

# MI CONNECT

Michigan Area of the United Methodist  
Church News & Information

Print Edition

MIConnect Monthly Magazine

March 2018 Review

## Michigan UM Camping celebrates new life at Crystal Springs



**The Crystal Springs Express carries mini campers to their cabins after sign-in. It also makes an annual appearance at the Dowagiac Lighted Christmas Parade each year. Says Camp Director Dan Stuglik, “If you are in the area, you see our camp outside of camp often.” ~ photo courtesy Dan Stuglik**

### **KAY DEMOSS** Senior Editor, Michigan

It was dedicated August 10, 1860 as the Big Springs Camp Ground. Since 1874 the outdoor ministry near Dowagiac has been known as “Crystal Springs Camp,” and according to local historian Barbara Cook, it’s the oldest religious camp in Michigan.

While the site has a glorious past—the tabernacle and

cottage grounds filled with 8,000 people during the revivals of the 1890s—today Crystal Springs Camp and Retreat Center looks ahead to an awesome future.

Dan Stuglik, full-time Camp Director since January 2018, says, “We have sort of shifted focus with the help of our mission statement: *To create a welcoming Christian sanctuary that removes distractions between our*

*guests and God.* Stuglik and his team measure everything that happens at Crystal Springs. “We ask ourselves, will this help us be welcoming and will it remove distractions?” Ever a tranquil setting, water and woods are valued and used to further that purpose.

Another intentional shift at Crystal Springs has been outward-focused. “We want to be an asset to our commu-

nity,” Stuglik explains. “If you are in the area, you see our camp outside of camp often.” For instance, in April 2018 Crystal Springs’ pedal cars will be taken to the YMCA in nearby Niles for Healthy Kids Day. The pedal cars are also available and advertising Crystal Springs’ activities at other community events.

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# MICONNECT

Michigan Area of the United Methodist  
Church News & Information

## March 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.*

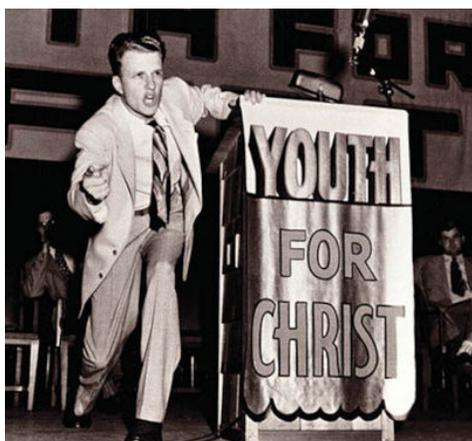
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**Bishop David Bard**

## The Joyful Journey

Park United Methodist Church in Duluth, Minnesota. The teacher of that class told me about God's love in Jesus in such a way that I gave my life to Christ. The teacher had an important impact on my life, but her impact was reinforced by Billy Graham. I reaffirmed my commitment to Jesus watching Billy Graham on television. I engaged in his Bible studies through the mail. I subscribed to *Decision* magazine, listened to his radio program, *The Hour of Decision*, sent a couple of dollars when I could. I still have on my book shelf The Christian Life New Testament from The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.



I read a few of Billy Graham's books, the first being Peace With God.

A neighborhood friend gave me his paperback copy of Peace With God, and I still have it. Originally published in 1953, my copy was part of the 44<sup>th</sup> printing, dated 1973. The book's first two parts could be seen as an elaboration of the basic message Billy Graham preached. Part One delineates the human problem, which has to do with human sin. Part Two provides the solution in God's love in Jesus Christ. Then there was a Part Three, which was about living the Christian life after making a commitment to Jesus Christ. It included a chapter on "social obligations of the Christian." My introduction to the idea that Christian faith has something to do with seeking a better world came from Billy Graham. Graham encouraged Christians to be good citizens and to demonstrate hospitality. Furthermore, he encouraged Christians to take a Christian attitude toward labor-management relationships, toward economic matters, and toward race relationships. I remember writing these broad principles down and posting them on the bulletin board that hung over my bed. The idea that my faith had these social dimensions was a pretty heady one for a 14-year-old. The idea has stuck with me.

One week before Graham's death was Ash Wednesday, and this year we were reminded not only of our mortality, but of our vulnerability as a horrific act of violence was perpetrated at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The image of a distraught mother, with an ashen cross on her forehead hearing the news of the shooting will be indelibly etched on my memory. What might a Christian response to this act of violence, to the multiple acts of gun violence in our society, be? Sadly, as I am writing this on Friday March 2, I have heard initial reports of a shooting on the campus of Central Michigan University, where two have died.

While there is no single answer to the question of a Christian response to gun violence, for there are numerous ideas put forward by many persons who follow Jesus, I would like to suggest three ideas that I think should be part of a Christian response. It has become routine for persons to respond to tragic incidents of gun violence by saying that now is not the time to discuss politics. I agree that initial responses should focus on care, concern and love. Yet how often the difficult conversation about what

# Grand Rapids First UMC aids in Puerto Rico recovery

## MYRON DONAJKOWSKI Grand Rapids First ERT Leader

MARCH 24, 2019 – To date 12 UMCOR/UMVIM teams have gone to work in Puerto Rico since the hurricane struck the island in September 2017. Our Early Response Team from Grand Rapids First was among them.

We left March 1, 2018 and arrived back in Grand Rapids on March 11. In summary, we all had a very rewarding trip both for what we accomplished and the spiritual gifts and love we received from the people in Puerto Rico.

Our work location was east of Patillas on the southeast coast. Work was made possible by many hands and high spirits.

### Site #1 Task description

Maria blew away the kitchen somewhere up the mountain. The prior team had erected 2x4 stud walls and put up a blue tarp for roof, our team put on steel roof, added siding, installed windows, painted siding, and did a lot of debris cleanup. More work will be done by subsequent teams, electrical, plumbing, and putting up the inside paneling, and getting the sink back on line.

### Site #2 Task description

Maria blew away the roof. We prepared the home for 4" thick concrete roof. Sites #1 and #2 were 300 yards apart. We walked between sites for tools needs. We supported Jose, a highly experienced builder. Jose was building this for his sister Petra and Petra's family. He was a very patient mentor to our folks who had never been part of a concrete roof job. Jose told us in 1955 when he was 11 years old, he and 12 family members rode out Hurricane Santa Clara in a small concrete shed about a 100' from this home. I think it convinced him that concrete was the way to survive a Hurricane.

I was fortunate to spend some time at this place working alongside Jose. I built out a concrete form on the inside of the house and I was not pleased with my work. I looked to Jose for suggestions. He started shaking his finger slowly. I thought I was going to be criticized for my poor work. He searched for the words in English then said, "You, you, you, you are the hands of God."

### Site #3 task description

Installed new roofing on 14 x 14 room. In addition, we put a roof over a generator shed with salvaged metal roofing and helped with debris cleanup.

### Site #4 Task description

Support homeowner and family in concrete home rebuild. We dug holes, helped with re-bar reinforcement, fed a gas powered small batch mixer and poured concrete for each hole. The homeowner thought we helped their rebuild schedule by 2-3 weeks. In one hole, the concrete was 10" or more thick and the powered hammer was having little effect, so we established a teamwork approach for the sledge hammer with each of us rotating in after 10 or so swings. We had a crew of folks swarming on building re-bar beams. There was difficulty getting the wheelbarrows to the holes and then dumping the load of concrete without losing it. Lots of teamwork needed during this phase. When the last hole was poured, we all cheered.

There were many rich stories shared between the family and our team. Angel (16) and Natalie (14) recalled what they were doing during the hurricane. Angel was sneaking peeks out the louvered windows, while others were trying to take their minds off the storm. The winds were so high that the whole concrete house was shaking. During the time they

were in the eye-wall, they walked out and looked around. Things were holding up okay. The backside of the storm was rain wrapped and had embedded tornadoes. It was the backside of the storm that took their home away.

How did I see God?

I saw God helping our team get through the four phases of teamwork: *forming*, *storming*, *norming*, and *performing* from the moment we arrived at the camp when we set out to get ready to hit the ground running on Saturday morning.

I saw God in my connection with Jose, our translator, who is a very talented photographer. I have started working to arrange an art show for him in our church.

I saw God connect Julie with young Angel who expressed a desire to go to West Point. Julie and her husband Laurin, a West Point grad, have already reached out to the admissions department on Angel's behalf.

I saw God, when my team allowed me to bust up concrete. Much of my time as team leader was spent in coordination of activities and planning for the next job.

We established strong relationships with the people in Puerto Rico. Many hands and high spirits made big things possible.



## In love with God's people ... remembering Billie Rench

**CHERYLL WARREN**  
Michigan Bd of Global Ministries



Millicent Rench, fondly known to those who loved her as "Billie," was a

passionate spokesperson for mission in her local church and throughout United Methodism in eastern Michigan, an area known during her life as the Detroit Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Her family as she grew up did not attend church, so she began attending a local church herself as a child, one which her friends attended, a neighborhood United Brethren church. It was that church which helped her obtain a scholarship at Bible College in Naperville, Illinois.

Billie joined the Methodist Church at the time that she married Douglas Rench and moved to Chesaning, Michigan. Billie would later remark that she merged the United Brethren and Methodist churches in her own faith journey before the denominations themselves merged.

As a result of her love for her church family, doubled with an ardent support of missions in the United Methodist Church, she became known throughout the conference for her avid promotion of United Methodism's involvement in the lives of those in need around the world. Her love of mission entered her life strongly and in surprisingly new ways after the Rench's family of three sons grew up and moved forward with their adult lives.

As chair of mission ministries at First United Methodist Church, her home church in Owosso where the Rensch later moved, she attended the conference's annual School of Christian Mission at Adrian College. Hearing Dr. George Sommers, a presenter there, describe an upcoming seminar in India where he was actively serving in the mission field himself, she was moved to meet him personally following his presentation. Her own church had recently covenanted for salary support of yet another United Methodist mission couple serving in India, and Rench promised to pray that he would find the right 30 people to take part in the seminar which was planned for the following year. "Why don't you go?" was the response she received when she expressed her pledge to be in prayer for the project.

Rench said, "I'm not qualified....I have no talent or skill... I have no money." Sommers replied, "You're going to go. I want you to go. You're the kind of person this was planned for. I will pray about it." She went home with a new fire burning in her heart.

Then the United Methodist Women at Owosso First UMC directed \$500 in their scholarship fund to support Rench's participation in that seminar, known as "Journey of Understanding". With this scholarship, Rench was able to attend the seminar.

During those five weeks in India, Rench learned about the history and culture of India. She also experienced what would prove to be a highlight in her life, spending a day with Mother Teresa.

"This opportunity changed me completely," Rench later observed about her participation in the seminar.

She would come back home to serve as secretary for eight years of the Detroit Conference Board of Global Missions, and to become Director of Global Ministries for the United Methodist Church for another eight years. Through this latter role, as her family and church friends would recall, she visited many third world countries in order to observe firsthand the needs around the world and the help being supplied through United Methodist programs. She also communicated directly with many missionaries. Locally, she continued in her home church as chair of Missions, a position she filled for over 30 years.

During her last 20 years of active mission work in what was then the Flint District of the Detroit Conference, she organized and chaired the

Liberia /Haiti Covenant Committee. She also was instrumental in leading the district to raise over \$100,000 for a special year of mission emphasis. The Liberia and Haiti mission outreach will continue in the new Michigan Conference.

She also organized numerous Volunteers in Missions trips. During her lifetime, she visited all 50 states in addition to 50 countries. It was this collection of experiences that fueled her passion and drive as she advocated within her local church and around the Detroit Conference for support of missions in the United Methodist Church.

She once observed, "God chooses unqualified people to reach out with His love and serve the least of these...." Rench left her passion for mission in the hands of others in her beloved church family in March of 2017 when she was called home to be present with the Lord she served so diligently throughout her life.



## Drinking the Cup ... sin and idolatry



**REV. JOHN BOLEY**  
Clergy Assistant to the Bishop

The most compelling book I've read recently is *"America's Original Sin"* by Jim Wallis. Wallis is well known for his work with Sojourners, and in this provocative book Wallis claims without apology that America's original sin is racism, and it is based on the idolatry of "whiteness," which some might call "white privilege."

I had not seen much publicity about this book, but read it when it was thrust into my hands by a friend. I can understand why it might not have gotten wider publicity – because it is a truth-telling book which is every bit as direct and convicting than Wallis' book *"God's Politics."*

Wallis recounts the history in America of racism, going back to slavery and our tragic racist history since the end of the Civil War. But this book is compelling because Wallis is so adept at placing things in the right theological context. Wallis speaks the language of both evangelism and social justice, but more importantly, he is a theologian who always hits the nail on the head with respect to faith in our triune God.

Racism is Sin. For many of us, we don't speak the language of Sin very much anymore, even though we probably should. So if racism is sin, we must overcome our focus on color – "dying to whiteness is essential to our spiritual integrity." Wallis goes on to say that whiteness is not just an ideology, it is also an idol. As the Ten Commandments teach us, idols separate us from God, and the idolatry of "whiteness" has separated white people from God.

Wallis quotes Genesis 1:27-28, where God creates humankind in God's image, male and female he created them. He points out the obvious - that all human beings are made in the image of God, not just white human beings. While this seems almost like a truism for most of the groups that we are part of, we have to have intentionality to apply it to the "other" – the alien, the refugee, the foreigner, the other race or ethnic person or group.

So, I'll confess. While every ounce of my being wants to deny it, I am racist. But Wallis draws a distinction between explicit bias and implicit bias. I would pray that I have never explicitly promoted racism or white privilege, although I probably have. But implicit bias is woven into our very fabric, of our white privilege, our culture and our institutions. And I know that I have been implicit in my racism and my approval of white privilege. In this time of Lent, I confess my sin of explicit and implicit racism.

It is much easier to speak the language of social justice, and it is essential to do so. But when we speak only the language of social justice, we end up with political polarities and we become mired in the political paralysis that right now grips our country. And we don't have the tools to fight the resurgences of explicit racism that are being promoted right now. So maybe it is time to go back to telling the truth – racism is sin, and our preoccupation with whiteness is idolatry.

But it is not all depressing. There has been so much progress. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and seeking a justified and sanctified life, we can overcome or at least cope with our idolatries and our sin while living with the joys and benefits of discipleship and following the path of Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God.

# Michigan Conference profiles in leadership

## KAY DEMOSS Senior Editor-Writer

On December 15, 2017 Bishop David Bard announced the names of persons who will serve as the core leadership team for the new Michigan Conference. He noted, “We are working to organize our life together so that, centered in Jesus Christ, we are engaged in mission and ministry to our communities and the world, we are led by bold and effective leaders, and we are supporting and fostering vibrant congregations.”

MIConnect is introducing these persons in a new series, “Profiles in leadership.” The Rev. Benton Heisler was the subject of this magazine’s January issue. This month we present the Rev. Jennifer Browne, the Rev. Dirk Elliott and Mark Doyal.

These are condensed versions. For full detail of each individual, go to [news.michiganumc.org](http://news.michiganumc.org) and search on “profile.”

## REV. JENNIE BROWNE *Clergy Excellence*



For me, the call to the Christian faith and the call to ministry were simultaneous. It

took me a while to realize it didn’t work that way for most people!

I was baptized at age 21 at the First Congregational United Church of Christ of Middletown and matriculated at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in the fall of 1981. Union was (and is) an intellectually and politically exciting place

but it didn’t do much to prepare me for hands-on ministry. When I was hired as the Associate Minister at the First Congregational Church of Battle Creek, Michigan, I experienced all kinds of culture shock – not just the adjustment to the Midwest but to the “settled” kind of church life that preferred to maintain the status quo and had no desire to change the world.

I went running back to academia, enrolling in a PhD program at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. But I’d also fallen in love and gotten married to a West Michigan Conference pastor. Eventually I joined the Conference and began serving United Methodist churches.

My background gave me the advantage of seeing church life through a newcomer’s eyes. Why would anyone join a church that didn’t make a difference in the world? Why would anyone want to be part of an organization that didn’t value and promote diversity? Why do we think that listening to one person tell us what to think or believe for one hour on Sunday mornings is helpful or desirable?

I am filling a new position within the Michigan Conference. I will need to learn the map of the former Detroit Annual Conference—towns, churches and people. But my thoughts so far are that the DCE’s primary purpose is to devise, implement and evaluate systems of support and accountability for United Methodist clergy in this conference.

While the DCE is not involved in appointment-setting or in disciplinary situations, my office is the



**Rev. Jennifer Browne is married to Rev. Eric Strand, Director of Music, Worship and Arts at Grand Rapids 1st UMC.** ~photo courtesy Jennifer Browne

place where the processes of candidacy, commissioning and ordination are tracked and recorded. There will be much to wade through as the two Boards of Ordained Ministry continue to blend their ways of doing things and come up with systems and procedures that are new to both of them.

I’m looking forward to finding ways to bring opportunities for clergy spiritual development and education to our area, to helping clergy find the support they need, and to creating a culture of excellence in which clergy hold one another accountable for our effectiveness in our ministries.

## REV. DIRK ELLIOTT *Congregational Vibrancy*



Halfway through my senior year in high school, my dad purchased a farm in Ohio.

I moved there in December that year with my mother and younger siblings to operate the farm until my dad closed his business in Texas and moved the cattle to Ohio. It was on that farm one day that I knelt

in prayer and gave my heart and life to Christ. In Ohio, our family joined the United Methodist Church.

My young adult years were spent in agribusiness where I am grateful for the mentoring of Dave Davis (now a member of First UMC in St. Louis, MI) who encouraged and helped me grow in confidence and professional skills. Several years later, on the day my dad graduated from seminary, I said yes to a call to ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church.

As much as new-church ministry is in my blood, church vibrancy and renewal are in my heart. It is central to my call. My vision and the “why I do what I do” has always focused on renewal—to be a church with passionate spirituality and missional focus, a church of people who love God and neighbor.

As Director of Congregational Vibrancy, I look forward to starting new churches and new faith communities as well as work alongside local churches that seek to be healthy with relevant and vital ministries. We cannot rest on what we are already doing.

We need to continue hearing what the Spirit is saying to us while cultivating our awareness and understanding of the diversity of cultures and communities in which we serve, so we can *reach more people, younger people, and more diverse people.*

The 2016 General Conference has challenged us to make one million new disciples by the end of 2020. To reach that goal, the Connectional Table set a number of strategic goals.

As these relate to the Michigan Conference in the area of Congregational Vibrancy, our challenge is to start 13 new churches using a variety of models, 130 new faith communities (new worship services or new venues for worship), and 1,300 new small groups. The work area of Congregational Vibrancy will focus on reaching these goals through starting *new places for new faces*, developing lay leadership, and helping existing churches grow in effective ministry.

The words of hope in Isaiah 43:19 resonate for this time in our church and world:

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” God is doing something new, and we get to be part of this new thing!

We have a new vision and a new structure helping us live that vision. We can dream, start new ministries, and make new friends. As our world faces grave difficulties, the church has a message of hope and the capacity to share that message in both word and deed

#### MARK DOYAL *Communications*



After graduating from Michigan State with a degree in communications, my career began

as a street reporter for the evening news of the CBS affiliate in Lansing. It was exciting work and I learned how to tell complex stories in seconds. I also discovered an interest in marketing and later



**United Methodist Association of Communicators President Arthur McClanahan honors Mark Doyal with the 2016 Communicator of the Year Award. ~umac photo**

transitioned into that work at the station. I left television to start a full-service advertising agency with two friends. Over 25 years we grew into a regional firm developing multi-media campaigns for clients in nine states. My area of expertise was in brand campaign development and radio and television creativity.

Working with a wide range of large corporate and non-profit clients, I learned a great deal about leadership. I learned the importance of listening and of asking the right questions.

And, I learned the importance of clear messaging. While I found advertising fulfilling, I found myself drawn to working with non-profits. I sold my share of the firm and began consulting with non-profit and faith-based communities, working with a variety of denominations across Michigan.

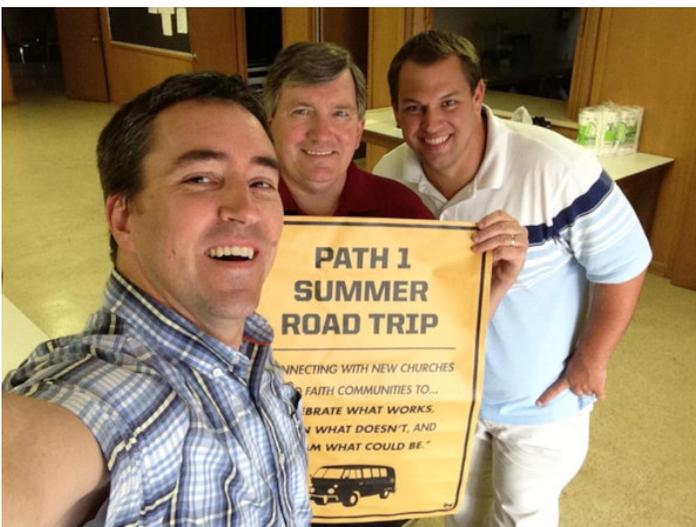
That is when my pastor at University Church, John Ross Thompson, made me aware the West Michigan Conference was looking for help. Three years later, Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey asked if I would come onboard full-time to manage communications for The Michigan Area.

The purpose of communica-

tion ministry is to witness the ministry of the Michigan Conference and enhance the connection of our members through communication; so that we are able to carry out the mission of making and empowering disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As Communications Director, you have to wear a lot of hats: consultant, photographer, editor, writer, artist and designer. Whatever needs to be done to accomplish the mission, I feel it is my responsibility to listen for the needs of our conference ministries and help construct messages and campaigns that share those messages. I work to be a sounding board for ideas and to push back a bit to test those ideas in the same way other audiences will do when they hear them.

The timing of creating a new conference could not have been more perfect as we prepare to address the changes of our global church. We have done the hard work of understanding who we are as a conference and what we need to accomplish in Michigan.

After four years of listening, planning and re-designing, we can now focus on the critical work ahead.



**Dirk Elliott (center) has national experience as a trainer and consultant including work with Path 1, a program of Discipleship Ministries. ~photo courtesy Dirk Elliott**



**MARQUETTE DISTRICT ...** *Webelo Ian Galbreath receives "God & Family" at Marquette Hope UMC.*



**DETROIT RENAISSANCE DISTRICT ...** *Pastor Patty Gandarilla presides at the Maundy Thursday meal at Centro Familiar Cristiano UMC in Detroit.*



**CROSSROADS DISTRICT ... Flint:** *Bethel member Alma Hopson receives Church Women United's Human Rights Award for dedication to children.*



**GRAND TRAVERSE DISTRICT ...** *With cupcakes and grape juice, Kids at Pentwater: Centenary UMC learn about the miraculous wedding at Cana.*



**CROSSROADS DISTRICT ...** *Stairway to heaven? A young person from Grand Blanc UMC on the journey toward confirmation.*



**GRAND RAPIDS DISTRICT ...** *Laura Witkowski was one of many United Methodists who were on the street Saturday, March 24 witnessing against gun violence.*



**ANN ARBOR DISTRICT ...** *Off to the races in the nursery at South Lyon United Methodist Church-*

**Snapshots of Vitality**



**LANSING DISTRICT ...** *Campus Pastor William Chu proclaims it's Tutu Tuesday in East Lansing.*



**HEARTLAND DISTRICT ...** *Staplers ready for action. Big Rapids Wesley went to Slidell, LA over spring break. Making a difference with Epworth Project.*



**BLUE WATER DISTRICT ...** *Reaching neighbors. Pastor Pat Robbins served the sacrament outside Yale UMC while others offered communion in the sanctuary.*

## Marquette District Dialog ... *boom, bust or beyond*

### REV. SCOTT HARMON Marquette District

Traveling what has long been identified as the Marquette District – largest of all the districts east of the Mississippi River -- I often hear the affirmation that, “This is God’s country.” While the conviction is certainly sincere, there are surely as many locations considered “God’s Country” as there are places we call home.

As with many areas of our state Northern Michigan has known the cycles of booms and busts. From the fur trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, commercial fishing and mining of copper in the mid-nineteenth, to logging and iron in the latter half of that same century, communities mushroomed as resources were harnessed.

With the growth came our Methodist forebears, missionaries and pastors at one time outnumbering any other denomination along Superior’s south shore. Hardy adventurous souls like John Clark (1833), William Brockway (1838), James Evens (1838), and John H. Pitezal (1843). Faces now long forgotten who answered the call to serve God’s people in an isolated wilderness.

Even today the remoteness of Northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula is a unique treasure. The western communities of District #1 have a far greater connection with Green Bay, Wisconsin or Duluth, Minnesota than they do with Lower Michigan. Of our 60 congregations, 14 are located in the Central Time Zone west of Chicago. Surprising as well to those unfamiliar

with the northern region is our strong connection with Alaska. Rev. Ray Buckley who was with us this summer from The Alaska Missionary Conference told of the annual “U.P. gathering” in Anchorage bringing Upper Peninsula transplants together in an informal day of connection to the place they called home.

Those who travel north today still find hints of the past. The many structures from mining’s boom days (copper



on the Keweenaw, and iron ore in the central Upper Peninsula). Enormous saw blades, with abandoned rail berms, trestles, and sun-bleached stumps from the lumbering days. Along the shores of both great lakes the fishing villages and boats once marking their trades are still there. As well as the churches giving witness to the spiritual life.

While loving this land and its proud legacy, and especially those who have lived and are living through its booms and busts, I’m drawn these days not to a question of history but to one of mission .... “what lies beyond?”

There are northern images which for me have been meaningful as we seek to find our way. The first reflects

something of our Alaskan connection. The UP-200 is an annual 12-dog, dogsled race covering some 200 miles of Upper Peninsula back country. As a qualifying race for the Iditarod it draws teams from across the United States and Canada. In mid-February, as I watched the teams start down the prepared snow-packed streets of Marquette, what I noticed was not the uniformity of the dogs, but rather the way they were pulling in the same direction.

Looking into the eyes of these canine athletes stretching forward through the twists and turns of the city, I was left with little doubt of the passion that filled them or the ability they had in working together. Forming such a team though takes practice, and patience, and trust. Surely no one would expect to do well on race day if they hadn’t put in the effort required to effectively work together. What’s true of dogsledding I believe has some correlations in the body of Christ as well.

A second image is of places with names like Copper Peak (Ironwood), Pine Mountain (Iron Mountain), or Suicide Hill (Ishpeming). Locations that, as ski jumps, both inspire and terrify. What does ski jumping have to with

actively engaging the world as the body of Christ? Both, when practiced at their best, are indeed inspiring and terrifying; challenging us to take a big step beyond what we are comfortable with, the effort we are willing to make, the risks we are willing to take, the fear we are willing to set aside.

And yes, there are times when following Jesus, being the church, feels a lot like coming off a ski jump: risky, stepping into the unknown. An unknown that others with “good sense” would be hesitant to go into, and yet in the midst of a myriad reasons why we shouldn’t, there is still the itch.... a call to step beyond what can be fully known, comprehensively evaluated, or risk-managed. A call that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob challenged the people of Israel with over and over again. The journey Jesus testified to in assuring his followers that our “God is the God of the living not of the dead”.

In the Old Testament story of Esther a young woman, hesitant to step forward in uncertain times, is told by her uncle, “who knows but that you have not come for such a time as this?”... Today as we too seek to be faithful in the challenge of our own uncertain times, we listen for the Spirit’s leading stepping beyond the booms once enjoyed and the busts long endured, through imperfections and sometimes even blindness, to what lies beyond as we seek within our storied communities to answer the question long posed, “Lord, how can we best follow you? What would you have us to become?”

# CAMP ..... from p. 1

In addition, Crystal Springs hosts two major community events each year. Three hundred kids enjoyed Trick or Treating at Crystal Springs in October 2017. And the 2018 Easter Egg Hunt is about to happen.

The camp experience itself is not the same as it was even 20 years ago. Dan considers meeting the needs of modern parents and campers as a vital part of the mission to be welcoming. “Modernizing our retreat and family camps has been important,” he says. Air conditioning and a partnership with Terminex pest control have been significant. “We are the only summer camp we know of with NO mosquitoes,” Dan exclaims. “We often hear campers say, ‘We haven’t seen a mosquito since we got here.’” There’s an emphasis on safe and modern buildings. “Our cabins are as comfortable as anyone’s house,” Dan reports.

Current projects include renovating a retreat house and staff house, and updating multi-media equipment in the chapel.

The emphasis on welcoming and visibility in the communi-

ty has brought new and diverse camping experiences to Crystal Springs. The reality is that United Methodist churches are not sending as many children to camp as they once did. “We still have empty beds at United Methodist youth camps,” Dan says. “So we work in the gap.”

New guests now fill the facility spring, summer and fall ... among them Christian churches and schools. And the ministry has international dimensions, too. There’s an Indonesian group that celebrates on the grounds and Crystal Springs hosts a *Quinceañera*, a Hispanic tradition celebrating a young girl’s coming of age. Crystal Springs has also become a wedding venue. The renovation of the tabernacle is now self-sustaining thanks to revenue from weddings.

The United Methodist Camping season kicks off on Memorial Day with Big Kids Camp. What are Dan Stuglik’s hopes for the 2018 season? “Every year I want to finish a little bigger than the year before in numbers and improvements.”



**Fall splendor at Crystal Springs. In the glory days 8,000 people filled the tabernacle and cottages near Dowagiac.**



**Summer is coming. Go to [umcamping.org](http://umcamping.org) for news of Crystal Springs and all Michigan camp sites.**

This is Dan’s sixth season at Crystal Springs. A Coloma Township police officer at the time, he came in as a part-time camp director in 2012. He had been both a camper and a counselor at Crystal Springs before that. “This is a place where I always enjoyed volunteering,” he recalls. “I loved it as a site 150-year-old and thought it would be neat to be a piece of that history.”

Dan calls himself, “the guy taking care of the place right now.” He feels privileged to be a person who took his turn as a steward of Crystal Springs. “Someday,” he reflects, “I will be gone but this place will still be here serving God.”

What is a highlight of his ministry? “I’m always blown away by the support that we get at Crystal Springs both from the community and from United Methodists.” He describes it as confirmation of how special Crystal Springs was and is. “I am not crazy thinking this place is important,” Dan notes. “Others see Crystal Springs as a big deal, too!”

One thing for certain, Camp Director Dan Stuglik is not

afraid of change. “We must always look to adapt and be ready for something new,” he says. “That’s what has done well for Crystal Springs.” He emphasizes that “you sometimes have to change your approach” to meet needs in the church and in the community. Dan enjoys camp director trainings and especially likes “to visit bigger camps to see how they are doing the next thing.”

The Mission of Crystal Springs Camp and Retreat Center is: *To create a welcoming Christian sanctuary that removes distractions between our guests and God.* Is it working? These Facebook reviews from guests suggest that it most certainly is...

“I call it holy ground; a part of history and a big part of finding peace in today’s busy world.” (Janet Smiedendorf) ... “My daughter had a great time! I had a lot of anxiety sending her to camp for the first time as she has a severe peanut allergy. They went above and beyond to accommodate her.” (Juliette Nunez) ... “Had my first experience here with band camp and loved it. Going to come volunteer when needed.” (Becky Bolton)



## Home Words Bound

Rev. Benton Heisler  
 Director of Connectional Ministries, MIUMC

The mission of The United Methodist Church is inspired by three key biblical texts:

1. John 3:16: *For God so loved the world that he gave His only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*
2. Matthew 28:19: *Therefore, go into all the world and make disciples in my name.*

The third text is a little less known but I believe it is every bit as essential to our mission: “Everybody do their part!” That is not exactly what it says, but if you read Nehemiah 3 you quickly get that impression. Every worker with a wide variety of skills, from all sorts of places did their part to reconstruct the wall of safety and security around the city of Jerusalem.

My friends the challenge of “being the Church” in 2018 is a massive endeavor. The world has changed! No longer will 135,000 people gather in the Los Angeles Coliseum to see a young Billy Graham evangelize the masses.

The UMC Discipline states that, “The local congregation and extension ministries are the most significant arenas for making disciples.” It further states that the purpose of the Annual conference is to “equip and connect the local church.”

Every conversation I was a part of at the Design Team as it has worked these past three years has had some element of “improving our focus on and support of the local congregations.” I am filled with excitement in regard to the staffing model we have outlined and even more excited in regard to the persons that have been selected to lead in these positions. Last month all the staffing positions were announced except one.

I am pleased to introduce to you Brittney Stephan. She will graduate from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary this May with a Master of Divinity including a Concentration in Multi-cultural Worship and Music Ministry. She will be commissioned and become a probationary member of the Indiana Conference in June. Her appointment as the Associate Director of Multi-Cultural Vibrancy in the Michigan Conference will begin July 1, 2018. It is quite possible you will have an opportunity to greet her at Annual Conference. Brittney is currently serving as an associate pastor in a predominantly African American congregation in Rodgers Park, IL. She has lived in Zimbabwe, served on the Indiana Conference staff in the area of youth and young adult ministries, and grew up on a farm in north central Indiana. These diverse experiences and contexts



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## Bishop ..... from 2

might be done never rolls around. It seems different this time, and I would suggest that encouraging the conversation is one Christian response to gun violence. As Christians we should encourage conversations informed by solid data and information.

In the days following the Stoneman Douglas shooting I read an essay by a radiologist who treated some of the shooting victims. The doctor discussed the extraordinary damage done by bullets fired from an AR-15 as opposed to those fired from a handgun.

***“No policy or law will absolutely guarantee our safety. That is not a reason to do nothing.”***

This should be part of our conversation. Currently there is on the books a law in the U.S. which prohibits the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from using any money to “advocate or promote gun control.” The effect of this law has been to stifle government-funded research on gun violence prevention. This is not helpful to us.

We must encourage conversations about background checks, mental health and domestic violence. As Christians we should encourage informed conversation and then let such conversation inform our actions.

In addition to encouraging informed conversation, as Christians we should help

move the conversation beyond some of its typical contours. I am a proud citizen of the United States. When someone says that the three greatest legacies of our country are baseball, jazz and the Constitution, I nod in agreement, even though the statement is hyperbole. The second amendment to our constitution guarantees rights to gun ownership, though not unlimited rights. Rights describe what we can do, legally. They do not necessarily define what we should do, and that is a faith question. As Christians are we asking ourselves, beyond the question of the right to own a gun, questions like: “Why do I have these guns?” “Am I keeping the guns I own stored safely?” “Am I doing all I can to make sure my guns do not find their way into the wrong hands?”

Finally, I think part of the Christian response to gun violence is to acknowledge that nothing we do will end all such violence. We live in a world where people act sinfully and selfishly. We live in a world where we do not adequately care for the hurting and damaged. No policy or law will absolutely guarantee our safety. That is not a reason to do nothing. John Wesley encouraged followers of Jesus to do all the good they can. Paul encouraged followers of Jesus, “do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

We cannot do it all, but I believe we can do better. We can encourage deeper and better-informed conversations, and let such conversations lead to more thoughtful action, all in the name and Spirit of Jesus.



# Commission on A Way Forward in homestretch

**HEATHER HAHN**  
United Methodist News Service

Heading into its homestretch, the Commission on a Way Forward has prepared its final report for bishops.

The 32-member commission is helping the bishops try to find a way through The United Methodist Church's decades-long divisions around how the church ministers with LGBTQ people.

The denomination's bishops will use the commission's report when they meet April 29-May 4 to determine what proposals to submit to the special 2019 General Conference. The commission will meet again later in May to help provide resources for the wider church, including General Conference delegates.

General Conference will have ultimate say on what direction the church takes.

The commission is focusing on two options that would alter the status quo.

**The one-church model:** Under this plan, each conference would be able to decide whether to ordain LGBTQ individuals as clergy. Each pastor would be able to decide whether to perform same-sex weddings or unions. Each local church would be able to decide whether to allow same-sex weddings in its sanctuary or receive an openly gay pastor. Those who could not in good conscience participate in same-sex weddings or ordination of LGBTQ clergy would not be required to do so. Central conferences — church regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines — could maintain their own standards on ordination and marriage.

**The multi-branch model:** Under this plan, United Methodists would share doctrine, services and one Council of Bishops, while also creating different branches. The five U.S. jurisdictions would be replaced by three connectional conferences, each covering the whole country, based on theology and perspective on LGBTQ ministry — progressive, contextual and traditional branches. In this case, contextual means allowing churches flexibility in ministry with LGBTQ people as best fits their mission field. Annual conferences would decide with which connectional conference to

affiliate. Central conferences would remain as they are or could choose to affiliate with one of the three connectional conferences. This model likely would require amendments to the denomination's constitution.

We are seeking to focus more closely on the values that are important to United Methodists — traditional, contextual and progressive," Florida Area Bishop Kenneth H. Carter Jr., one of three bishops serving as commission moderators, told United Methodist News Service.

"We did work on the proposals but tried to go more deeply into what is important about them to our mission."

Matt Berryman, one of three openly gay commission members, told UMNS that to him either plan falls short of equality for LGBTQ members.

"We are experiencing attempts to change the church such that LGBTQ people are going to have a greater sense of inclusion, but it is by no means anywhere close to what justice would look like," he said. "Is it better than what we have? Yes. Does it model the kingdom of God? No."

Still, he said, of the two possibilities, he prefers the one-church model.

The Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, another commission member, said the

commission meeting was notable for "a very good spirit and brutal honesty in terms of where people are at."

He added, "The same divisions and impasse that are apparent in the broader church are apparent in the commission."

Lambrecht is the vice president of Good News, which advocates for maintaining the church's teachings against the practice of homosexuality. He said he might be able to live with the multi-branch plan, but that would not be his preference. Instead he would prefer a plan that includes great enforcement of current strictures that "graciously allows people who cannot live with that find another venue."

Good News and other unofficial advocacy groups within the denomination already are staking their positions.

Uniting Methodists earlier this month announced support for the one-church model — arguing it is grounded in Scripture, church doctrine and Wesleyan tradition.

In a world torn by polarization, the group said in a statement, the one-church model "provides a countercultural witness of unity in Christ and sets in place a process by which the church will continue to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."



**Members of the Commission on A Way Forward participate in a letting-go prayer at the end of their 4-day meeting. ~cob photo/Maidstone Mulenga**

## News in Brief

### UNITED METHODIST HEROES SOUGHT



United Methodist Communications (UMCom) is planning a new social media campaign, #amazingUMCheroes. Do you know a United Methodist in Michigan who is doing wonderful things, either as a difference-maker or through selfless giving? Please nominate that individual by sending a few sentences of explanation to [presscenter@umcom.org](mailto:presscenter@umcom.org).

### PUERTO RICO'S BISHOP REPORTS ON RECOVERY

On March 5 Bishop Hector Ortiz, episcopal leader of Puerto Rico, reported that a third of the population is still were without power and 300,000 residents have left for the U.S. Further, 30 Methodist churches on the island were damaged by Hurricanes Irma and Maria last September. The United Methodist Committee on Relief is on the ground in Puerto Rico providing case management and funding. As Early Response Teams have arrived from the U.S. Puerto Ricans have worked alongside them. "With the help of God we will rise up again," Ortiz said. The Bishop is engaged in a ministry of traveling, offering hope through his pastoral presence and prayer. (See related story p. 3.



### MICHIGAN COMMUNICATIONS WINS AWARDS

The United Methodist Association of Communicators (UMAC) met in Philadelphia March 7-9, 2018 for their annual conference and awards ceremony. Michigan Communications received six awards including First Place honors in Media Presentation (Mark Doyal "Michigan Conference Structure) and Non-Fiction Writing (Kay DeMoss) "Impossible Dreams Come True, Remembering Robert C. Smith. Doyal continues service as President of UMAC.



**Mark Doyal and Kay DeMoss accept awards of excellence on behalf of Michigan Conference Communications.**



## Team ..... from p. 12

have provided Brittney with a deep faith, a compelling interest in helping others grow in their desire for diversity and develop their skills for navigating through our culture of change.

So this is only part of the "team." The conference staff exists for the purpose of equipping and connecting the more than 150,000 laypersons and over 1,000 clergy. "Some may not put their shoulder to the task" as it says in Nehemiah. I get that, but their failure cannot be our excuse to be and to do what God has placed before us.

Thirty five years ago I was the assistant varsity coach of a high school basketball team in the regional finals. It was the last year before they added the three point line in high school. Five talented seniors took the floor. As a team and coaches, we had been through thick and thin together. Each had a special role: rebound, shoot from the wing, shoot from the top of the key, post up in the lane, run the offense, everybody play defense, and coach. Two minutes into the game, I screamed at the head coach, "We gotta call a time out. Nobody is doing their job!" Adjustments were made. We did not win that game, but it wasn't because people didn't fulfill their role. The other

team just did a better job at their responsibilities.

Many will watch a lot of NCAA Tourney Basketball the next three weeks. Every Sunday is a "time-out." It is a moment to be reminded of the call God has placed on our lives. It is a moment to hear a word of instruction and encouragement from the "coach." Our spirits are lifted as together we sing the "team fight songs" that remind us of how God has called us and will equip and sustain us to the completion of our task.

My father always shot baskets with two hands. My sister could only play in GAA (Girls Athletic Association). She wasn't allowed to run the entire court or take more than three dribbles before she had to pass the ball. I ended up in a lot of "jump balls." There was no "possession arrow." Basketball is not the same anymore and basketball is every bit the same.

A lot has changed in our culture and the Church, but God's redeeming love found in Jesus Christ is still the same and always will be. I pray we all take the necessary "time out" to listen to the voice of God give us the clear "play" for what God desires us to be our next step.

