

MI CONNECT

Michigan Area of the United Methodist
Church News & Information

Print Edition

Annual Conference Special Edition

June 2018

The 2018 Michigan Annual Conference ... united at last!



Conference Lay Leaders, John Wharton (Detroit) and Anne Soles (West Michigan) set their tapers to the Unity Candle that marked the igniting of The Michigan Conference at the close of Annual Conference on June 3. ~mic photo/Hannah Hazen

KAY DEMOSS Senior Editor-Writer

ACME, Michigan – (MIC) A half century of making disciples and transforming the world came home to the Grand Traverse Resort May 31-June 3, where the 2018 Michigan Conference was in session. Conference opened on Thursday morning with a video -- “Michigan Area History” -- narrated by the Rev. Marsha Woolley.

In the days that followed, members of the Detroit and West Michigan conferences experienced transformation, not as a break from that legacy but with commitment to future faithfulness.

On “Count Day,” June 10, 2015, Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey announced the votes that committed the two 47-year-old conferences to unite. Three years later, on their golden anniversary, that union happened when Conference Lay Leaders John Wharton (Detroit) and Anne Soles

(West Michigan) put their lighted tapers to the Unity Candle representing The Michigan Conference. Bishop David Bard blessed that union, “In friendships made, in ministry shared, the good done through the power of God’s grace in Jesus Christ continues to radiate.” And the people said, “As we are already one with Christ, we become one with each other and one in ministry to our state and world.”

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June 2018

MIConnect provides the official news of The Michigan Area 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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Bishop David Bard

The Joyful Journey

Michigan is coming together as one conference even as The United Methodist Church is trying to discern the shape of its unity moving into the future. As was shared at Annual Conference, the Council of Bishops after receiving the final report of the Commission on a Way Forward, agreed to submit the three plans the Commission had been working on (Traditionalist, One Church, Connectional Conferences) to the 2019 General Conference, with a recommendation that the General Conference approve the One Church Model. The manner in which this will happen is that the One Church Model will be submitted as legislation, and the other

models will be part of a longer historical narrative on the work of the Commission and the Council. It is important to note that the other models will have enough detail and substance to them that they could become substitute motions. Additionally, the Judicial Council has not yet ruled on whether other petitions with plans for a way forward might also be submitted. There will be no lack of legislative ideas going to the 2019 General Conference. Please also note that the final report from the Council of Bishops will be released in early July and I encourage you to read it carefully and prayerfully.

“The One Church Model offers space in two senses — space for and space between.”

Without going in to all the details, which are still being finalized, allow me to say a few words about the One Church Model as a way forward for The United Methodist Church. The appeal of the model for many, including many of the bishops, is that the model is relatively simple (requiring no constitutional changes), it holds together important values that have been articulated in this process (expanding United Methodist witness, recognizing different contexts of ministry, seeking as much unity as possible given our diversity), and it offers space in two senses — space for and space between.

The One Church Model offers new space for LGBT persons in the church who experience the current language of The Book of Discipline and our denominational practices and policies as telling them they are deeply defective. I know that is not the intent of many who want to maintain current language and practice. They genuinely want to “love the sinner” while clearly identifying the practice of homosexuality as sinful. These people love Jesus, love the church and seek to live faithfully. There are other United Methodists who love Jesus, love the church, seek to live faithfully and think that we need to minister with and to LGBT persons while fully accepting them, holding their relationships to biblical standards of love, care and covenant faithfulness. The One Church Model offers space for congregations and conferences to determine



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The theme for the 2018 Annual Conference, ENGAGEwith, was lived out in times of worship, learning, decision-making, celebration, giving and dedication.

Engaging in celebration

It took two-and-a-half years of diligent work to bring the Conference to this moment. On Friday morning the Design Team was celebrated for work well done. Co-chairs the Rev. Marsha Woolley and the Rev. Dr. Glenn Wagner offered comments. “Mr. Rogers said, ‘There has never been anybody in the whole world like my neighbor and there never will be,’” Woolley began. “Is it too much of a stretch to say that he could have been talking to us?” Wagner thanked all those involved, “diligently combing customs, practices and creating new ones.” Woolley continued, “In many ways your vote set us up for seeming chaos but all the moving parts have helped ready us for moving forward together; one voice and one vision for the people of Michigan.” Thanks were given all around to team members, bishops and co-chairs. Conference members stood applauding their appreciation.

A number of awards were conferred during conference. Ruby Anderson, laywoman from the Detroit Annual Conference received the **John Buxton Award** for Leadership on Thursday morning. “She has provided creative and dedicated leadership at all levels of the church,” said David Dobbs, Director of Administrative Services and Treasurer for The Michigan Conference. Gary Step was on stage Friday to present the **One Matters Award** to Southfield: Hope UMC. Senior Pastor Kevin Smalls said, “God has given us amazing results.” During Saturday’s Celebrating the Journey of Ministry, the Rev. Dean Prentiss honored the Rev. Sherri Swanson with the **Lynn Grimes Spirit Award**. “You were kind and good in helping us understand what we are doing and why we are doing it,” he said to Swanson, the outgoing chair of the West Michigan Board of Ordained Ministry. Prentiss also announced that the Rev. Arthur Spafford (Detroit) and



Conference Music Director Jantz Black (Director of Music Ministries and Organist, Midland 1st UMC) came to the stage on Friday morning to welcome conference members to the neighborhood. “Some neighbors are easy to love. And some neighbors are harder to love, aren’t they?” ~mic photo/Hannah Hazen

the Rev. Bernard Randolph continue as holders of the Conference Canes.

During the same ministry celebration on Saturday afternoon, 29 retirees were feted. A Program Book can be found online at 2018.michiganumc.org. More about the lives and ministries of 2018 retirees may be found on pages 75-89.

The Corporate Session led by Conference Trustees on Friday morning celebrated the legacy of nine churches closed by action of the 2018 Annual Conference. Said Bishop’s Assistant John Boley: “We trust, that even in death and transition, the seeds these churches have planted will bear fruit for the kingdom of God.” They are: Dearborn Heights: Warren Valley; Melvindale: New Hope; Flint: Lincoln Park; Flint: Eastwood; Ruby; Laurium; West Mendon; Traverse City: Christ; and Vermontville.

On Saturday the Rev. Carl Gladstone, Michigan deacon and Discipleship Ministries’ North Central and Northeastern Jurisdiction staff for Young People’s Ministries, introduced Izzy Nowak. Izzy, a youth active at Pinconning UMC, and Ciere Turner, Detroit Renaissance District, will attend the Global Young People’s Convocation in Johannesburg, South Africa, July 18-22, 2018.

On Sunday Bishop David Bard said goodbye to superintendents who are leaving the Cabinet.— the Revs Mark Spaw, Dale Miller, Kennetha Bigham-Tsai and Bill Haggard.

Engaging in worship

With a conference theme like ENGAGEwith, Luke’s account of the Good Samaritan was a natural choice for worship focus. Conference preachers – Bishop David Bard, the Rev. Ben Bower, and the Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai—reflected on aspects of the parable.

From *A Classic Love Story* shared on Thursday morning: “Eternal life, love of God and neighbor, has something to do with being able to be moved by the hurt and pain of others, even others who are other.” (Bishop Bard).

From *Who is my neighbor?* shared on Friday morning: “Some folks try to take a pass on the grace of God, the invitation of the Holy Spirit, the love of Jesus Christ, because we assume there’s a price for everything.” (Rev. Ben Bower)

From *Go and do likewise!* Shared on Saturday morning: “I know that the day after the Special Session of the General

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Conference is over, the needs of the world will still be the same.” (Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai)

Full transcripts of the sermons may be found at news.michiganumc.org, “AC preaches about neighbors.”

A worship highpoint in any annual conference is the Service of Ordination and Commissioning. On Sunday afternoon, June 3, Bishop Bard ordained three Deacons; ordained five Elders; commissioned nine persons for work of the Elder; recognized one person’s Elder’s ordination; recognized seven persons completing Course of Study.

Before the holy moments with questions of examination and laying on of hands, Bishop David Bard shared a message focused on navigating the uncertainties of the present day: “Not just a job, an ADVENTure.” His map for the adventure of ministry was based on, “Canoeing the Mountains,” by Tod Bolsinger. “It’s all about adaptive leadership where mission needs to be the focus and leaders need to stay focused, stay calm, stay connected and stay the course.” The bishop stressed the important of self-discovery, managing interpersonal relationships, theological growth, and resilience. “Here is some good news,” he concluded. “God shows up on the adventure. God calls AND God accompanies.”

Engaging through learning

Annual Conference has a teaching time. Rather than import a guest teacher for the topic ENGAGEwith, this year’s educators came from ministry sites



Sonya Luna



Rev. Kevin Smalls was introduced on Friday to receive Discipleship Ministries’ One Matters Award. Southfield: Hope UMC witnessed “amazing” growth in 2017. Rev. Smalls presented his colleagues, the Revs Chris Grimes and Rosaline Green. ~mic photo/ Hannah Hazen

around The Michigan Conference Nine TOM Talks were shared throughout Friday’s and Saturday’s sessions. The “Transformational Outreach and Ministry” presentations focused on the 2018 theme of engagement.

“The Rev. Paul Perez, Associate Director of Mission and Ministry for the Michigan Conference, provided context for the TOM Talks: “We will hear from some of our own firebrands in Michigan. How they are putting Old Man Wesley’s advice into action” The hope is we will catch a few of their sparks.” Perez continued. “In highly contentious and unsettled times are we a big hot mess? ... John Wesley’s answer to spiritual malaise was missional.” His advice to those in a “discipleship funk,” is to “be vulnerable with the vulnerable.”

TOM Talks can be viewed in their entirety on vimeo.com; search on Michigan Conference UMC’s Videos.

A new model for mission engagement was introduced on Saturday evening at the 2018 Annual Conference. EngageMI officially begins January 1, 2019. Guidebooks were distributed to all members and a copy will be mailed to each church in the conference this summer. In addition to the printed guide there will be

a website for EngageMI with up to date project lists and an online giving option. The Rev. Paul Perez, Associate Director for Ministry and Mission, the Rev. Don Gotham, outgoing Chair of Global Ministries for the Detroit Conference and Brenda DuPree, incoming Chair of the Michigan Conference Board of Global Ministries stepped on stage to describe the model.

They explained that EngageMI will not only continue the generous legacy of Spotlight Church and Six Lanes of The Advance but “take it to the next level.” Perez introduced 50 Engage MI ambassadors have been trained to interpret and assist local churches in bold involvement with EngageMI. Read more p. 8.

Bishop David Bard took two opportunities to be in conversation around the work of the Commission on A Way Forward. On Friday afternoon, June 1st, he spoke personally about the Council of Bishops’ work of the past 18 months. “The Commission was formed by action of the 2016 General Conference “to do a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph of the Book of Discipline concerning human sexuality and to

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explore options that help to maintain and strengthen the unity of the church.”
The Council of Bishops is now drafting specific legislation that will be acted upon at a special called session of General Conference to be held February 23-26, 2019 in St. Louis, MO.

“The conversations have been rich but heavy,” the bishop said. A video featured comments by bishops Ken Carter, Cynthia Fierro Harvey and Bruce Ough on the “One Church Model” being recommended by the Council.

Bishop Bard added his observations. “The appeal of the model for me and many of the bishops, is that the model is relatively simple (requiring no constitutional changes), it holds together important values that have been articulated in this process (expanding United Methodist witness, recognizing different contexts of ministry, seeking as much unity as possible given our diversity), and it offers space in two senses – space for and space between.”

He then offered conference members four things “you should do now.” Read Bishop Bard’s full statement p. 2.

Bishop Bard also spent two hours after the 10:30 pm close of legislation on Saturday, engaging interested persons in a Question and Answer around the

Commission on A Way Forward and the 2019 General Conference.

Engaging in decision-making

The 2018 Michigan Annual Conference made history in several ways, including legislation. Thousands of votes have been taken at the previous 49 sessions of the Detroit and West Michigan annual conferences. But it was a new moment on Thursday when yellow cards were held aloft in Governor’s Hall. No more color coding ... orange circles and blue squares to denote conference membership. All members, one yellow square. It was a visual and actual sign that The Michigan Conference has become one.

The 28 resolutions that were before the body for decision-making were, as typically the case, split evenly between matters that govern life together as a church and matters that govern the church’s engagement with the world. When the Conference agenda turned to legislation, it was an opportunity to act in accordance with John Wesley’s Rules of Discipleship ... ordering our conference, district, local churches and relationships with the world in a spirit of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion.

Read more about all resolutions that came before the body on p. 16.

Engaging through giving

Giving to the mission and ministries of



Ruby Anderson (right) received the John Buxton Award for her leadership at “all levels of the Connection.”

The Michigan Conference began even before the 2018 session was called to order. On Wednesday, May 30, golfers scrambled and runners, walkers and eliptiGO bikers raced the 5K course to benefit campers and college students.

The Rev. Ryan Edwardson (Escanaba 1st UMC) placed first in the 5K which raised over \$2,500 for Haiti. The event was sponsored by the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits. The 4-person golf scramble raised \$1,250 to support campus ministries. Award winners included: Rev. David Kim (longest drive); Rev. Ron Vanlente (closest to pin); and 1st place team—Jonathan Combs, Tony Schumaker, Todd Shafer and Ron Vanlente.

On Saturday the Rev. Jack Amick, UMCOR’s Director of Sustainable Development, presented three Advance Giving plaques to the Rev. Paul Perez, Associate Director of Ministry and Mission, and Jackie Euper, Detroit Conference Secretary of Global Ministries. They celebrated Detroit Conference standing in the top ten conferences in the denomination for support of missionaries, health initiatives, and international disaster relief. Amick said, “Because we are better together, I am sure there will be 2019 awards for The Michigan Annual Conference, a place that is committed to mission.”

In-gatherings were received at the 2018 Annual Conference. The Midwest Mission Distribution Center left the resort parking lot headed for Chatham, Illinois with a trailer full of relief supplies.



No more orange card—blue card for voting. For the first time all conference members voted as a single body. ~mic photo/ Hannah Hazen

Conference preachers talk about our neighbors

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Editor-Writer

Opening Worship | May 31, 2018 *A Classic Love Story* Bishop David Bard

The 2018 Michigan Annual Conference began on the morning of May 31st with eyes on the overhead screens. Five decades of images and memories recalled the people, places and values of the West Michigan and Detroit conferences. “As we meet for the last time as two separate conferences, let’s take these moments to remember,” said narrator Marsha Woolley. With “O God, our Help in Ages Past” playing in the background, the leadership of women, wise financial stewardship and strong hearts for missions were celebrated. A special moment to remember – Count Day, June 10, 2015 – when Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey announced the will of the two annual conferences to become one. “It was not the first time but it was the right time,” Woolley said.

With candle-lighting and portraits on screen, tribute was paid to those in the Michigan clergy and lay member family who passed since the 2017 Annual Conference.

Bishop David Bard opened his second Annual Conference as Michigan’s episcopal leader saying, “Wow! Y’all came back. You still look beautiful!” He continued by recounting “what a difference a year makes,” with examples from the culture and church. “As your bishop, I have had wonderful opportunities to see more of you, and more of your incredible work in ministry,” he said. With enthusiasm and confession, he continued,

Transcripts of all sermons are available online at www.news.michiganumc.org.

“I hope that there have been times when I have inspired you to think more deeply, dream more imaginatively, pray more ardently, and live more joyfully and hopefully. We have made a lot of decisions this year, and I know that not all of them please everyone.”

The bishop preached “plumbing the depths” of the Good Samaritan, “two classic stories wrapped together.” Talking about the characters – Jesus, lawyer, priest and levite – he left the congregation with three take-aways on the theme that God has a mission in the world and love is at the heart of that mission.” 1) We are both

recipients of God’s love and bearers of God’s love; 2) Love can be complex but we never should use the complexities of love to avoid being moved in heart and soul by the hurts and wounds of the world; 3) Being part of that mission is personally transforming, for it invites us to let Jesus form in us hearts and souls that are deeply moved to care.”

“We are here beginning a new way of being together, one conference,” he noted. Speaking to the Conference theme, ENGAGE with, the bishop concluded, “Engage is a love word ... It’s good to begin with a classic.”

Friday Worship | June 1, 2018 *Who is my neighbor?* Rev. Ben Bower

Jantz Black (Conference Music Director and Director of Music Ministries at Midland 1st) donned a red sweater and welcomed Annual Conference members to a beautiful day in the neighborhood on Friday morning. Sharing childhood experiences and Rogers’ quotes Jantz concluded, “There are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes. Thank God for the wisdom of Mr. Rogers.”

The Rev. Ben Bower, Lead Pastor of Redford: Aldersgate UMC continued the home-street theme in his sermon, *Who is my neighbor?* Speaking of the lawyer whose question launched one of the most oft-quoted parables in the gospel, Bower said, “He’s already made up his mind about who his neighbor is. I think that’s true for me.” Still identifying with the lawyer, the preacher went on, “I want to come to Jesus and say, ‘Give me the discipleship of least resistance ... Meet me right where I’m at and do nothing else with me.’”

Bower shared how the school lunch program hosted by Aldersgate and the experience of a visitor in worship both taught him the importance of relating with neighbors. “There are no shortages of ditches or desperate situations and wounded people in our neighborhoods,” he concluded. “How do we step into the ditch if we haven’t already made a connection?”

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The Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai “came home” from her new role as Chief Connectional Officer of The UMC, to preach on Saturday morning . ~mic photo/ Hannah Hazen

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Saturday Worship | June 2, 2018
Go and do likewise
Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai

The Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai, chief connectional ministries officer for The United Methodist Church, began her saying, “I feel like I’ve come home to a bigger family.” She left Michigan in January as a Superintendent in the West Michigan Conference. Six months later Kennetha said to members of the new Michigan Conference, “These two annual conferences are coming together, not because we are all alike or think alike but because we all love alike.”

Like two preachers before her, she reflected on the story of The Good Samaritan. Her focus on the parable was, “Go and do likewise.” Recalling the pop songs current at the time of the birth of The United Methodist Church – especially Dionne Warwick’s, *What the World Needs Now, is Love, Sweet Love* – Kennetha explained, “Love is not about being right or winning the argument. Love is not about our personal preference or our sense of politics or our authority. Love is to be deeply committed to the wellbeing of others.” Just as The United Methodist Church was born during a time of turmoil in 1968, so The Michigan Conference is being born during a time of struggle “at the crossroads.” She urged all to keep diligent in ministry and mission. “I am so grateful and so delighted that even at this time of division in our nation and our church, Detroit and West Michigan are singing love songs to one another. We are about to get hitched.” Conference members enacted the care for the wellbeing of one another of which Kennetha spoke by participating in a hand-washing facilitated by deacons of The Michigan Conference.

Sunday Worship | June 3, 2018
Not just a job
Bishop David Bard

The Service of Ordination and Commissioning, a high point of every Annual Conference, was held on Sunday afternoon, June 3. During a majestic service the conference ordained three Deacons; ordained five Elders; commissioned nine persons for work of the Elder; recognized one person’s Elder’s ordina-



The bishop told them, “It’s not just a job but an ADVENTURE.” 2018 Ordinands, I-r: Revs Gary Simmons, Ryan Wenburg, Timothy Trommater, Janine Plum, Seok Nam Lim, Kristen Coristine, Caleb Williams, Christy Miller-Black, and Susan Amick. ~mic photo/Hannah Hazen

tion; and recognized seven persons completing Course of Study.

Bishop David Bard shared a message focused on navigating the uncertainties of the present day: “Not just a job, an adventure.” He noted that the “social location of the church and of its clergy has become dramatically de-centered. He remarked about the “tender place of uncertainty and fragility” the denomination finds itself in right now. Citing chapters in testaments both Old and New, the Bishop declared, “In the midst

of the uncertainty and the unknown, we understand that we need to be something more than pastoral directors.”

The map for the adventure of ministry was taken from, “Canoeing the Mountains,” by Tod Bolsinger. He stressed the important of self-discovery, managing interpersonal relationships, theological growth, and resilience. “Here is some good news,” he concluded. “God shows up on the adventure. God calls AND God accompanies.”



Rev. Ben Bower, lead pastor at Redford: Aldersgate UMC, confessed he was like the lawyer in the parable of the Good Samaritan. ~ mic photo/Hannah Hazen

EngageMI debuts as a new model for mission giving

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Editor-Writer

EngageMI will stir passion to change the world with our resources, our time, and our hands-on presence.

On Saturday evening of The Michigan Annual Conference the Rev. Paul Perez, Associate Director for Ministry and Mission, the Rev. Don Gotham, outgoing Chair of Global Ministries for the Detroit Conference and Brenda DuPree, incoming Chair of the Michigan Conference Board of Global Ministries stepped on stage. They described the new model for mission engagement that will not only continue the generous legacy of Spotlight Church and Six Lanes of The Advance but “take it to the next level.”

EngageMI officially begins January 1, 2019. Guidebooks were distributed to all members and a copy will be mailed to each

church in the conference this summer. In addition to the printed guide there will be a website for EngageMI with up to date project lists and an online giving option. Perez introduced 50 Engage MI ambassadors who have been trained to interpret and assist local churches in bold involvement with EngageMI.

DuPree noted, “We wish to challenge congregations to move from transactional *ministry to*, which views people as objects of charity or problems to be fixed, into transformative *ministry with*, which mutually engages each person involved as a child of God and an integral, mutual participant in ministry.”

Similar to the traditional Spotlight and Six Lanes models, EngageMI curates a number of Advance Projects from the General Board of Global Ministries which include national and international projects and missionaries. It also



The Detroit Conference received three Advance Giving Awards for being in the top ten conferences in The UMC supporting health initiatives, international disaster response and missionaries. ~mic photo/Hannah Hazen

includes Connectional (Conference-wide) Projects. This fall, each new District will have its own list of District Projects, chosen from applications to District Superintendents this summer.

Learn. Give. Act. That’s the basic concept of EngageMI.

- **LEARN** about the issues and the people whom we serve: host a missionary or mission speaker; attend Mission u or Keep Making Peace; participate in a book study.
- **GIVE** by first fulfilling 100% of Ministry Shares or Apportionments. Then contribute to extra-mile projects of the Advance which includes Michigan, National, and International Projects, along

with Mission Personnel support and UMCOR.

- **ACT** by sending out a short-term mission team; build a relationship with a District Mission Project; find a need to fulfill in a nearby school; work at a shelter; organize a church-wide day of clean-up.

Gotham said, “We have no worries of having the traditions of the past set aside, for we both (Detroit and West Michigan boards) hold dear the mission of the church.”

DuPree added, “It is vital that we honor those whom we serve and those with whom we work ... EngageMI is all built on a foundation of relationship-building with those involved in the giving and receiving.”



Conference Lay Leaders and youth assisted in the installation of Superintendents on Sunday. “Take this globe and lead us into mission.” ~ mic photo/Hannah Hazen

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Dollar offerings were as follows:

- \$23,020 Haiti Hot Lunch
- \$22,280 Bishop Craig Children's Village in Liberia
- \$4,934 Bishop's Emerging Needs Fund
- \$4,818 Ministerial Education Fund
- \$950 Quilt Auction for Safe Harbor in Traverse City

On Sunday morning Treasurer David Dobbs moved the adoption of a 2019 Michigan Conference budget totaling \$14,825,633 (\$222,242 less than the 2018).

Other significant numbers from the 2017 Report of the Conference Statistician, the Rev. Ron Iris.

Detroit Conference: membership 75,351; worship attendance 34,432; church school attendance 8,615; professions or reaffirmations of faith 1,526; adults and young adults in small groups 19,005; worshippers engaged in mission 1,781

West Michigan Conference: membership 51,705; worship attendance 30,277; church school attendance 7,168; professions or reaffirmations of faith 965; adults and young adults in small groups 14,674; worshippers engaged in mission 14,594

Engaging with dedication

The Cabinet reports were again this year brought to Conference members in the context of a worship service. A Cabinet Choir sang, "You are the Seed," and the Revs Dale Miller (piano) and David Kim (solo) brought down the house with their rendition of, "To God be the Glory."

The Rev. William Haggard, outgoing Dean of the Cabinet, was among those bringing the Word. His message compared the Detroit and West Michigan conferences in the 21st century to Judah and the prophet Jeremiah in the 7th century B.C. "Jeremiah believes just because Babylonians are at the door ... doesn't mean God isn't to be found. Looking beyond the challenges with hope and aspiration. I think maybe that's a little like starting a brand new Annual Conference." He encouraged members to put TOM Talks into action then asked, "Will we do it?" He continued in a spirit of hope and challenge. "We will have to welcome change and imagine things we never imagined before. We will have to allow ourselves to dream and let God show us what the church could look like as we follow

God into our communities in this constantly shifting culture. Here's what I believe. We can do it. Do you believe that?" See full report on p. 20.

After thanking D.S.s finishing their terms, Bishop David introduced two Superintendents who were invited to share the Word. Rev. Dr. Margie Crawford (Midwest District) reflected on Pentecost and the difficulty of waiting. "We are a very diverse group but we are also children of God. That is our accord. God has each of us in his hands and we must be yielded and still for the next thing that is going to happen." The Rev. Dr. Jerome DeVine (Mid-Michigan District) visited imaginary waters of the Sea of Galilee. After recounting the story of Jesus walking on water he said: "Bishop, we have reached the new shoreline and moored our boats I give you this vintage oar. We are ready to step out of the boat with urgency."

All superintendents of Michigan's nine new districts were installed. The ceremony ended with each receiving a baton and the admonition, "Let the race begin!" Appointments were set and the Rev. Dr. Charles Boayue was introduced as the new Dean of the Michigan Cabinet.

Signs of new life already emerging in The Michigan Conference were announced by the Rev. Dirk Elliott, Director of Congregational Vibrancy. "We are taking steps to start three new churches: Restoration UMC in Grand Rapids; Detroit MidTown out of Cass Community UMC; and Detroit: African Diaspora, a French-speaking congregation." Leaders of those start-ups were called to the platform and blessed by Bishop Bard.

Time of adjournment on Sunday morning continued in the spirit of covenant. "We are doing more than ending a meeting," Bishop Bard said. With Lay Leaders lighting the Unity Candle, members of the 2018 Michigan Annual Conference responded on behalf of the state's 127,000 United Methodists, "And as two become one, we will work and pray so that the light of God's love shines even more brightly."

The 2019 Michigan Annual Conference will be held at Grand Traverse Resort, May 30—June 2, 2019.



Rev. Dirk Elliott (left) and Bishop David Bard (right) bless those leaders involved in starting new churches around the new Michigan Conference. L-r: Rev. Lindsey Hall, Associate pastor Birmingham: First UMC and spouse of the Rev. Jon Reynolds, Associate Cass Community UMC/Midtown Detroit; Rev. Banza Mukalay, Grand Rapids: Restoration UMC; and Revs John K. Ilunga Ngoi and Gertrude M. Mukalay, Detroit: African Diaspora UMC. ~mic photo/Hannah Hazen



Candles were raised during the Service of Memorial and Remembrance that took place in Opening worship on Thursday 31.



Before Conference even began, the athletes among us gathered for a Golf Scramble benefitting Campus Ministries that raised \$1,250. Others participated in a 5K that profited over \$2,500 for Haiti. Winner of the 5K was Rev. Ryan Edwardson of Escanaba: First UMC shown here with Bishop Bard and Rev. Don Gotham.

AC Snapshots



Lay Leaders John Wharton and Anne Soles process for worship carrying towels that were used during a hand-washing on Saturday morning. All present received a towel printed with Wesley's words, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can ... "



The Rev. Dr. Charles Boayue will be the new Dean of the Michigan Cabinet .



The Service of Ordination and Commissioning is a highlight of every conference. These light-bearers led the Clergy Parade on Sunday.



The journey of ministry goes on. During Opening Worship Holy Communion was served by retiring pastors, like the Rev. Diane Gordon (right), and ordinands, like the Rev. Christy Miller-Black.

~ all photos by Conference photographer, Hannah Hazen



The 2018-2019 Appointive Cabinet. Front l-r: Rev. Dr. Margie Crawford (Midwest); Bishop David Bard; Rev. Elizabeth Hill (Heritage); Rev. Dirk Elliott (Congregational Vibrancy); Rev. John Hice (East Winds). Back l-r: Rev. Anita Hahn (Northern Waters); Rev. Dr. Charles Boayue (Greater Detroit); Rev. John Boley (Bishop's Assistant); Rev. Dr. Jerome DeVine (Mid-Michigan); Rev. Dwayne Bagley (Greater Southwest); Rev. David Kim (Central Bay); and Rev. Scott Harmon (Northern Skies).

TOM Talks and the Annual Conference listens

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Editor-Writer

Nine TOM Talks were shared throughout Friday's and Saturday's sessions. The "Transformational Outreach and Ministry" presentations focused on the 2018 theme of engagement. The Rev. Paul Perez, Associate Director of Mission and Ministry for the Michigan Conference, provided context: "We will hear from some of our own firebrands in Michigan. How they are putting Old Man Wesley's advice into action" The hope is we will catch a few of their sparks."

TOM Talks show us how to be vulnerable with the vulnerable.

ENGAGE with Community

—*Matt Witkowski — Trinity Community Ministries*: "You cannot get to know the neighborhood inside the church building."

ENGAGE with the Poor

—*Rev. Julie Liske — Circles Grand Rapids*: "Togetherness is more than aid. Love causes togetherness."

ENGAGE with your Neighbors

—*Raquel Owens — Justice For Our Neighbors*: "Everyone has a skill set to welcome a stranger."

ENGAGE with the People (Con la Gente)

—*Sonya Luna — Michigan Hispanic/Latino Ministries*: "Go home and welcome God's people and you will welcome Jesus."

—*Rev. Ellen Zienert — St. Johns 1st UMC*: "Just listen to where your heart takes you and do not be afraid."

—*Rev. Patty Gandarilla — Detroit Centro Familiar Cristiano*: "If God did it for me and was vision was born at the age of 7, God can accomplish this in them as well."

—*Rev. Sari Brown — Harbor Beach and Port Hope UMCs*: "I can tell how our ministry has shaped people. In talking to people I learned some of these people became family to them."

ENGAGE with the World

—*Rev. Rob Cook — Lansing Mt. Hope UMC*: "Your church can overcome privilege, prejudice and racism."

—*Rev. Eric Mulanda — Lansing Mt. Hope UMC Associate*: "I stand here as a reverse missionary."

—*Rev. Dr. Darryl Totty — Detroit Second Grace*: "This is a simple but effective process. We can do this!"

ENGAGE with youth

—*Rhonda Goode — Indian River Youth Director*: "The parents, school and community have embraced Glow as a moral compass and safe gathering place."

—*Sarah Alexander — Motown Mission*: "We teach a lot about serving *alongside* which is different than ministry *to*."

ENGAGE with schools

—*Rev. Shawn Lewis-Lakin — Birmingham 1st UMC Associate*: "Pray for us. After Parkland and Santa Fe we know there is support. But that support is needed everyday."

—*Rev. Alex Fernandez — Cornerstone: Heritage Hill*: "The young mother said, 'I just had to come to this church because I was certain there was an agenda or motive for why you work in the school. I found out today you just love my daughter.'"

—*Rev. Kathy Pittenger — Waterford: Central UMC*: "The principal said they hadn't done a summer book exchange for years. We said, 'How about ice cream?' and organized a book drive and ice cream social."

—*Christy Miller-Black — Flint: Court Street UMC*: "Educators and administrators are just as busy as we are. Just keep calling. Don't give up. Let them know you aren't going away."

—*Randy Hildebrandt — Missionary God's Country Cooperative Parish*: "We make a big mistake when we have the attitude, 'We're here to fix you.' We went in cleaning the kitchen floor."

ENGAGE with those struggling

—*Gregory Timmons — Exec. Director Flint Recovery*: "There's a mountain of fear, doubt and worry and you are the only church that continues to have a presence, on a daily basis, in Flint gathering resources."

ENGAGE with churches

—*Naomi Garcia — Associate Director of Congregational Vibrancy*: "Things happen when people know God will do it, and yet we be have as if God's not trustworthy."

See all Tom Talks online at <https://vimeo.com/user18083327/videos>.

Rev. Julie Liske



Rev. Paul Perez



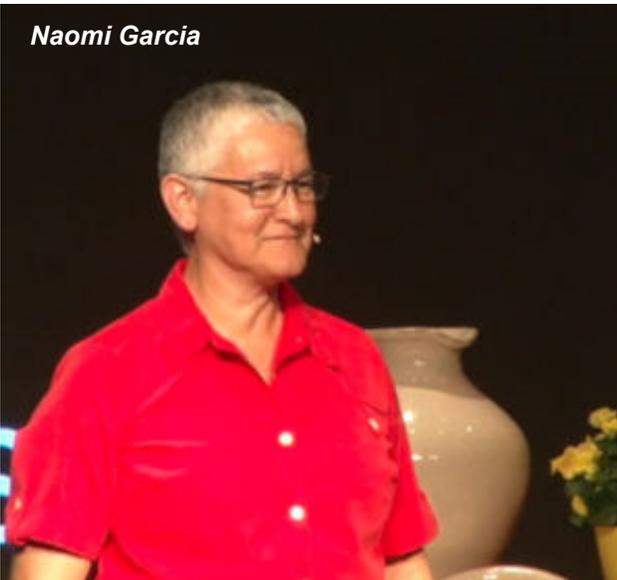
Matt Witkowski



Rev. Dr. Darryl Totty



Naomi Garcia



Rev. Eric Mulanda



FORWARD

..... from p. 2

how best to minister in their contexts, while not compelling persons to minister in ways that violate their conscience.

While offering space for differing ministries in differing contexts, the model also offers more **space between** persons whose views on the appropriate place of LGBT persons in the church differ dramatically. If we are to hold together values of expanding United Methodist witness and recognizing differing contexts, while seeking as much unity as possible, then we have to offer more space between United Methodists whose deeply held convictions differ.

The One Church Model does not compel clergy to officiate at same-sex weddings and offers protection for their choices. The Model does not compel conferences to ordain LGBT persons. The Model

offers some financial firewalls such as every episcopal area within the United States funding its own bishop's expenses.

This One Church Model does not permanently resolve our conflicts and differences. Questions about LGBT persons and human sexuality are wrapped together with questions about reading the Bible, about what it means to love Jesus, love the church and live faithfully. For some it is clear.

For some, the Bible condemns homosexual practice while enjoining us to love all, so inclusion matters but cannot mean condoning sin. For some, biblical justice demands the inclusion of all persons, and the history of the church suggests that we have often failed to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God – think the doctrine of discovery, think slavery, think the subordination of

women. For some, our shared mission and the on-going conversation between us matters as we seek to love Jesus, love the church, and live faithfully.

The questions we need to ask as we approach General Conference 2019 are questions about space. How might we balance space for and space between in a United Methodist Church? Even knowing that such shared space created will continue to be uncomfortable and sometimes painful, is our shared ministry and mission worth the effort? Can we envision such shared space as a place where all are committed to love Jesus, love the church, and to live faithfully as we together work to make disciples of Jesus Christ so that lives can be different and the world transformed? Can such shared space be a place where we allow the winds of God's Spirit to blow freely?

Another part of preparing for General Conference 2019 includes prayer. The Council of Bishops has been organizing efforts to "pray our way forward." We participated in weeks of prayer together. Moving forward, this endeavor asks us to consider the following:

- A weekly Wesleyan 24 hour fast from Thursday after dinner to Friday mid-afternoon. For those whose health make food fasts inadvisable, consider a fast from some other activity.
- As the 2019 General Conference will be held February 23-26, 2019, you are invited to pause and pray for our church's mission and for that General Conference for

the four minutes from 2:23 through 2:26 am or pm each day.

- Go to the website www.UMCPrays.org for a prayer calendar.

This is all very heavy stuff, especially heading in to summer, so I also invite you to listen to these words from Mary Oliver's poem, "The Summer Day."

*I do know how to pay attention,
how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel
down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how
to stroll through the fields.*

Please listen again to these words from my recent pastoral letter: Breathe. Pray. Cultivate a mind of wisdom and a heart of peace and love. Listen well. Speak gently.

Summer affords us some time to rest and renew, to be idle (in appropriate ways!) and blessed and to breathe. Take time for that.

One of the books I have on my summer reading list is Patricia Hampl, [The Art of the Wasted Day](#). Even amid all the turmoil in our world, even amid all the swirling conflict in the church, we need to be renewed within. To be idle and blessed and to breathe are practices of faith, evidences that we trust the goodness and graciousness of God. Furthermore, without inward renewal, we will be more reactive than responsive as we seek to find our way forward in the church and as we seek to live faithfully in the world.

Be Idle, Be Blessed and Breathe on This Joyful Journey.



L-r: Bishop David Bard, the Rev. John Boley, and the Rev. Dr. Dale Miller lead the processional during opening worship on May 31, 2018. ~ mic photo/Hannah Hazen

Annual Conference recognizes faithful discipleship

KAY DEMOSS Senior Editor-Writer

The phrase, “Thank you,” was uttered many times during the course of the 2018 Michigan Annual Conference. However, there were some special moments of recognition for exceptional service and giving.

On Thursday ...

John Buxton Award

A highlight of the Conference Treasurer’s Report each year is the announcement of the recipient of the John Buxton Award. On Thursday afternoon David Dobbs introduced **Ruby Anderson** as the 2018 honoree. “She has provided creative and dedicated leadership at all levels of the church,” Dobbs said. Currently Anderson is a Director of the National United Methodist Women in addition to her district and conference responsibilities. Conferred annually since 1996, the award honors a member of the Detroit Conference— clergy or lay — who exhibits exceptional leadership. The first such award was posthumously given to John Buxton himself, for his role in making the Detroit Conference pension program one of the strongest in the denomination. Immediate past recipients were Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey (2016) and the Rev. Paul Perez and the Rev. Faith Green Timmons (2017).

On Friday ...

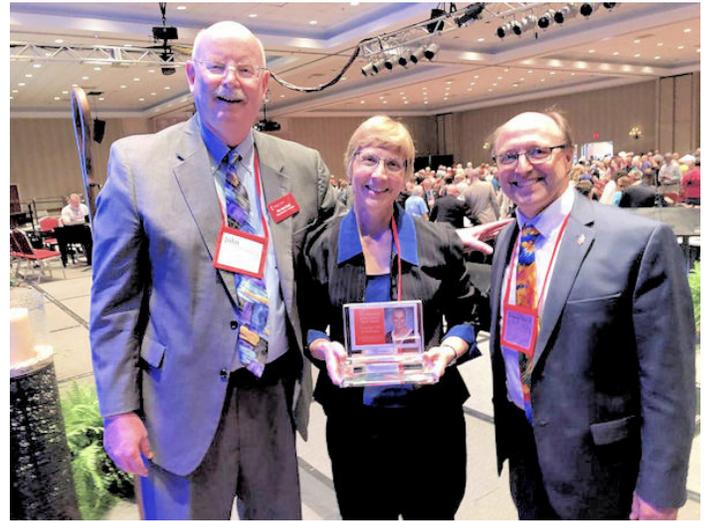
The Matters Award

The Rev. Gary Step, the Michigan Conference Associate Director for Congregational Vibrancy, was at the mic on Friday afternoon to help confer Discipleship Ministries’ One

Matters Award. Created in 2015 the award recognizes churches that rise up from zero baptisms and professions of faith. A \$1,000 gift encourages further work in discipleship. Step introduced the **Rev. Kevin Smalls**, senior pastor of Southfield: Hope United Methodist Church. Once the largest African-American United Methodist Church in the North Central Jurisdiction, Southfield: Hope went into decline after the retirement of a long-tenured pastor in 2014. Worship attendance went from 800 to 300. “That’s falling off a cliff,” Step said. The congregation began to stabilize in 2015 under leadership of the Rev. Cornelius Davis. Then Rev. Smalls arrive from the Baltimore-Washington Conference in 2016. Step explained that they now average 500 in worship, had 81 professions of faith and 19 baptisms. “It is well on the way to restoring its historical significant to Michigan Methodism,” Step added. Pastor Smalls introduced his staff colleagues, Rev. Chris Grimes and Rev. Rosaline Green. He noted, “God has given us amazing results.” More innovative worship, new welcome techniques, relevant sermons, a user friendly building, and expanded avenues for becoming members were cited as reasons for new growth.

On Saturday ... Lynn Grimes Spirit Award ... Conference Canes ... Advance Awards

During ceremonies hosted by the Board of Ministry on Saturday afternoon, several acknowledgements were made of servant leadership. The Rev. Dean Prentiss presented the Lynn Grimes Spirit Award to outgoing Board of Ministry



The Rev. Sherri Swanson is congratulated by Bishop David Bard and the Rev. John Boley. Swanson was honored with the Lynn Grimes Spirit Award. ~ Facebook

chair, the **Rev. Sherri Swanson**. “You were kind and good in helping us understand what we are doing and why are doing it,” Prentiss commented. Prentiss also announced the current holders of the Conference Canes, the oldest living United Methodist Elders in Michigan: the Rev. Arthur Spafford (Detroit Conference) and the Rev. Bernard Randolph (West Michigan pastor 102 years young). “

On Sunday ... Goodbye to four D.S.s

Sunday morning’s Cabinet Report was offered in the context of worship. Bishop David Bard expressed appreciation to four superintendents who finished their service on his team: the Rev. Mark Spaw (Ann Arbor); the Rev. William Haggard (Grand Rapids); Rev. Dr. Dale Miller (Albion); and the Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai. Bard’s tributes ... “I have come to know **Mark Spaw** as a person who has a huge heart and who cares deeply about the ministry of Jesus Christ and the pastors and churches

who are under this care. I love him even though he makes fun of my dog.” ... “I appreciate the **Rev. Bill Haggard** for his choice of ties, his humor, his warmth, his authenticity and willingness to share his life’s journey. He cares deeply about how the church is doing. It pains him when churches are stuck in 1950s GM mode and wants to gently move them to a new place.” ... “The **Rev. Dr. Dale Miller** said yes to what is not any easy jog to take on for just one year. He had done this job before but bishops all do things a little differently. He offered experienced leadership with kindness and grace.” ... “Last July I got a call that said ‘We might think of **Kennetha Bigham-Tsai** for Chief Connectional Officer of the Connectional Table.’ In December we learned the appointment would be made. She has left us but her commitment to the Church’s people and her depth of faith have left something with all of us.”

2018 AC legislation ... taking care of business

KAY DEMOSS
Senior Editor-Writer

ACME, MI (MIC) – The 2018 Michigan Annual Conference was a setting in which history was made. This was true for legislation, as well. There had been thousands of votes taken at the previous 49 sessions of the Detroit and West Michigan annual conferences. But it was a new moment when yellow cards were held aloft in Governor’s Hall. No more color coding ... orange circles and blue squares to denote conference membership. All members, one yellow square. It was a visual and actual signal that The Michigan Conference had become one.

The 28 resolutions that were before the body for decision-making were, as typically the case, split evenly between matters that govern life together as a church and matters that govern the church’s engagement with the world. When the Conference agenda turned to legislation, it was an opportunity to act according to John Wesley’s Rules of Discipleship ... ordering our conference, district, local churches and relationships with the world in a spirit of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion.

Eight resolutions generated lengthy discussion. All the motions eventually prevailed with the exception of one referral.

R 1 *Plan of Organization*: concern was expressed and amendment offered about the structuring of district

leadership and organization. Design Team Co-chair Marsha Woolley explained that the team’s intention was to leave “as much empowerment to the districts as possible,” giving flexibility honoring the unique context of each district. Confidence was expressed in the work of the Design Team. The Plan was approved with minor editorial changes.

R 12 *Poor People’s Campaign*: after much debate in which concerns were expressed about civil disobedience and the church moving outside the walls and into political halls, members voted to

favor of confessing mistreatment of persons and extending blessing as Jesus did. Others expressed concern about disciplinary language.

R 14 *Call for Unity in Diversity*: Delegate to the 2019 special called session of the General Conference Rev. Melanie Carey, presented R 14 saying, “John Wesley argued that diversity provides opportunity for us to grow in holiness ... This resolution gives us space for grace and to disagree agreeably And gives the opportunity to send that message to the General Conference in 2019.

Think of what unites us.” A substitute motion urging the Michigan Conference’s adoption of the One Church Model, on behalf of Minnesota clergyman David Meredith, a married gay man, was defeated. The original resolution was passed by wide margin.

R 15 *Prevent Gun Violence*: “The Michigan Conference of the UMC calls on the state of Michigan through communication by

the Bishop to state representatives and senators to advocate for a state of Michigan ban on private ownership of AR-15s...” was overwhelmingly supported after discussion that called for churches instead to hold family support events, buy-back of weapons, security concerns, and the addressing of systemic issues within society that lead to gun violence. Corey Simon, being commissioned an Elder at this Conference summed up: “We are called to a tradition of non-violence whether we like it our not. The AR-15 is a tool designed to break a commandment, ‘Do not kill.’”

Go to **NEXT page**



pray and witness for this National Call for a Moral Revival supporting workers and those in poverty. “It’s advocacy that makes things happen.” (Rev. George Covintree). “We do a lot of charitable work. Justice is often missing. Support this.” (Rev. Len Schoenherr)

R 13 *Acknowledgement of Sin*: Members took the scope of the resolution beyond the church setting by deleting the words “pastors and laypersons.” Approved the statement: “We acknowledge we have sinned in how we have sometimes treated those marginalized (people of color, Native American, women and LGBTQI).” A number of youth members were among those speaking in

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R 16 *Raise the Age in Michigan* The resolution, encourages Michigan UMs to contact legislators to support the bill that permits 17-year-olds to be considered juveniles in criminal court and to be held in juvenile facilities. Questions were raised around the risks to youth, the effects of abuse and the practice of the state's judges. The Resolution passed overwhelmingly as amended in committee.

R 18 *Childcare for Conferences*: Debate began on Friday regarding provision of childcare at multi-charge conferences, and other mandated district and conference events. Questions about who would organize, who would pay, and assurance of safe childcare led to tabling on Friday and eventual referral to the Michigan Area Protection Policy Committee on Saturday.

R 20 *End U.S. Military Support of Saudi Coalition for the War on Yemen*: After much discussion, it took a standing vote of the house to determine that this resolution passed: "The Michigan Conference urges its members to advocate for legislation by the U.S. Senate to end the U.S. military support of the Saudi coalition for war on Yemen. We urge our members to contact Senators ... in order to end U.S. assistance of this military action. Arguments in favor of the action spoke to humanitarian concerns. Arguments not in favor spoke to terrorism and a general belief that such legislation only "stirs us up."

Constitutional Amendment #1: Bishop Bard explained to Conference members on Saturday that there had been an error in the wording of one of the Constitutional Amendments that were voted on across the global connection in 2017. This required a new vote by all annual conferences of The United Methodist Church. The amendment proposed a new paragraph between current Paragraph 5 and Paragraph 6 of the Discipline focusing on gender justice. A written ballot was taken which will be submitted to the Council of Bishops. The recount will be announced after all annual conferences



Rev. Mary Ivanov, Muskegon: Lake Harbor UMC, participates in the debate on child care for mandated meetings that ended in a referral to the Michigan Area Protection Policy Committee. ~ mic photo/Hannah Hazen

have submitted their ballots. It takes a 2/3s vote of the Conference to pass a Constitutional Amendment; 2/3s of all annual conferences must approve in order to ratify. Stay tuned. (Note: the original vote on Amendment #1, announced earlier this year, revealed approval by both the Detroit and West Michigan annual conferences.)

These are the resolutions that passed on the Consent Calendar or with minimal discussion or amendment in the general session ...

R 2 Management of Benefit Claims; R 3 Housing/Rental Allowance for Retired Clergy or Clergy on Medical Leave; R 5 Past Service Rate; R 7 Michigan Conference Human Resources Policy #1; R 9 Policy on Use of Proceeds of Sale & Accumulated Assets of Local Church Properties; R 10 Clergy Family Statement added to 2017 Covenant of Clergy Sexual Ethics Policy; R 17 Breastfeeding Facility at Michigan Annual Conference; R 17 Stop a War on North Korea; R 22 You Shall Not Bear False Witness; R 25 Protecting the Right to Peacefully Address Injustice through Boycotts, Divestments and Sanctions; R 26 Guidelines for Equitable Compensation Support; R 27 Minimum Base

Compensation Support for 2019;

These are the resolutions that were referred with minimal discussion in the general session ...

R 4 2019 Comprehensive Benefit Funding Plan referred to the Board of Pension & Health Benefits; R 6 Amend Rules of Order Par. 5.1.2 referred to Rules Committee; R 8 Michigan Conference Human Resources Policy #2 referred to Human Resources Committee; R 11 Formation of Older Adult Ministries Council referred to the Board of Congregational Life; R 23 Child Incarceration, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UMW Priorities referred to Board of Justice; R 24 Advocating for the Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Occupation referred to Board of Justice.

Note: Resolution 19 (Questions for Candidates for Federal and State Offices) was not considered because the presenter was not in attendance at Legislative Committee.

The complete Legislation Book, with all resolutions can be seen online at 2018.michiganumc.org. The Consent Calendar and Legislative Committee Reports can be read on the website new.michiganumc.org, "Taking care of business."

Conference by the Numbers

Ingatherings for neighbors



Special offerings were received at the 2018 Annual Conference. The volunteers from the Midwest Mission Distribution Center left the resort parking lot bound for Chatham, IL with a trailer full of relief supplies.

Dollar offerings were as follows:

- \$23,020 Haiti Hot Lunch
- \$22,280 Bishop Craig Children's Village in Liberia
- \$4,934 Bishop Bard's Emerging Needs Fund
- \$4,818 Ministerial Education Fund
- \$950 Quilt Auction for Safe Harbor in Traverse City

Treasurer's Notes

On Sunday morning Treasurer David Dobbs moved the adoption of a 2019 Michigan Conference budget totaling \$14,825,633; \$222,242 less than the 2018 budget. Earlier the Treasurer had announced that Ruby Anderson is the 2018 honoree for the John Buxton Leadership Award for her faithful work across the Connection. In addition to district and conference responsibilities, Ruby is a Director of National UMW (shown here at the recent UMW Assembly in Columbus, Ohio).



Statistician's Report 2017



Detroit Conference:

membership 75,351; worship attendance 34,432; church school attendance 8,615; professions or reaffirmations of faith 1,526; adults and young adults in small groups 19,005; worshippers engaged in mission 1,781

West Michigan Conference:

membership 51,705; worship attendance 30,277; church school attendance 7,168; professions or reaffirmations of faith 965; adults and young adults in small groups 14,674; worshippers engaged in mission 14,594.

Celebrating a fruitful legacy

The 2018 Corporate Session held on June 1st, witnessed the closing of nine congregations.

The Church of Jesus Christ is a living, breathing body which fortunately for all of us still contains the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its prophetic message of justice and compassion. Our 800 Michigan United Methodist Churches embody this mission and ministry in so many powerful ways.

But over time, some of our beloved congregations have struggled with mission and ministry, often severely affected by changes in demographics, local economic conditions and natural cycles of life. Some Michigan congregations over the last year have not been able to sustain vibrant ministry in the United Methodist tradition. They have great histories of nurturing members and serving their community, but the

Bishop, the Cabinet and the various District Board of Church Location and Building have determined that these churches no longer serve the purpose for which they were organized.

The members may transfer their membership to other United Methodist churches, and the appropriate bodies are handling disposition of church buildings and other assets. We trust, that even in death and transition, the seeds that these congregations have planted will bear fruit for the kingdom of God.

1. Dearborn Heights: Warren Valley
2. Melvindale New Hope
3. Flint Lincoln Park
4. Flint Eastwood
5. Ruby
6. Laurium
7. West Mendon
8. Traverse City Christ
9. Vermontville

Members of The Michigan Conference add their prayers and thanks during this time of transition.



Vermontville United Methodist Church

DEAN from p. 20

These friends, are challenging days!

They are times perhaps not so much dissimilar, to the days Judah faced.

While we don't have time to delve deeply into this text, let me remind us basically what's going on. Judah is under siege. Babylon is just about to finish off the southern kingdom and take the best and the brightest into captivity. Jeremiah who clearly sees what's coming is being pressured by a relative to follow the custom and the law and buy from him a piece of land that within a very short time will be property of the Babylonians. My image for this scene is a guy trying to unload his beach front property just before the tsunami hits! If we had been Jeremiah we probably would have said, "nice try" but get lost. But that's not what Jeremiah does. Instead he takes great pains to be sure the sale is recorded properly and the deed kept safe. Why? Because Jeremiah has faith. Jeremiah believes that just because the Babylonians are at the door doesn't mean it's over. Just because they have made mistakes and it feels like God is far away doesn't mean that God is. Jeremiah looked forward, beyond the challenges of the present moment, and he did so with hope and aspiration.

And as I thought about it, I think it's maybe a little bit like starting a new Annual Conference when you have been in decline for decades and you don't have any idea what's going to happen come next February. It's a step of faith. It's a step of faith that says we're moving forward. We're engaging the mission anyway, because we know, as so many have said this week, we have work to do! We're going to create a new Conference who's vision and mission is the creation Christ Centered Mission and Ministries, Bold Effective Leaders, and Vibrant Congregations because we know that's what's needed and we believe it's what God is calling us to be and to do. We're not going to wait and see, we're going to engage our faith and move into the future with a confidence that whatever is decided at General Conference, whatever struggles we may continue to face there's a place for all of us in our calling to embrace the task of loving our neighbors and building the Kingdom of God on earth even as it

is in heaven.

The car companies came back. A new normal settled in to be sure. Things were not the same. Market share shifted, and partnerships were formed. But they adapted, and they have products that are competitive and even superior because they chose to move beyond old patterns, beyond the assumptions, even beyond the mistakes of the past in order to reach into a positive new reality.

And friend we are moving in that same direction as the church. In order to get there, we'll have to do some things and we'll need to let go of some things. After serving six years as a Superintendent I am convinced that one thing we will have to do is let go our addiction to our buildings. You know one of the lessons the Jewish exiles learned in captivity was that God wasn't in the Temple. They discovered, much to their surprise, that they could find God wherever they were, IF they sought and served God. We need a similar revelation in our day.

We'll have to welcome change. We'll have to imagine things we've never imagined before. We'll have to allow ourselves to dream and allow God to

show us what the church could look like, as we seek to follow God into our communities in this constantly shifting culture we live in.

But here's what I believe....we can do it! We really can. And we know how to do it! We have been talking about it all week. We have heard at least a hundred ideas this week about how to do. The question is, as Naomi put it to us yesterday are we willing? It's not a knowledge issue is it? It's a heart issue.

Yes, we are in a challenging place. But we have been here before and we have been led through to good places of hope.

So here's what I propose: Let's purchase and register that land. Let's engage this new Annual Conference and all the new possibilities God puts before us with hope and faith. Though it may feel sometimes like the Babylonians are at the door, let us defiantly proclaim that there is a future for us. A future filled with mission and meaning. And may we enter that future with faith, with energy, with everything we've got, as Bishop and Cabinet, as the Directors Table, as 9 Districts and 880 Churches, as Laity and Clergy, as sisters and brothers in Christ; as the Michigan Annual Conference. Thanks be to God. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Jerome DeVine uses a "vintage oar" to take conference members on an imaginary trip across the Sea of Galilee. ~mic photo/Hannah Hazen

Dean of the Cabinet ... 'I believe we can do it!'

REV. BILL HAGGARD

Dean Michigan Cabinet, 2017-2018

I want to begin this morning by taking you back about 30 years to a warm fall afternoon. I was flying home to Michigan from an event in Texas and I had a several hour layover in Cincinnati. My sister lived there at the time and she came to the airport so we could have an hour or two to visit before my flight home. My sister worked as a level 5 Administrative Assistant for General Motors in those days, and as we caught up on family and other issues, our conversation shifted to her work. She began talking about the struggles GM was facing with the influx of foreign competition from Honda and Toyota and as we talked I had something of an epiphany. It struck me, as I listened to my sister describe the current business situation in her company, that **the** auto industry and the church had done exactly the same thing. Both of us had made the same significant miscalculation. Both GM and the Church had looked at the realities of the 1950s and 1960s and assumed throughout the 1970s and then into the 1980s that the same realities that had been present then would simply continue into the future. GM, it seemed to me, had taken the attitude, "where else are they going to buy cars?" so it allowed, in too many cases quality and innovation to slide.

The church, often ignoring what was happening in the culture around us, assumed that people would just keep coming as they always had whether we paid attention or sought to be relevant or not. And year by year we continued these patterns and both the church and the car companies saw a consistent and continual decline. We of the church in many places, behaved in ways that exacerbated our situation in the years following. We fought vehemently the changes that, had we made them back then, could have created a difference situation today. For decades we fought worship wars and resisted the multitude of prophets who wrote books telling us to get out beyond our enclaves and make a difference in world. We continued to delude ourselves into believing that the old pattern of United Methodist's moving from Lansing to Detroit finding a United Methodist church there and serving on three committees, would not change even as Brand loyalty continued to be a thing of the past. And so we have, over every one of the 38 years I have been in ordained ministry, watched as our churches and our Annual Conferences have declined. We've watched as the average age of United Methodist's has risen year by year. We've watched as young people have looked on with amazement and disbelief at both the things that we were willing to die for and the things we didn't seem to care about at all. And they have drifted away. And as we sit here this morning we are awaiting with significant levels of anxiety and uncertainty the special General Conference meeting next February to try to find a "Way Forward" as we deal with our 46 year old struggle over human sexuality.

Go go **DEAN p. 19**



Superintendents of nine new districts picked up the baton on Sunday morning. L-r: Charles Boayue (Greater Detroit), Elizabeth Hill (Heritage), Dwayne Bagley (Greater Southwest), John Hice (East Winds), Jerome DeVine (Mid-Michigan), Margie Crawford (Midwest), David Kim (Central Bay), Anita Hahn (Northern Waters), and Scott Harmon (Northern Skies).

~mic photo/ Hannah Hazen