

## Covenant between Liberia and Michigan focuses on respect



**James Reynolds engages with school children at Bopolu Mission.** ~ photo courtesy Jackie Euper

### KAY DEMOSS

Senior Content Editor

It's a covenant, not a contract. Contracts are about money while covenants are founded in relationships. It was in that covenantal spirit that the Detroit and Liberia conferences came together in 1999. The Rev. Terry Euper has been involved in that partnership since the beginning.

Terry's first trip to Liberia took place in 2005 when he accompanied the Rev. Duane Miller on a medical mission. Since then, Terry has traveled to northwest Africa three more times, just returning from his most recent trip last week on November 8.

This was the first time that Terry served as the organizer of a trip. Eight others joined him. Their sponsor, funding the project portion of the trip, was the former Crossroads District of The Detroit Conference. A gift of \$20,000 from the District Board of Missions was wired ahead to Liberia's VIM Coordinator, Dehkontee Tarr. She saw to it that materials got purchased and projects got jump started by Liberian workers prior to the Michigan team's arrival. Terry says it was an excellent trip that surpassed his hopes and expectations. The Michigan team knew they did not want to stay working in one place for two weeks. "Dehkontee and I worked together from the beginning," he reports. "The success of the trip had to do with working directly with Liberian leaders to keep the focus on what the Liberia Church wanted."

The Liberia Conference staff set the schedule and chose the stops along the way. The Michigan team visited five different sites. Here are some details with observations by Euper ...

**Monrovia** ... painted five classrooms at the College of West Africa, the oldest secondary school in Liberia. "They had already painted the outside of the building before we got there, and our hands-on experience was inside the school working with a team of Liberian painters until we ran out of paint."

**Bishop Judith Craig Children's Village** ... helped install a playground for the 83 kids in residence and the additional 600 children in the surrounding community. "A lot of heartstrings here. Things are in



**November 2018**

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**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.*

**Michigan Conference**  
 1011 Northcrest Road  
 Lansing MI 48906

517.347.4030

Direct comments & stories  
 to Mark Doyal  
 mdoyal@michiganumc.org



**Bishop David Bard**

**The Joyful Journey**

**A**dvent is a unique time in the church calendar, a time when the calendar of the church and the calendar of the society seem uniquely mismatched. When the world is rushing about – lining up for early sales, logging on early for cyber sales – Advent asks for waiting and patience. When the surrounding society has

watching for bargains, counting down the days until we can unwrap what others have bought us, Advent asks us to watch for moments of light, echoes of grace, and then counting the days until God will make all things right in total, when God will fully dwell with humanity, wiping every tear from our eyes, when “death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (Revelation 21:4). We have no idea when that may arrive.

Advent is about waiting, watching, patience, about thin rays of light piercing the growing darkness, about how God in Jesus Christ continues to come into our world. Advent is about this coming of God in the everyday, even as we await a final coming. Advent is about calm and quiet.

As Advent arrives, I am returning from a wonderful and moving trip to Israel/Palestine, the Holy Land. I am deeply grateful for all who shared this pilgrimage with Julie and me. Yet even in the Holy Land there was often rushing through, or better put, an odd combination of waiting and rushing. We stood in line at the Church of the Nativity for about 90 minutes, having to be assertive about our place in line, only to be hurried through the place that marks Jesus’ birth – “only five minutes please!”



At the same time, there were moments where the echoes of the upcoming Advent and Christmas seasons resounded deeply, when all was calm, all was bright. I appreciated kneeling in prayer at the Church of the Beatitudes on the Sea of Galilee, and at the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth. Both moments had me thinking that perhaps Protestants had been too hasty in removing kneelers from our churches. Another profound moment for me was praying at the Western Wall. I can still “feel” the touch of the cool, smooth stone on my hands as I touched the wall in prayer.

It is important to also say that it was not only in moments of relative silence and solitude that I experienced God’s grace deeply. A significant part of the experience of grace on the trip was the other people, and grace happened not only in profound conversation, but in laughter. There was grace even as I slipped off a step in the Jordan River during the baptismal remembrance, and got wetter than I had intended. I wonder, though, if we all need some of those moments of quiet grace, those calm moments encouraged by Advent, to fully appreciate the grace that comes in more crowded and chaotic moments. The quiet and calm and patience encouraged in Advent seem to shape a soul that can appreciate the thin rays of light that can arrive in chaos, that can receive more profoundly the gift that is present in every conversation with another that moves beyond a greeting and asking about the weather, that can laugh with genuine joy at the moment of a self-renewal of baptism.

## Michigan Conference receives \$204,000 UMCOR grant

**KAY DEMOSS**  
Senior Editor-Writer MIUMC

Checkbooks and wall plaques. For years those items were symbolic of the Detroit and West Michigan conferences' relationship with the United Methodist Committee on Relief. Thousands of generous United Methodists around the state would write checks for every appeal issued by UMCOR. Then at every session of Annual Conference, a representative from the General Board of Global Ministries would stand alongside the bishop and conference treasurer, to present a plaque that commemorated exceptional giving during the year just past. "We're running out of wall space for all these plaques!" was a common quip. That kind of generous mission stewardship is indeed worth celebrating!

In 2014 something new began to happen between The Michigan Area and UMCOR. Surely, strong giving continued on the part of congregations and there were more plaques, as well. But perhaps the new symbol of the relationship between The Michigan Conference and UMCOR is the Case Manager.

First there was epic flooding in Northwest Detroit in 2014. An UMCOR grant of \$600,000 enabled the Rev. Becky Wilson and her team to assist residents in their recovery. In the early part of 2016 another UMCOR grant of \$75,000 enabled the Crossroads District to hire, first, Peter Plum, and then, Greg Timmons to lead the United Methodist response to the Flint Water Crisis.

In 2017 UMCOR provided \$190,000 to support two Case Managers and their service to families affected by flooding in Midland; their work is wrapping up now.

Four more Case Managers are currently at work in Michigan. Mano a Mano con Puerto Rico (Hand in Hand with Puerto Rico) has assisted those who fled to Michigan after Hurricane Maria. A \$100,000 UMCOR grant funded the work of those two Case Managers, based out of Detroit and Grand Rapids. Two Case Managers have just arrived in an office in Hancock, Michigan to begin a twelve-month effort to coordinate response for those suffering from the Fathers' Day flood in the Keweenaw

Peninsula. The Copper Country Flood Recovery is possible thanks to a \$100,000 grant from UMCOR.

Because of the effective disaster response provided by these various projects of the last four years, the United Methodist Committee on Relief has granted \$204,700 to The Michigan Conference.



**Volunteers, like these helping clean-up after the 2014 flooding in northwest Detroit, have been significant partners in disaster recovery in Michigan.**

The two-year funding will employ a full-time coordinator for disaster recovery ministries in Michigan.

The search is underway for a person who will be part of the Office of Connectional Ministries staff, supervised by Benton Heisler. It is hoped that the new coordinator will be in place by January 1, 2019.

This Disaster Recovery Ministries Coordinator will focus both on the after-care of past disasters and preparedness for future crises. UMCOR will provide intense training for the individual who is hired for this task.

The new staff person will work with volunteers who make up the present Michigan Conference Disaster Response Team: Bob Miller (Chair of the Disaster Response Committee; Dan O'Malley, Disaster Response Coordinator, and Jody Pratt, Volunteer in Mission Coordinator. Together, they will build the Michigan

Conference's readiness to respond.

"We are looking for a person with a heart for disaster response ministry," said the Rev. Paul Perez, Michigan Conference Associate Director for Mission and Ministry. "We are interested in someone with case management experience in the non-profit arena and

The United Methodist Church."

Other conferences, including Florida, New Jersey and New York have disaster response coordinators on staff. Paul Perez expresses his excitement that Michigan United Methodists have developed a heart for disaster recovery ministry over the past five years. "This grant positions us for the next chapter and will help build our capacity and our ability to respond with local communities in timely ways," he continued.

Checkbooks and plaques. For many years those nurtured and fueled Michigan's enthusiasm for disaster response at home and abroad. And it is hoped that The Michigan Conference will continue its strong funding of disaster relief and recovery. "With this grant," Perez concludes, "Michigan may be able to move to the forefront of those who can be relied upon when catastrophes happen."

## Keweenaw neighbors rise above 'Father's Day Flood'

**KAY DEMOSS**  
Senior Content Editor

For them, it's a matter of neighbor helping neighbor. Marci Vivian and Dennis Leopold are residents of Copper Country in northern Michigan. They are also Case Managers for the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

"It's pretty amazing what UMCOR does," Dennis says. "But nobody around here had heard of UMCOR because we had been unaffected by disaster."

That changed on Father's Day 2018. Six inches of rain overnight Saturday night caused flash-flooding that washed out roads, filled basements with water and rock, and opened 60 sink-holes across the Keweenaw Peninsula.

The state and community rallied to relieve residents in the early weeks and months. The Portage Health Foundation took the lead, helping



Perez the UMCOR Case Managers will pick up where the Portage Health Foundation left off. "Marci and Dennis will follow up with about 150 residents who

***"We can get through what we need to get through right now."***

~ Marci Vivian

460 families. Meanwhile, The Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church received a grant from UMCOR. Those funds allowed the Flood Recovery Project – Copper Country to open in October.

According to the Rev. Paul

have self-identified as in need of recovery assistance," Perez says. They will also reach out to additional residents, working in partnership with the Keweenaw Foundation and Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church. The

Foundation and Good Shepherd have funds for use in direct assistance.

Marci and Dennis received spreadsheets and contacts from the first responders. Those inform their work. A typical day involves phone calls. Perhaps the person whose name was on the call list is okay, but they know of neighbors who still suffer hardship from the summer storm.

After the flood, "People looked around and saw that there were people worse off so they didn't seek help," Dennis reports. Those persons who stepped aside so that their neighbors could be cared for are now among those the Case Managers are picking up in their calling. Dennis describes the storm-ravaged area as, "many towns but one community."

After phone interviews come home visits for further assessment of need. Home owners are connected with resources. Needs include mold abatement, basement muck-out, as well as appliances. "We're looking for people without furnaces, hot water heaters, as well as homes that have not been cleaned and sanitized yet," Marci said.

"Everyone has a unique set of circumstances. The need from household to household can vary greatly, and funds will be distributed accordingly," Dennis states.

Some were unable to complete the application process for foundation assistance earlier in the year. They were among the "left behind" who are now being



**UMCOR Case Manager Dennis Leopold assesses a homeowners needs. The next step is to connect that resident with resources.** ~ photo Marci Vivian

reached by this UMCOR-funded effort.

Based on their first 150 calls, and how many people registered for aid, the pair estimate they'll be overseeing about 80 households for disaster case management.

Case Managers connect the residents-in-need to appropriate organizations, non-profits, counselors and tradesmen and walk them through their full recovery process.

Dennis explains that needs have stretched the local professionals. "We spend a lot of time talking with contractors, who are tied up and trying to make space for us," he says. "They shoehorn our requests in."

A lot of work has been done in the five months since the rains came but Marci and Dennis continue to seek out the more

***"People looked around and saw there were people worse off so they didn't seek help."***

~ Dennis Leopold

vulnerable persons in the community.

"This is a commitment to holistically getting people's lives back to a place of normalcy," says Perez. "The work of disaster case management is not only material but it's psychological, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being."

The work Dennis and Marci do meets those various needs. "Some we phone may be talking about the flood for the first time," Dennis notes. Marci observes, "We talk to a lot of people who are very emotional and very grateful. They felt so overwhelmed." Dennis adds, "Again, some of them are the outliers who knew there were others with greater needs even though they were unable to meet their own needs. Those who denied assistance for themselves in June are thankful help is still available."

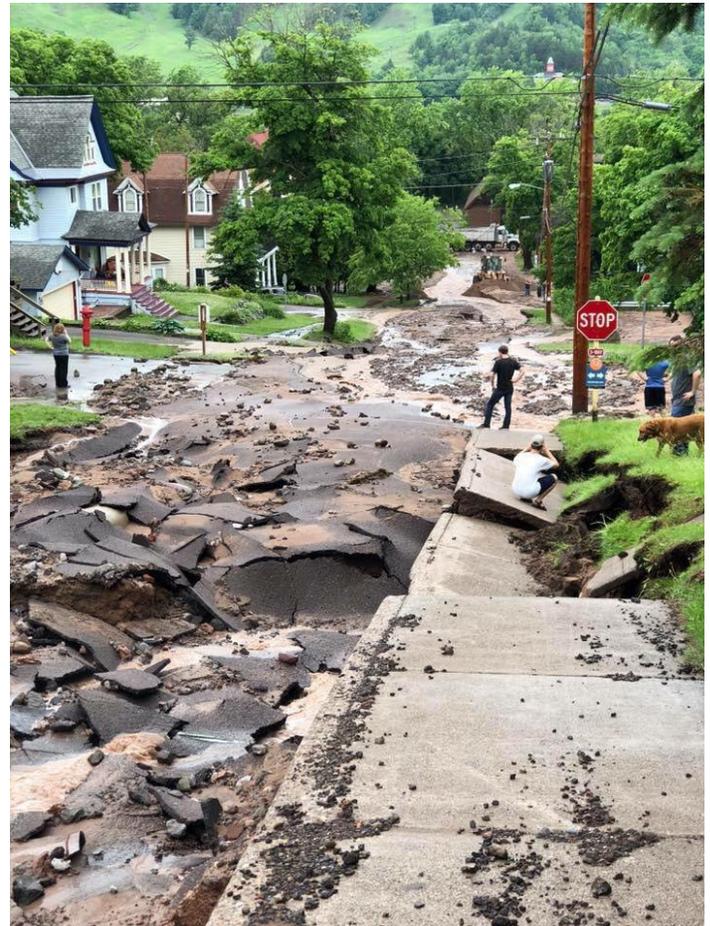
"We can get through what we need to get through right now," Marci says. "We need to put the focus on the future and keep the story out there." There's already 2 feet of snow on the ground where they sit in their office in Hancock with plenty more



winter ahead. They anticipate challenges come spring.

"The topography and hydrology changed after the June rain," Dennis explains. "There is a lot of concern about the spring thaw when 250-300 inches of snow melts, and we have to contend with that."

"The flood was unique to



***The morning after. The community of Houghton, Michigan woke up on June 17, 2018 to cars buried in mud, basements full of rocks and streets destroyed by sinkholes. Six inches of rain in as many hours caused the "Father's Day Flood" ~ photos courtesy Scott Lindenberg***

our back doors. We are used to blizzards and we pull together. The flood affected what will happen in the spring run-off," Marci continues. "More funding will be needed until we can get back to a new normal." Such is the nature of case management. "Our case managers assist from the beginning of their client's case to the close of it to aid and empower that person to work toward their long-term recovery," Paul Perez concludes.

UMCOR works through partnership. The Case Managers in the U.P. are in

regular contact with two Case Managers still at work in Midland doing similar flood recovery. "They continue to be part of our team," Dennis says. Marci and Dennis also relate to the Copper Country Team Disaster Recovery Group comprised of local churches, community leaders, non-profits and government agencies.

The two are based out of the D&N Bank building in Hancock, Room 402, and can be reached by phone (906) 231-6856 or by email [dleopold@michiganumc.org](mailto:dleopold@michiganumc.org); [mvivian@michiganumc.org](mailto:mvivian@michiganumc.org).

## New life comes to the Burton Heights neighborhood

**JOHN ROSS THOMPSON**  
Grand Rapids Metro Ministry

For more than 80 years, Burton Heights United Methodist Church served the neighborhood in Grand Rapids that is now known as Garfield Park. Soon its site will again serve the people of that area with low income housing.

On November 20, 2018 ground was broken for Garfield Park Lofts. This 36-unit apartment building for low-income residents near the corner on Burton Street SE and Division Avenue is the first multi-family housing development in the Garfield

Park neighborhood in at least 30 years.

In the 1980's the Burton Heights congregation was the third largest United Methodist Church in Grand Rapids. When the congregation declined in number, the church was closed. For a time, the building housed Grand Rapids Metro Ministry, a day center for homeless families through what is now Family Promise Grand Rapids, and the congregation of La Nueva Esperanza United Methodist Church.

When upkeep on the building was too much to maintain, it was sold by Grand Rapids

Metro Ministry through an agreement with Dwelling Place, with the hope that it would someday again serve the neighborhood.

At the November 20 groundbreaking, a 1909 time capsule from the building was opened. The congregation started as Feakin Methodist Episcopal Church at the corner of Buchanan and Brown. In 1909, the name was changed to Burton Heights when the new building was constructed near Burton Avenue and Division Street.

The time capsule contained a 1905 Methodist Episcopal hymnal, a 1908 Book of

Discipline, church newsletters, Grand Rapids newspapers, and other memorabilia. A 1909 calendar featured the slogan "Saloons Must Go! – Michigan's Doing Dry", recalling Methodist advocacy for prohibition at the time.

Contents of the time capsule will be reviewed by Grand Rapids city archivists. Church-related materials will then be given to Grand Rapids Metro Ministry, hopefully for inclusion in the West Michigan archives.

The groundbreaking and time capsule opening were attended by Metro Ministry chair John Ross Thompson.



*Where a United Methodist Church stood -- on the corner of Burton Street and Division Avenue in southeast Grand Rapids -- ground is breaking for a new low-income housing project. ~ photo courtesy John Ross Thompson*

## Drinking the cup ... *temple and tabernacle*



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

So out of the blue a few days ago, I received a package that looked like a book package. I knew that I hadn't ordered anything recently – I'm trying to get rid of books. But there it was. Diane held the book envelope and told me that the package was from Dallas.

My first thought was – Ugh, some General Conference lobbying stuff.

But my thoughts changed as I opened the package and saw what was inside. There were two copies of a book by Stanley Copeland and Scott Gilliland, pastors at Lover's Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas, called *"Together: United Methodists of the Temple, Tabernacle and Table."*

On quick inspection, it was clear that it was a book supporting the One Church Plan for the United Methodist Church – the plan which tries to hold together the different visions and versions of the UMC as history and the witness of the Church unfold. I guess it was indeed General Conference lobbying stuff, but different from what I expected.

The authors use great Biblical images to convey their beliefs. The first is the image of the tabernacle from Exodus. The tabernacle was the dwelling place of God set up by the Hebrew people wandering in the wilderness. It was moveable and made of moveable materials. The tabernacle represents "God at God's most free." Free to move with God's people. Free to call anywhere home. Free to be wherever God's people are. The authors conclude that a wandering, searching, free God is a good thing.

The second image is that of the Temple from I Kings. The temple, unlike the tabernacle, was made of stone and was fixed in place. It was the dwelling place of God as the people became settled in Jerusalem. "The fixed temple is the same yesterday, today and forever." Fixed in stone as the sacred place for a priestly nation. Fixed as the place Israel can finally call home. Fixed as an anchor where God could always be found.

The authors believe that both the tabernacle and the temple are valid realities for our understanding of God. They understand that there is TENSION between the understanding of these two realities, but that the tension is complementary, not contradictory.

You've figured it out by now – these two images represent different understandings of the interaction of LGBTQ persons with the life of the UMC – and that the UMC should be a both/and rather than an either/or – fitting with the intent and hope for the One Church Plan. So ALL can receive Christ's baptism, and ALL can be present at Christ's Table.

One of the authors summarize their thesis by stating:

*"I believe United Methodists have a unique opportunity right now to speak loudly and clearly that divisions taking root in our culture and in our country will be uprooted in our church, and that we will find a way forward where everyone can follow the God of the tabernacle and temple together. While we may disagree, we can be united in the Good News of a Savior named Jesus Christ who we proclaim to a world in desperate need of redemption in every place where God's temples may be found and where God's tabernacles may go."*

Amen. I am thankful on this day before Thanksgiving that these authors see that the tension between the tabernacle and the temple is a good thing and that the UMC can be better in the future if it sees these points of tension as complementary rather than contradictory.



**NORTHERN SKIES ...** An aspiring Music Man. The newest band member at the Connection Center of Marquette Hope United Methodist Church.



**GREATER DETROIT ...** Members of Orchard United Methodist Church were "Taking the Next Steps" on their journey to generosity during worship on October 28, 2018.

**Snapshots of Vitality**



**HERITAGE ...** A young saint of South Lyon United Methodist Church is the first acolyte to carry the new Bible in worship alongside Pastor Mary McInnes.



**NORTHERN WATERS ...** Thankful for their leader, Pastor Cloud Pyo, the Boyne City and Boyne Falls UMCs pulled together to present him with a beautiful stole during Pastor Appreciation Month..



**GREATER SOUTHWEST ... Rev. T-Rex is ready to greet the Trunk-or-Treaters who arrive at Schoolcraft United Methodist Church.**



**MIDWEST ... High seas. These Lowell United Methodist Church Preschoolers row the boat ashore. Hallelujah!!**



**MIDWEST ... The Rev. Devon Herrell, Big Rapids Wesley Director, participates in a Vigil for the Victims of Hate Crimes in Pittsburgh and Jeffersontown.**



**MICHIGAN CONFERENCE ... Rev. Ellen Zienert was among 149 persons who went with Bishop Bard to the Holy Land. She made a new friend in Bethlehem.**



**CENTRAL BAY ... Volunteers from Auburn United Methodist Church assist with food distribution for Thanksgiving dinners in their community.**

## HomeWords Bound ... *with thanksgiving*



**REV. BENTON HEISLER**  
Director of Connectional Ministry

**“H**ave **no anxiety** about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Philippians 4:6)

I have noticed that most every conversation I have been a part of in recent weeks, the word **anxiety** or an expression of anxious thoughts and behavior has come up.

Really? What’s to be concerned about? Now with a new governor the roads will be fixed! (That’s curious, I have been in construction zones every summer in multiple places the last 20 years. Republican and Democrat governors alike. I wonder what our new governor knows about asphalt, concrete, water and freezing and taxes that nobody else knew to date? I guess I will not worry and simply watch.)

Have no anxiety! Right, now everybody can smoke marijuana! What could go wrong with that?! I guess I must have been reading fake news about “increased teen use” and “gateway drugs” and “increases in impaired driving.” I am sure the second-hand smoke won’t be any problem for any small children in a home. These young brains will be more relaxed, less anxious and able to focus on math, science and reading. Test scores will increase, and behavior issues will dissipate. What a great country!

I know what we can do! Let’s let everybody who is incarcerated vote! Florida thought it was a good idea and passed that law, even though Michigan and 34 other states think it is a bad idea. Maybe we can just legalize “straight ticket balloting,” that way nobody has to be able to use discernment, reasoning, or study some competing facts about ideas and approaches and elect people on the merit of their unique ideas, regardless of party affiliation. Oh wait, Michigan just approved such an item!

I do not expect the media to get it “right.” Never have and never will. They sell the twist that sells the advertising time and draws the viewers. I don’t expect the politicians to get it right. They never have and never will. The contracts are too lucrative, the power too seductive, the security and benefits too enticing. As an elementary school child, I remember hearing the cost of a helicopter that was shot down in the Vietnam war. The amount of money was more than the school millage that had just been turned down. I also remember there was no mention of the lives lost, and I thought to myself, “What if that had been my dad flying that chopper?”

War goes on and price of helicopters increases, and teachers are still underpaid and expected to be “in loco parentis,” in place of the parents. Bad idea when I learned the phrase in my teacher education classes in college, bad idea today! Legally protective of the child yes, but cover every aspect of positive moral behavior, character, the 3 R’s, Science and provide at least some opportunity for artistic expression. Wait, don’t tell me they have reduced art and music!??

And then, there is the 2019 Special Conference of the General Conference! No worry or pressure there!

Yes, I am being “bummer Benton cynical,” or is it a bit of prophetic announcement! Time will tell.

What I do know is that the verses of Philippians go on: *“Finally, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (4:8)”* **This is where I intend to focus time and energy!**

I do expect the Church to at least offer an alternative to worry and anxiety and help the culture understand what is “true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent and worthy of praise.” So, to that end we must continue. The late Bishop Edsel Ammons put it best in a sermon I recall him preaching at Annual Conference, “Preach Christ Simply and Simply Preach Christ.” “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary use words,” St Francis of Assisi is quoted as saying.

**So go the second mile, turn the other cheek, love your enemy, pray for those that persecute you, love your neighbor as yourself, believe that with God nothing is impossible, trust in the Lord with all your heart, know that, “God has a plan for you, plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give you Hope and a Future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)**

I suggest you print this above paragraph out and post it someplace you are likely to see at about the same time you get the next “robo-call” and you feel inspired to say something on social media you may later regret.

I end with a verse, the pastor who was at my United Methodist Church while I was in high school, used every week. We didn’t agree on every political or social issue, but this verse stuck! (His name was Rev. Tom Jones, he died too young as a result of exposure to Agent Orange in the Vietnam War. He lived as a peacemaker.)

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us, but if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1: 8 & 9)

**“Let your prayers and requests be made known with thanksgiving!”** Amen to that!



**The Crystal Springs Express transports children around the camp and makes guest appearances in local parades.**

## Get on board to support camping

Need a one-size-fits-all gift to put under the tree this year? Looking for a gift to give someone who has everything?

The nine United Methodist campgrounds around the state of Michigan are already registering campers for winter, spring and summer events in 2019. What better way to beat the winter chill than by looking ahead to the summer sun??

Registration for summer camp makes an awesome Christmas gift. As a bonus, those registering between now and December 15th will receive a \$10 Camp Store Gift Certificate in the mail.

You'll make a child, grandchild, niece or nephew a happy camper knowing he or she not only gets to go to camp but will bring home something fun, too. (Not applicable to Early Bird registrations.)

Have questions about how to register or concerns about your UltraCamp account? Email your inquiries to [registrar@umcamping.org](mailto:registrar@umcamping.org) or phone the registrar at 989-272-1116.

To learn more about the activities going on at the nine camp sites go to the website of Michigan Area United Methodist Camping: [umcamping.org](http://umcamping.org).

Questions about the program of any specific camping opportunity should be directed to the site managers listed on that website.

## BISHOP ..... from p. 2

One of the gifts of the Advent and Christmas seasons is the invitation to calm and quiet, to letting the soul rest in the amazing love of God, a love that comes down at Christmas, but comes down always, again and again. It is a love that shines into the darkness that is part of our lives and part of our world.

While in Bethlehem, I could not help but hear the words, "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee, tonight." We cannot deny the difficulty in the world, its brutality, its suffering. We cannot deny that we suffer and know disappointment and pain. What we can likewise affirm is that God's love is a constant, that God continues to work in our world in the direction of beauty, grace, healing, compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation, justice, peace and love. They are there, but sometimes it requires patience, quiet and calm to see them more clearly. When we, out of a calm and quiet center, know God's love in beauty, grace, healing,

compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation, justice, peace, we also know that we are invited by God in Jesus Christ to be part of God's work of nurturing and growing each of these.

You don't need to travel to the Holy Land to discover calm and quiet, to let your soul rest in the amazing love of God. The invitation to such moments is always there if you listen carefully to the whisper of God's Spirit. Listen.

My hope and prayer for each of you is that you create space and make time for moments of calm and bright this Advent and Christmas season. Let such moments more deeply center you in the love of God in Jesus Christ, and being more firmly centered, may such moments give you renewed energy to live God's love more fully.

Thank you, Michigan United Methodists, for being people who, knowing you are loved by God, choose to love. Thank you for being part of God's work of shining light and love into our world.



**BISHOP'S ADVENT OFFERING PROVIDES RELIEF**  
**The 2018 Michigan Conference Advent Offering supports Disaster Recovery. Catastrophe has come to Alaska, California, Michigan, Puerto Rico ... Your gifts will help.**

## United Methodists were there when ground shook



**Russell Alexie and 45 other residents of Karluk Manor took shelter at St. John UMC after the Nov. 30 earthquake.** ~ photo by Anne Hillman, courtesy of Alaska Public Media



**The Nov. 30 earthquake hit south central Alaska damaged roads and buildings, and in some areas knocked out power and water for a time.** ~ Air National Guard/U.S. Army



**Betty Sanchez Sopcak (l), her husband Daniel (bottom), and her uncle James Sugar (r) take shelter with other residents of Karluk Manor at St. John UMC after the Nov. 30 earthquake.** ~ photo by Anne Hillman, courtesy of Alaska Public Media

### **SAM HODGES** United Methodist News

Alaska's most powerful earthquake since 1964 prompted an Anchorage United Methodist church to become a temporary shelter.

The Nov. 30 earthquake caused major damage to roads and buildings. And it left Karluk Manor, a residential facility in Anchorage for people who have battled alcoholism and homelessness, without power or water.

St. John United Methodist Church learned of the situation from one of its members, Cathie Clements, who works for the program overseeing Karluk Manor. The church agreed on short notice to house all 46 residents. "St. John members and staff hurried to ready the church building for their guests who would arrive within 30 minutes," said the Rev. Andy Bartel, lead pastor. "Dozens of people pitched in to supply hot coffee and tea and welcome people with smiles and outstretched hands."

The church also rounded up bedding and worked with a local restaurant to provide meals. The group was relocated to a Red Cross shelter after a couple of nights at St. John.

The 7.0 earthquake caused minor injuries but no deaths. Though property damage was widespread, Alaska's strict building codes apparently prevented building collapses. Schools remain closed, as do many businesses and government offices.

The Rev. Carlo Rapanut, Alaska Conference superintendent, said homes of some members of the United Methodist Church of Chugiak, about 20 miles northeast of

Anchorage, had extensive damage. The church itself had damage to its entryway, he said. "The parsonage, which is a log house, shifted 4 inches," Rapanut added.

Other United Methodist churches in the affected area had only cracked drywall or other minor damage, he said. Alaska Pacific University, a UM-affiliated school, also reported no major damage.

The Homer UMC is an official emergency shelter, and in this case served as a backup to the high school, which filled with evacuees "We had had about half a dozen people arrive, including a family with small children, before the tsunami warning was rescinded and people could return home," said the Rev. Lisa Marie Talbott. "While we did not bear the brunt of damage, the threat of a tsunami is real, and it is terrifying."

Greater Northwest Bishop Elaine Stanovsky issued a statement, offering thanks that there was no tsunami, asking for prayers for all involved and asking that donations be made through UMCOR.

Lonnie Brooks, a United Methodist layman, was with his wife in their fifth-floor home at an Anchorage retirement center when the earthquake hit.

United Methodist churches were able to have services on Sunday, Dec. 2. "Attendance was close to normal, and everybody had a story to tell," Rapanut said. "There was a general sense of 'We're all survivors and we're going to pull through.' It was the first Sunday of Advent, and the theme of hope was really appropriate."

# Finance and Administration holds to budget cuts

**HEATHER HAHN**  
United Methodist News Service

Despite a request to reconsider, the board of The United Methodist Church's finance agency is pressing on with plans to slash the denomination's budget starting in 2021.

During its Nov. 15-16 meeting, the board of the General Council on Finance and Administration also made plans for the parts of the church budget it oversees — with an eye toward spreading the pain around. Much of the discussion revolved around how the multinational denomination can be financially sustainable even as its U.S. membership and financial base continues to decline.

In August, the board approved an 18 percent cut in the base percentage rate used in calculating U.S. apportionments — the requested giving from U.S. annual conferences. Each conference's apportionments are determined by multiplying the base percentage rate by its local church expenditures.

Basically, the board decided to shrink the financial pie.

Earlier this month, the Connectional Table — the board's partner in deciding how to slice up the pie — sent a letter urging the board to reconsider the proposed cut. The Council of Bishops, at the request of its Immigration Task Force, also discussed the letter. The Connectional Table is led by the Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai

Based on current estimates, the denomination is looking at a proposed general church budget of \$498.65 million for the years 2021-2024. That's about \$105 million less than the current four-year budget approved in 2016.

Such a sizable cut, the letter said, could threaten the denomination's identity as a "connectional church."

Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño, both a finance agency board member and chair of the Immigration Task Force, made sure the letter was part of the board's conversation.

"In our decisions around budgeting, are we moving from being a connectional church to a more congregational church?"

she asked the board.

The Rev. Steve Wood, chair of the board's General Agency and Episcopal Matters Committee, responded. He said the entire board desires "a very strong connectional church."

"The challenge comes when there is an evaporation of people, apportionment dollars and local churches," said Wood, who is also lead pastor of Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church in Johns Creek, Georgia.

The board's executive committee also is finalizing a response to the Connectional Table. For the past four years, the denomination has seen collection rates from annual conferences go up. However, church leaders have long projected that the shrinking U.S. membership makes the current funding levels unsustainable.

While the church is growing, particularly in Africa, the United States still provides the lion's share of general church funding. Overall, the collection rate is 2 percent below where it was at the same time in 2017.

Budget planning is still in its early stages. General Conference, the denomination's top lawmaking body, will have final say on the size and allocation of the denomi-

national budget at its 2020 session.

The Connectional Table has responsibility for allocating the World Service Fund that supports most of the 13 general agencies; the Ministerial Education Fund that supports United Methodist seminaries and seminary students; the Black College Fund; Africa University; and the Interdenominational Cooperation Fund.

The Connectional Table will have about \$361.6 million to allocate — about a 23 percent decrease from the current budget. A big concern at both the Connectional Table and finance-agency board meetings was what the reduction would mean for the World Service Fund.

Bigham-Tsai told the board that the Connectional Table will do "the best with what we have." But she also raised concerns about maintaining the core missions of the funds the Connectional Table will allocate.

Board member Steve Court offered that, "Another part of this conversation is not actually setting the budget but raising the money." He added, "No matter the budget we set, if we increase giving, more money will become available because the payout will be higher."



**The Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai serves as the top executive officer of the Connectional Table. "We will do the best with what we have," she said. ~ct photo**

## Nine new Michigan Earthkeepers commissioned

ATLANTA — A new class of 44 EarthKeepers was commissioned via an online service Nov. 12, 2018, making the EarthKeepers movement 132 people strong. This 2018 class of EarthKeepers, ranging in age from 13 to 80, is strengthening the movement of United Methodists taking bold action on behalf of God's creation.

EarthKeepers, a training program of Global Ministries and the United Methodist Committee on Relief, is designed to equip United Methodist clergy and laity to lead their communities in environmental stewardship.

Michigan Conference Earthkeepers include: Tom Allen, Emily Burns, Philip Harrington, Stuart Jacobson, Rene Johnson, Christy Newhouse, David Newhouse, Asti White and Marilee Woodworth.

The service gathered the new EarthKeepers, their family, friends and others in a digital space, allowing an unlimited number of people to participate while reducing the carbon footprint that would have been required for all of the

2018 EarthKeepers to travel to one place for the service. This is the second online commissioning service for the EarthKeepers program.

"Each EarthKeeper logged into the service from their home contexts," said the Rev. Jenny Phillips, UMCOR Creation Care program manager. "When they joined the service and their faces appeared on the screen, it felt like a great reunion. Several participants had family and friends alongside them. Prior to the service, those who did not know one another eagerly introduced themselves, and they shared stories of what they recalled from the training and what they have learned since."

The service, led by Bishop Larry Goodpaster of the Southeastern Jurisdiction; Thomas Kemper, Global Ministries general secretary; Phillips; and the Rev. Dr. Jerome Saha-bandhu, Global Ministries



**Robert Prud'homme, Emily Burns, Marilee Woodworth, and Phil Harrington present a project plan at the Detroit Earth-Keepers training in October 2018. ~ umcor/Jenny Phillips**

mission theologian, included a video in which many of the EarthKeepers introduced themselves and the projects they are implementing in their communities. The highlighted projects include initiatives such as starting creation-care ministries in their churches and annual conferences as well as community gardens that will nourish both the environment and members of their community.

Global Mission Fellow Emily Burns, Christy Newhouse and the Rev. David Newhouse, pastor of hospitality at Sunnyside United Methodist Church, are addressing food insecurity around Kalamazoo, Michigan. Their approach has three components to reach the community at multiple entry points: a community garden, partnership with a local food pantry and a children's education program.

Our call to care for God's creation has no age limit. Shirley Alcorn, 80, is teaching United Methodists in the North Georgia Annual Conference how to use plastic shopping bags to create

sleeping mats for people who are homeless. Henry Morgan, 13, is working with his mom, the Rev. Jenny Partch, pastor of Highline UMC, and Michelle Danagol, a member of Highline UMC, to create a community garden that addresses food insecurity in their community near Seattle.

Leigh Williams of Cary, North Carolina, proves that the ways in which we can work to conserve and preserve creation are limited only by our imaginations. Williams is addressing single-use plastic waste by developing a silverware-lending library at her church.

Each of the newly commissioned EarthKeepers attended a three-and-a-half-day training program to equip them for environmental stewardship. During that time, they were immersed in learning and discussions on theology, United Methodist resources, community organizing and anti-racism, which helped them to develop an environmental project to engage their churches and communities.



**A Free Store and community-tended garden are ministries at Kalamazoo: Sunnyside UMC that will now be expanded and enhanced by those recently commissioned as Earthkeepers. ~ Facebook photo/Sunnyside UMC**

## News in Brief

### HYMN COMMITTEE SEEKS WORSHIP MATERIALS



The Liturgical Resources subgroup of the Hymnal Revision Committee invites the submission of original materials for possible inclusion in the next United Methodist Hymnal. The Committee particularly invites the submission of resources about: Baptism; Confirmation; Renewal of Baptism; and Days and Seasons of the Church Year. If at all possible, please submit material electronically. Deadline for submitting these

materials is June 30, 2019. Instructions on how to submit material are available at [michiganumc.org](http://michiganumc.org). Search "Hymnal."

### THANKS EXPRESSED FOR GIVING TUESDAY

More than 2,450 gifts totaling \$624,868 from 11 countries were received for missionary support, mission projects and disaster relief in the 2018 UMC Giving Tuesday campaign on November 27.

Donations were given to 110 missionaries and 272 different projects. The annual event benefits mission work supported in large part through the Advance, the designated mission giving channel of The United Methodist Church. "The faithful giving of United Methodists to mission outreach is constantly inspiring" said Rev. Russell Pierce, director of Global Ministries' Mission Engagement, which includes the Advance.



### VIETNAM INITIATIVE IN NEED OF PRAYER



The United Methodist Mission Initiative in Vietnam is working through challenges in transition because a retired missionary-pastor, who has surrendered his ministerial credentials, is attempting to lead Vietnamese United Methodists into a separate denomination he is trying to organize. In a Nov. 2 joint statement, North Carolina Annual Conference Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, the bishop assigned to Vietnam, and Thomas

Kemper, chief executive of the General Board of Global Ministries, asked for prayers. Ward and Kemper wrote that the Rev. Ut To, who served as a missionary in Vietnam for 17 years and retired in June 2017, "has not upheld the order and discipline of The United Methodist Church. He has interfered with the ongoing life and ministry of the church, has refused to vacate the United Methodist property in Ho Chi Minh City, has organized a group of followers into a new denomination and allowed himself to be elected bishop of this new group." To surrendered his ministerial credentials to Bishop David Bard of the Michigan Area. Churches supporting the ministry of Ut To and Karen Vo To are asked to discontinue that support.



## Year-end mission reporting

As 2018 draws to a close, churches are asked to send in their reports of mission giving using Spotlight Church and Six Lanes of the Advance forms.

In **2019** The Michigan Conference will begin a brand new initiative for mission giving called EngageMI.

But this is **2018** and congregations across the state are now wrapping up their global and local outreach through Spotlight Church (Detroit Conference) or Six Lanes of The Advance (West Michigan Conference).

Spotlight Church officially ends December 31, 2018. Former Detroit Conference churches, please use the 2018 Spotlight Church Form to report your 2018 mission giving and to receive recognition as a 2018 Spotlight Church.

The Six Lanes of the Advance program also officially ends December 31, 2018. Former West Michigan Conference churches, please use the 2018 Six Lanes Form to report your 2018 mission giving and to receive recognition as a 2018 Six Lanes Church.

Where can the current Spotlight and Six Lanes listings and these report forms be found? Go to [michiganumc.org](http://michiganumc.org) and search on "year-end mission reports."

The Conference Board of Global Ministries thanks every individual and every local church for their faithful support that offers healing, help, hope and justice to God's people next door and around the world.

Those needing help with year-end reporting should contact Paul Perez, Associate Director for Mission and Ministry: [pperez@michiganumc.org](mailto:pperez@michiganumc.org) or 517-347-4030 x4076.

Do your mission leaders wish to learn more about EngageMI? All nine districts have a group known as "EngageMI Ambassadors." They are ready to travel to your church to explain this new mission initiative based on "ministry with." A list of these ambassadors is available at [michiganumc.org](http://michiganumc.org).

# Liberia ..... from page 1

bad repair with no functioning generator or pump.” The team enjoyed “a lot of time with the kids,” sharing clothing, soccer balls, school supplies and other gifts.

**White Plains Agriculture Center** ... helped rehab an old pig pen to enable start-up of a hog raising enterprise; a fund-raising project of the Liberia Conference Board of Pensions. “Bishop Samuel Quire has set agriculture as a major focus for the Liberia Annual Conference. White Plains is raising livestock and re-cultivating fields of cassava, coconuts and pine-apples devastated by the war.

**Ganta Hospital** ... assisted in installation of air conditioning in the maternity ward. Crossroads District’s dollars purchased three AC units and fans for the hospital. The team also gave dollars toward improvement of the dining hall at the Nursing School in order to enable their certification with the government.

“This is the only hospital in northern Liberia. It is impressive to see how it has been rebuilt after being destroyed by the war 14 years ago.”

**Bopolu Mission** ... painted inside the high school and worked on preparing science lab for electrification. “The Pastor-Director has a marvelous vision for agricultural and educational mission in the community.”

The highlight of the entire trip for many was the dedication of a well at a site between Monrovia and Ganta. VIM team members participated in a ceremony in the village of Tippita that honored Millicent “Billie” Rench. Billie, a Flint District resident and long-time supporter of the Liberia Covenant, contributed to water projects around the country. The District Superintendent present for the dedication related that his wife had received a nursing scholarship given by Rench in honor of her husband, Doug.



**Team members join Liberians in celebrating the dedication of a well in memory of Billie Rench.**

“Talk about connection!” Terry Euper exclaims.

Reflecting on the importance of the Michigan-Liberia Covenant, Euper explains, “The covenant has a lot to offer us and a lot to offer them. The key is to be able to fully respect one another.” He emphasizes the importance of real partnership. “This is not just a big, rich Michigan Conference doing something for the poor, little Liberia Conference,” Terry notes. “They have a wonderful spirit with much to offer us.”

Mel Leach, retired and pastoring Hale: First UMC, says, “Our team went to Liberia to be a blessing to the vibrant church there. But instead we were so flooded with the Joy of the Lord and Liberian generosity, that we turned out to be ‘the blessed ones!’”

This was the first trip to Liberia for Brenda DuPree, Chair of the Michigan Conference Board of Global Ministries. She observes, “I am blessed to have spent precious time in conversation and work with our partners in Liberia, both committed United Methodist missionaries

and others, over the years. So, helping with the progress at rural Bopolu Mission Station by painting the school was a joy!” Brenda looks forward to The Michigan Conference’s continued support of the 221 students at Bopolu. One trip participant, the Rev. Mike Seymour, was once a District Superintendent on the Cabinet of Bishop Judith Craig. He finally realized his goal of visiting the Children’s Village established in her honor. His grandson, James Reynolds was also on the VIM team. Mike’s other grandson, the Rev. Jon Reynolds, is the new chair of the Liberia Task Force of The Michigan Conference.

And family ties are perhaps what’s at the heart of the Michigan-Liberia Covenant, after all. “We are part of the same family, under the same sky, the sane stars!” says Brenda DuPree. And Terry Euper concludes, “What’s most important about our covenant? It lets the Liberians know that they have brothers and sisters who care about them.”



**United Methodist Women bring food for patients at Ganta Hospital.** ~ photos courtesy Jackie Euper