance between my physical and spiritual self. Time and space with people. Time and space away from them. A wide variety of opportunities and challenges engaging me toward evolving into my whole, God-created self.



Naomi Garcia was in ministry for three decades as a ministry consultant for The West Michigan Conference in youth ministry, camping, and Vital Church Initiative. ~ mic photo/Hannah Hazen



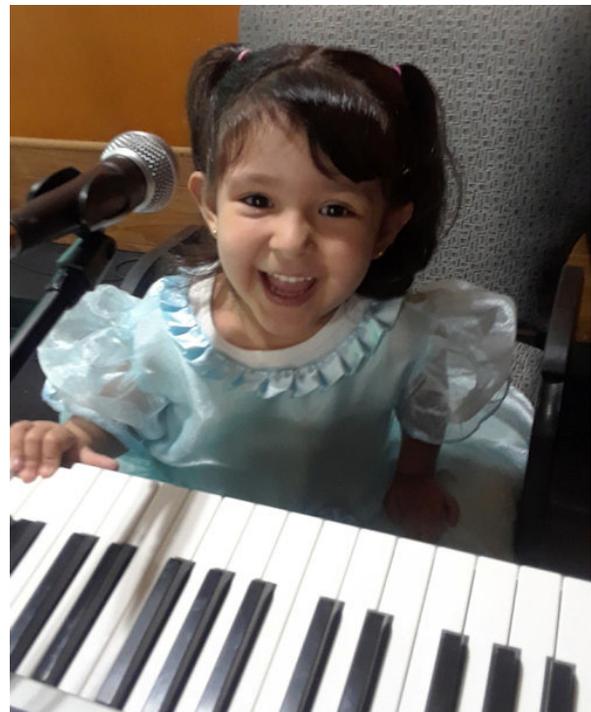
CENTRAL BAY DISTRICT ... Ranger Scott Sherrill , Vassar UMC, is ready for Sonrise National Park Vacation Bible School.



NORTHERN SKIES DISTRICT ... More VBS fun at Gwinn UMC's Barnyard Round Up.



UMC CAMPING ... Right on target at Grand-Parents Camp. Fun for all ages at Crystal Springs Camp & Retreat Center.



GREATER DETROIT DISTRICT ... A young musician at Centro Familiar Cristiano UMC is a living example of the Proverb: "Start children off on the way they should go ..."



HERITAGE DISTRICT ... Flat Prophet Amos has travelled this summer with members of South Lyon UMC. He's now a Yooper!



GREATER SOUTHWEST DISTRICT ...
The food on Vicksburg UMC's work trip to Virginia was SUPER! The team didn't have to WONDER where their next meal was coming from!?!



EAST WINDS DISTRICT ... *A student made some new friends during Clean and Green Day at the Flint: Asbury community garden.*

Snapshots of Vitality



NORTHERN WATERS DISTRICT ... *Northport Indian Mission UMC participates in the Cherry Festival Powwow in Traverse City.*



MIDWEST DISTRICT ... *35 Couples from Valley UMC in Allendale gathered at the Little Red Barn in Nunica to say, "We still do." A message on relationships by Pastor Matt Bistayi.*



CENTRAL BAY DISTRICT ... *Essexville UMC travels back in time to Rome for VBS. Apostle Eric Stone enacts a scene from Paul and the Underground Church.*

Manistee makes disciples with Vital Church Initiative

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Editor-Writer

Many in Michigan are familiar with the acronym “VCI.” And 167 congregations have gone as far as Phase 1 of the Vital Church Initiative. According to Gary Step, Associate Director of Congregational Vibrancy for The Michigan Conference, 113 of those 167 churches are currently going on to VCI “perfection,” living into the prescriptions (ministry plans).

When asked what the main contribution of VCI has been in these years since 2012, Gary Step said, “VCI has changed the culture of the Michigan Area in terms of how we think about church growth and what it means to be a healthy and growing congregation by looking beyond the walls of the church.” Step says the Vital Church Initiative, “has helped churches understand how stuck they are.” He estimates it takes 4-6 years to change the culture of a

church. “So we are just starting to see the fruits of VCI efforts,” he observed.

Manistee United Methodist Church, located roughly 2/3s the way up the Lake Michigan shoreline in the new Northern Waters District has been involved with VCI for four years. Phase 1 of VCI. Scott explains some of the initial responses to Manistee’s prescriptions. “Probably the biggest change was in leadership structure. Manistee moved to a single-board governance model.” Worship times were changed and worship was enhanced with addition of a new sound systems. “We looked at how we needed to staff for the future,” John adds.

On the less tangible side, core values were established. Vision and mission statements were written. “VCI helped Manistee’s leadership team discover that the culture of the church was an obstacle to growth and health,” Scott says. Things had to shift and



Beach Service Baptisms began in August 2016. Manistee UMC followed the Lord of the Lake Michigan Lakeshore into new waters with VCI. ~ photo courtesy John Scott

the development of a discipleship model included ways to help that shift take place. Through it all Scott says, “We didn’t lose anyone, but it was painful.”

Over three years, fruits have emerged. “We are seeing an increase in the number of visitors, particularly families with children,” Scott reports. According to the pastor, a crucial culture shift was “to move our ministries and our outreach from doing *ministry to the community* to doing *ministry with the community*. They formed a 501c3, River City Music School, where piano, guitar, drums, and stringed instruments are taught. The school includes Kindermusik, currently involving 60 persons. A new youth praise team is emerging out of the Music School and youth group that will enhance worship in 2019.

Manistee UMC has partnered with North Channel Brewing Company for care and landscaping of a section of the city’s River Walk. “In the past people knew where the church was but didn’t know much about it,” Scott says.

“Now when Manistee UMC comes up we hear, ‘You’re the church that’s so involved in the community.’”

There were painful experiences in the turnaround in Manistee. “Gary Step talks about *treasured traditions, valued relationships* and *personal preferences* and he is spot on,” Pastor Scott notes. But obstacles can become opportunities. He cites the gorgeous but no-longer-working pipe organ with a \$200,000 price tag for repair. “The Leadership Team is saying, ‘No way,’ but they are also saying, ‘Think of the ministry we could do with that kind of money.’”

Rather than a quick fix, Scott believes, “VCI helps wake the church up to its cultural stumbling blocks that prevent growth and wakes the church up to seeking excellence in everything they do.” He credits VCI with providing a fresh set of eyes to see obstacles within the ingrained culture of a congregation and tools to help overcome those obstacles.



River City Music School offers keyboard, percussion and guitar lessons for all ages. ~ photo courtesy John Scott

Midland Aldersgate wins with Vital Church Initiative

KAY DEMOSS
Senior Editor-Writer

The Rev. Michael Sawicki, pastor of Midland: Aldersgate United Methodist Church signs off an email with, “Because we are called.” That phrase sums up how the Vital Church Initiative (VCI) turned the congregation around.

Michael has pastored Aldersgate since 2013. In 2015 eight or ten laypersons attended the REACH Summit with him and came back excited. Back home in Midland, the energy and enthusiasm generated in that small group caught on in the congregation. “The key for any kind of change,” Michael says, “is to generate positive momentum.”

“My heart is for reaching people for Christ,” Michael shares. “I breathe evangelism.” That attitude proved infectious. His passion for people to experience the grace of Christ and the life transformation that grace brings has helped motivate others “The key role of a pastor,” he says, “is to define what a win looks like.” He then adds, “It’s not just me-and-Jesus. We win when people come to Christ and discover why they exist. That plays into all the efforts we’ve done through VCI.”

Since March of 2017 the church has been working on their prescriptions (ministry plan). “We know our weaknesses now,” Michael states, “and the prescriptions give us a defined strategy for implementing changes toward achieving our goals.” While recognized as a church generous in mission giving, Aldersgate needed to move

from *supporting* ministry to *doing* ministry. “We now put our boots on the ground and get our hands dirty,” Michael observes.

VCI helped move the church from *transactional* to *relational* ministry. Michael describes the different approaches. “Our church, along with others, put together and gave away Thanksgiving baskets to 400 families in the area. We



Disciples of all ages help with Thanksgiving Food Baskets. More than a give-away, the program builds relationships.

~photo courtesy Michael Sawicki

gave them food, patted them on the back and said, ‘See you next year.’ They were glad to get it and we felt good.” That’s changed.

Since VCI, Aldersgate has become intentional about ministries being relational opportunities. They stopped seeing the annual Easter Egg hunt as just a candy give-away. Family fun night expanded when the church built an outdoor pavilion on their property near an apartment complex. “We did it to create a connection point,” Michael reports.

“What does a disciple look like? What does a disciple do?” Michael asks. Every person is responsible for mentoring and developing

leadership by “walking through the scripture with others so they discover who Jesus is as a personal God who accompanies them every day.” He remembers the joy the congregation felt on Christmas Eve when a teen, a friend of a youth group member, was baptized. “He didn’t grow up in the church. The boy came to Christ because his friend shared his faith and led him to Christ. That

to have an outward focus and an alignment with your mission,” he explains. “A written plan asks, ‘Does this fit?’ and reminds us of what we are called to do.”

Michael cautions churches against thinking VCI is a checklist. “It is not ‘Do these five things and you will grow,’” he reflects. “VCI is a systematic and systemic approach to a cultural shift. Its aim is the creation of a healthy environment for growth.” For Aldersgate and the other 113 Michigan congregations involved in VCI, facilities, hospitality, worship, and a discipleship process are aspects contributing to culture shift.

But Michael claims that “our biggest shift has been from a ‘we-can’t-do-this’ to a ‘we-can-do-this’ perspective. Now Aldersgate is in a reality shift full of possibility thinking. People are seeing possibilities of ministry instead of being stuck in what we can’t do.” Clear communication has been crucial. “We were shifting everything at a core level. So, we provided a clear understanding of where we were going and why we were going there and what it would look like when we got there,” the pastor explains. “When people don’t know what’s happening they become afraid and imagine the worst,” he says. “But hopefulness creates energy.”

What would he say to a church thinking about starting VCI? Michael gives the church’s secretary the last word. Julie MacLauchlan says, “Do it! Why wait? It’s worth all the work and the stress! It lights a fire under you!” He concurs. “VCI is a lot of work but the benefits are beautiful. Aldersgate resembles a sports team on a winning streak.”

creates energy and hope.”

Pastor Sawicki credits VCI with giving Aldersgate a new sense of direction. “It was most helpful for the congregation to hear an outside voice articulate clear steps. We also have a written document to review and revise.” He goes on to say, “That written plan is how we define a win and how we evaluate our steps, successes and struggles.”

While a pastor may already “know all this,” Michael says the key is mutual agreement to a plan on the part of a VCI team and congregation. “Every church can say, ‘Now you are leaving into the mission field.’ But a written plan calls for every program



Home Words Bound

Rev. Benton Heisler
Director of Connectional Ministries, MIUMC

Traveling the roads of Michigan this time of year means a nearly constant encounter with “Construction Zones.” Any direction I travel on the freeway that is just a mile from our parsonage and each secondary street and road that leads to my office in Lansing and the Conference Center West Office in Grand Rapids, requires the navigation of a construction zone.

It means slower speeds, delays, detours and at times simply “you can’t get there from here.” At times the areas seem to be bustling with equipment, construction workers, dust in the air and smell of hot asphalt chokes your breath or the reflection of the sun off the new concrete blinds your eyes. In other moments, you wonder “Where is everybody? Why isn’t this done. Or, why are all those persons in hardhats just standing around looking down a hole at one worker with a shovel?”

All of this is a metaphor for me of our beginnings as a new Michigan Conference. Most construction zones allow you a redirected path to move through the same area, essentially allowing us to “drive on the road as it is being built.” So too it is with our Michigan Conference. We have been in a construction zone the past few years. Remarkable efforts of dreaming, design, remodeling, building, etc. have all been underway. Many sections of our “path” have been completed and a few components still require the finishing touches.

Thank you for your patience!

We have all worked diligently to imagine and address any number of contingencies and alternatives that have been necessary for our journey. The installation of a Comcast internet line to our offices took seven months to accomplish, not the six weeks initially quoted to us! Cell phones and wireless connections have allowed us to “drive as the road was being built” but not at the pace to which we as staff or perhaps you as our “customers” had been accustomed.

All the phone extensions across the state have new extension numbers. That went reasonably well until ... the failure of the



Go to **PATIENCE** p. 15

Bishop from 2

We United Methodists are asking what unity is possible, given our significant differences on LGBT inclusion, rooted in differences in how we read our shared authoritative Scriptures, and our theological understandings. We United Methodists are asking what it might mean to bear with one another in love at this time in our history.

I would invite you, then, as this report is released, to read it carefully. Reflect on it thoughtfully and prayerfully. I think that reflective, thoughtful reading of the report will help us all see that the plans discussed are not simply recycled ideas from the past.

The One Church Model is not simply the “local option” that we have seen before. The Traditionalist Model is more than the status quo. While it retains the current language of *The Book of Discipline* about LGBT persons, it would both offer more stringent enforcement of those provisions and a path out of The UMC for pastors, churches, or perhaps conferences that find those statements and provisions not in keeping with their understanding of the gospel. While complex, the Connectional Conferences Model deserves a careful review simply because of its complexity.

I will be traveling throughout the conference in the fall to discuss this report.

September 25: Hope UMC Connections Campus, Marquette, 7 p.m.

September 26: still to be determined

October 8: Michaelson Memorial UMC, Grayling, 7 p.m.

October 9: Lake Orion UMC, 7 p.m.

October 15: Grand Rapids area

October 16: Detroit area, location to be determined

October 17: Kalamazoo First UMC, 7 p.m.

October 21: Northville UMC, 4 p.m.

October 22: First UMC, Midland, 7 p.m.

December 6: Area Ministry Center, Lansing, 7 p.m.

January 2019, date to be determined, an on-line conversation

Finally, while this report and the upcoming General Conference deserve your careful attention, they should not demand all your attention. Do not lose focus on the ministry to which we are called by God through Jesus Christ – sharing the good news of the gospel, inviting people to faith in Jesus Christ, feeding the hungry, caring about those who are poor, offering healing to a hurting world, doing justice, fostering peace and reconciliation.

We cannot put a pause on our ministry. The world needs the good news we have to share, the lonely need a friend, the hungry need some food, those on the margins need to be included, unjust systems and practices need to be called into account and changed all in the name and spirit of Jesus.

Even in this time of uncertainty may we work together to help each other live lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.

SCHOOL from p. 1

in biochemistry and now oversees a team of engineers for LECO Corporation. At the urging of Norman Thomas, Rukunda returned to Arnoldine Mission in 2014. He said that trip changed his perspective on life and made him realize a need to touch the lives of others in the same way the Thomases had transformed his life.

“Children at Arnoldine High School had no textbooks, desks and no clean water. They would walk three kilometers round-trip to get water from a nearby stream. ... The harsh conditions they were enduring were unbearable,” Rukunda said.

“I was touched and thought of transforming their lives in any way I could.”

Rukunda returned to the U.S., and with the help of members of Stevensville United Methodist Church, started raising money to provide a clean water source for the students. By June of 2015, there was clean drinking water in the classrooms. Rukunda then set his sights on the creation of a new secondary school. In 2017, he founded Living Beyond Hope, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping the people of Arnoldine.

“Our mission is to use education as a catalyst for community and economic development at Arnoldine Mission,” Rukunda said.

One classroom block for the new high school is already in place.

“Our vision is to make the high school a boarding school to cater to those who are coming (from) afar,” he said.

Mwaonera Chiremba, headmistress of the school, applauded the efforts of Living Beyond Hope and Stevensville United Methodist Church for the infrastructure development, donation of textbooks and the payment of school fees for disadvantaged children.

“Through the efforts of Rukunda, donors contributed building materials for the construction of a two-classroom block after parents have provided locally available materials. In addition, recently, the school received textbooks valued at \$6,000, and furniture.”

In 2018, Living Beyond Hope assisted five children facing financial challenges.

“I am grateful to Living Beyond Hope who helped me with school fees after I had left school because my (guardians) could not afford to pay,” said Travis Dzikiti. “I have great hope to be an accountant, but this dream was about to be destroyed had it not been for him.”

“My wish is for my effort to touch a hopeless and helpless life and bring light at the end of the tunnel.”

Leona Kamupira echoed those sentiments. “My mother is a vendor and could not afford to pay my examination fee. I felt the presence of God when I was told that Rukunda will pay for my school fees. If it was not for him, my dream of being a lawyer was going to be shattered.

“His intervention has improved the quality of education to many children,”

she added.

Douglas Fusire said when his father was diagnosed with cancer, his hope for completing his exams became bleak. “When it was confirmed that my siblings could not continue to pay for my school because all the money was going for chemotherapy for my father, I was doomed. God has plans for everyone. When we feel life has ended, that is when he started. My hopes have been resuscitated through the hand of Rukunda,” Fusire said. Other projects in the pipeline include additional furniture, buildings and staff houses.

Rukunda said his goal is for the school to be self-sustaining through the utilization of 27 hectares of land allocated to the school. Plans are to implement a piggery, poultry farm and then dairy farming, with the feeds and processing to be done at the school, he said.

“I have great dreams to unleash in my rural home. My wish is for my effort to touch a hopeless and helpless life and bring light at the end of the tunnel by providing good service in education, health and agriculture sectors.”



Farai Rukunda visits with students Kudakwashe Nhunama (center) and Maxwell Mukeredzi during his first visit to Arnoldine Mission in August of 2014. ~ photo courtesy of Living Beyond Hope

World rallies to free three young UM missionaries

LINDA BLOOM
United Methodist News Service

The last of three United Methodist missionaries seeking to leave the Philippines after being placed on a government watch list arrived July 13 in her home country of Malawi.

Miracle Osman, 24, of Blantyre, Malawi, has reunited with her family there, the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries and church representatives in Malawi announced.

Her departure, along with her colleagues — Tawanda Chandiwana, 28, of Mutare, Zimbabwe, and Adam Shaw, 29, of Brunswick, Ohio — came after the mission agency mounted a public campaign calling for Chandiwana's release from a detention center and asking the government to allow the missionaries to leave the Philippines.

Shaw, who arrived back in U.S. on July 4, is a full-time global missionary and Chandiwana and Osman are part of the Global Mission Fellows program. Chandiwana was met July 6 at the Robert Mugabe International Airport in Harare, Zimbabwe, by family, friends and church representatives.

The mission agency declared the three “had been subjected to false accusations and actions by the Republic of the Philippines” after participating in a fact-finding mission last February as part of their work.

The campaign by Global Ministries included a Change.org petition that accumulated more than 18,500 signatures from 110 countries and a statement from the Council of Bishops. After six weeks of unsuccessful negotiations with the Filipino government, the media attention and support generated by the campaign had an almost immediate impact, Kemper said. “I strongly believe it made a difference — the prayers and solidarity in the Philippines and around the world,” he said.

The three missionaries were assigned to InPeace (the full name is Initiatives for Peace), a grassroots, interfaith movement that describes itself as supporting sustained peace negotiations among those involved in armed conflict, with the view of achieving meaningful reforms.

For Shaw, the assignment to InPeace as a lay missionary was a natural fit, given his language skills and prior experience with

the group in 2011 as a mission intern. He believes the increased scrutiny of the missionaries started after the International Criminal Court announced that Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte and his administration were under investigation for crimes against humanity. “For me, that’s when they (the government) became super-sensitive to foreigners roaming around outside the cities,” he explained.

Kemper spent time with all three missionaries while in the Philippines at the beginning of July. He visited Chandiwana at the detention center in Manila, a dismal place where “there were people who had been there for years, with no way out.” He noted that Chandiwana was wearing the anchor cross given by Global Ministries to all its missionaries “as a kind of protection” while in detention. When someone asked Chandiwana whether he was a sailor, his reply was that he was “anchored in Christ,” Kemper said.

Kemper met with the denomination’s bishops, church leaders and mission partners in Mindanao and Davao while in the Philippines. The longtime partners were “quite shocked and astonished” by the government’s treatment of the missionaries, he said, and United Methodists there defended the trio and their ministry.

In fact, Kemper added, concern over the government’s treatment of the three young adults has only strengthened the relationship between Global Ministries and Filipino United Methodists. “We definitely want to continue sending missionaries and working with them in the Philippines,” he declared.

Having to involuntarily leave a mission assignment is not easy under any circumstances. For Shaw, who is staying with his family in Ohio until a new mission placement is found, the reality of not being able to return to the Philippines in the foreseeable future has not really set in, he said. “The Philippines has been part of my life and work for the past seven years, since being involved in missionary work,” Shaw said.



Tawanda Chandiwana exhibits a broad smile as he arrives back home in Zimbabwe following a 56-day detention in the Philippines. ~umns/Taurai Emmanuel Maforo

News in Brief

UM HYMNAL DELAYED FOUR YEARS



Discipleship Ministries and The United Methodist Publishing House, the supervising agencies of the new United Methodist hymnal, announced a plan to revise the timeline. A progress report will be shared with the 2020 General Conference, and a final report will be submitted to the 2024 General Conference for review and approval. “As The United Methodist Church grapples with

critical questions before the 2019 special session of General Conference, and the subsequent agenda for the 2020 General Conference,” said the Reverend Junius B. Dotson, general secretary of Discipleship Ministries, “it is prudent to reset the timing for work in compiling the next official collection of hymns, prayers, and other liturgical resources.”

UM PEOPLE PODCAST FEATURES DAVID BARD

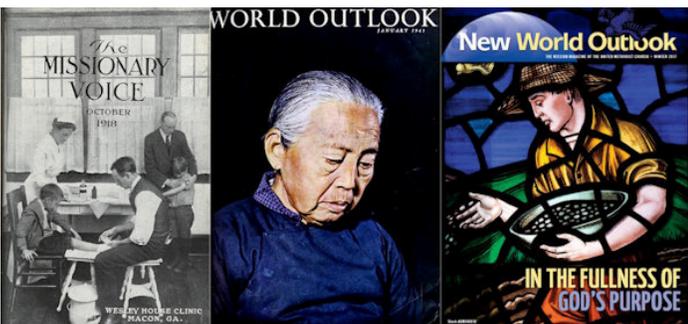


Dr. Brad Miller says, “The purpose of the *United Methodist People Podcast* is strengthening the connection in the United Methodist Church through conversation and commentary as a means of accomplishing our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” A conversation with Bishop David Bard is the second in the series,

“The Bishops Speak,” in which Dr. Miller is interviewing bishops from around the world prior to the 2019 General Conference. Go to www.unitedmethodistpodcast.com to listen or read the transcript of the interview.

NEW WORLD OUTLOOK SAYS GOODBYE

For 108 years one of the communication channels that helped to sustain Methodist commitment to mission has been a series of magazines known by its current title, *New World Outlook*. The final issue as a traditional print-format publication will be mailed in October 2018. The theme will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of the first missionary society. The Board of Global Ministries is considering multi-media options for the communication of inspiring mission information.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

United Methodists are people who care about keeping families together. Watch Justice For Our Neighbors Michigan for action steps. — <https://jfonmi.org>.

Patience from p. 12

ATT line that feeds the primary switching server. So... for a while, new phones for some, new extensions for all... but in a number of cases you can't access your messages or use the equipment to call out or receive calls, or access the internet.

During the end of this week, the Conferences' web pages go “down” and next week the “new and improved” web site goes live! What could possible go wrong with that change, right?! We trust it will all go well, but if by chance something you really need to know doesn't seem to be accessible, send us an email or give us a call and we'll do our best to help locate the information

you need.

Thank you for your patience!

At one time or another this summer, your conference staff, like you I trust, will be taking some time for rest and renewal. Like all the big equipment in those construction zones, each of us needs a moment to cool down a bit, refuel, repair, renew, and tune-up before pressing on.

The writer of Philippians put it this way, “He who began a good work in you, will be faithful to complete it.” (1:6) I look forward to the road ahead for each of us as the new Michigan Conference is seen to its completion by the grace of God.

An eight-year journey toward health and wholeness

REV. MARY McINNES
South Lyon UMC

In 2010, I hit rock bottom at a weight of 463 pounds. I'm 5' 1".

A mantra came to me "Health and wholeness of body, mind and spirit." I chanted this, and recited it in my head. I wasn't even sure what it meant at the time, but it became a springboard to taking charge of my life.

At that weight you can't just jump out of bed and run a 5k. I had to start with baby steps. I began working with a counselor and a trainer. The focus became synchronizing seven areas of life: nutrition, exercise, self-care, spiritual care, finances and career, relationships and self-development.

The first thing I tackled was sleep. When I started sleeping eight hours a night, I lost 20 pounds. The next step was to cut out fast food. I lost 40 more pounds.

I then started walking. When I say baby steps, I mean it—two minutes was the best I could do for a start, but it added up. Next I cut out processed food. I lost another 80 pounds.

When I got a new appointment, I gained some of the weight back—change is hard! I decided to have gastric bypass surgery. I lost an additional 200 pounds. While this seems like a magic cure, it wasn't just the surgery. I worked to discover that I'm addicted to sugar.

Every day I revisit my emotional attachment to food and set exercise goals. Otherwise I will gain the weight back (the surgery effects wear off). I also check on my seven areas of focus.

While they are never in perfect harmony, I continually strive for balance, and thank John Wesley for the guidance that I don't have to be perfect.

I cried recently when riding a bike because I never thought it was something I could do. I kept chanting "Health and wholeness of body, mind and spirit," and it was finally true for me.

~Published in *Center for Health*, a publication of Wespath.



The Rev. Mary McInnes, pastor of South Lyon United Methodist Church (Heritage District), has discovered the joy that balance brings to life. ~ Facebook photo