

MICONNECT

Michigan Area of the United Methodist
Church News & Information

Print Edition

MI Magazine

February-March 2019 Review

Michigan United Methodists respond to General Conference 2019



Bishop David A. Bard prays along with other episcopal colleagues at the 2019 General Conference. ~ mic photo/Mark Doyal

KAY DEMOSS
Senior Editor-Writer

In June of 2017, a special teacher was invited to the joint annual conference session of The Michigan Area. To members assembled for

the first time at Grand Traverse Resort, the Rev. Susan Beaumont presented sessions on the topic, "Leading in a Liminal Season." She defined "liminality" as, "a transitory

space, betwixt and between." Beaumont noted that both the denomination and Michigan's conferences were living between something that was ending and something that has not yet begun.

By March of 2019, the Detroit and West Michigan conferences are in their third official month of life together as a fully united organization. But

Go toGC2019 p. 4

MI CONNECT
Michigan Area of the United Methodist Church News & Information

Feb-Mar 2019

MICConnect 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 MICConnect Weekly. Find the "rest of the story" at MichiganUMC.org.

Bishop David A. Bard
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We are 850 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

If you are taking time to read this, you may be expecting another word about the recently completed special session of the General Conference. Thought the General Conference will certainly not be absent from this essay, it will serve more as background than foreground. I will be soon sending out

another letter to clergy and lay leaders encouraging leading from places of hope, courage, heart and tenderness rather than fear, anxiety and reactivity. I have in my mind a third, longer pastoral letter and am wondering if that might not best come following the next meeting of the Judicial Council which will be ruling on the constitutionality of the petitions approved at General Conference.

Because we are waiting for the Judicial Council rulings on the petitions passed by General Conference, there remains much uncertainty. Additionally, you need to know that any legislation passed at General Conference that is constitutional will not take effect until January 1, 2020. Thank you for your patience in the midst of all of this.

Coming directly from General Conference, entering the season of Lent seems fitting. In the service for Ash Wednesday in our United Methodist Book of Worship, the worship leader shares these words as part of a longer invitation: "Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: the early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation. In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith. I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to observe a holy Lent."

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, when we are reminded of our mortality, that our bodies will age and decay and return to the dust. During the season, somber colors are encouraged. We are reminded of our limits. We are invited to be in touch with our brokenness. Some of the words of the prayer offered in my listening session prior to General

Go to Bishop p. 11



Bishops David Bard and Thomas Bickerton serve communion to a mom and a young disciple at the 2019 General Conference. ~ mic photo/Mark Doyal

UMCOR is on the job in the Michigan Conference

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Content Editor

Nancy Money, the new Coordinator of Disaster Recovery Ministries for The Michigan Conference is now three weeks into this new position, and she is excited.

A two-year grant from the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) supported the creation of this important hire in the Office of Connectional Ministry. This is just the latest in a series of contributions that UMCOR has made in the state for flood recovery in Detroit, Midland, and Houghton as well as for clean water assistance for Flint.

In fact, it was interaction with two Case Managers in Midland – Katie Vokal and Anne Wortley – that first acquainted Nancy Money with the work of the United Methodist Committee on Relief. In 2017 Money was the Executive Director of Home to Stay Housing Assistance and co-chair of the long-term recovery group guiding the flood relief efforts. “I feel in love with how UMCOR embraced the work of response and recovery,” she recalls. “UMCOR was ready to invest in helping people get back to a new normal.” It was during training with UMCOR consultant Christy Smith that Nancy “felt

called to this ministry.”

At the outset of her ministry with The Michigan Conference, Nancy is working closely with other Connectional Ministry leaders, Benton Heisler and Paul Perez, and key volunteer like Dan O’Malley and Robert Miller. She is becoming acquainted with the “folks in this arena around the state.”

Together they are bringing a four-point plan of action into focus, that includes the following:

- 1) Implementation of best practices in all recovery efforts;
- 2) engagement of districts and local congregations;
- 3) development of community strategies for working with emergency managers, volunteers, and long-term recovery groups;
- 4) leadership development.

Money explains that there will be an emphasis on preparedness as well as on disaster response and recovery. “It is important that churches have the right tools and are equipped to know what to do when something happens,” she notes. It is her hope that a year from



Nancy Money

now each of Michigan’s nine districts has the understanding and resources needed to act when events happen.

“Disaster is often equated with natural disaster. That’s where our brains go when we hear *disaster*,” Money adds. “But other things qualify as disasters, too, and congregations need to have the skill sets to equip their communities to recover.” She listed possibilities such as a mass shooting, a sole employer leaving a town, or “anything that negatively impacts a community.”

Money is grateful that UMCOR is steadfastly present, come what may. UMCOR’s current investment in the state is in Copper Country, where two UMCOR Case Manager, Marci Vivian and Dennis Leopold, are helping with recovery from last year’s “Father’s Day Flood.” “Their grant is slated through October 2019,” Money says, “but there’s so much snow up there right now that they can’t get to some things until spring.” The Case Managers anticipate that the spring thaw could bring new problems due to the way the flooding shifted the terrain.

“What happened in Midland could not have happened without UMCOR,”

Go to UMCOR p.7



UMCOR Case Manager Dennis Leopold assesses a homeowner's needs following the "Father's Day Flood" in Copper Country. Next steps in recovery efforts are presently waiting for the spring thaw to come to the Upper Peninsula. ~
photo courtesy Marci Vivian

GC 2019

from p. 1

the season of liminality continues for The United Methodist Church. The uncertainty that existed between the adjournment of the 2016 General Conference in Portland and the convening of the specially called 2019 General Conference in St. Louis did not resolve; it has only deepened.

The Traditional Plan was adopted by delegates as was a petition regarding a disaffiliation process for churches. The Judicial Council will meet in April to determine how much of what was approved is constitutional. Further, questions around improper voting will soon be investigated by a special task force set up by the Commission on the General Conference. Add to that the need to elect delegates and draft legislation for the upcoming 2020 General Conference in Minneapolis (April 5 deadline for those petitions). Liminal indeed.

During the three weeks since delegates returned home, much has happened. Churches held prayer vigils and town halls within hours of the closing of the conference. Pastors engaged their congrega-

tions in conversations during worship on that first post-GC Sunday, March 2.

Bishop David Bard called Michigan's Elders, Deacons, and Local Pastors to worship and dialogue at Midland First United Methodist Church on March 9. The bishop said afterwards, "I was under no illusions that sharing in these means of grace would easily heal all hurt or bridge all differences." Then he added, "Rather, my hope is that all who attended experienced moments of God's grace."

On March 16 Bishop Bard attended a gathering, "Where do we go from here?" sponsored by Michigan Conference MFSA (Methodist Federation for Social Action). One hundred sixty person met at Lansing Central UMC around next steps following GC2019. Bishop Bard will also be present at Swartz Creek UMC on March 23 as the Michigan Wesleyan Covenant Association meets for reflection, prayer and discussion of General Conference 2019.

Seven major newspapers across the state published *The Michigan Statement* on Sunday, March 17. This "letter to our



Michigan delegates, seated in the center of the plenary floor, participate in the opening day of prayer on February 23, 2019 in The Dome. ~ mic photo/Mark Doyal

LGBTQIA+ siblings and their allies from Michigan United Methodists" was signed by over 2,000 individual clergy and laity. The statement concludes, "We believe that God is not yet finished working within The United Methodist Church. We commit ourselves to creating the inclusive church God intends us to be."

The Board of Ordained Ministry is the one official body of The Michigan Conference to take formal action since the General Conference adjourned on February 26. In a statement released on March 13, 2019, the BOM said: "In honor of the ministry we share and in lament regarding the decisions of the 2019 Special Session of General Conference of The UMC, we, the Michigan Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, are compelled to reaffirm how we fulfill our discernment responsibilities since our inception as a Conference board."

The statement outlines the BOM's approach to their work with candidates for ordained ministry and concludes: "As the Michigan

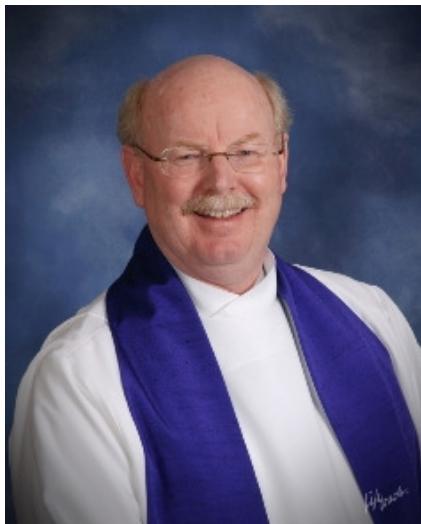
Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, our compass has been, and will continue to be, the indicators given by the Holy Spirit of authentic call, of evidenced readiness, and well-demonstrated effectiveness in the work of ministry. We offer this public statement in the certain hope that our siblings in professional ministry will celebrate with us the task we share." Click here for the full statement of the Board of Ordained Ministry.

The words of Susan Beaumont spoken in June of 2017 continue to have meaning for our shared life together today. She acknowledged the discomfort and pain of liminal living: "Liminality is a space we hate to occupy but it's where the biblical God is continually taking us ... in order for God to work with us to do remarkable things." Perhaps her counsel for Michigan United Methodists then applies now, as well. "Lead with presence" leaving behind judgment, cynicism, and fear in order to experience, "a fresh breath of creativity that emerges with letting go."



Gary Graves, secretary of the conference speaks to the press following the conclusion of the United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis. ~ umns photo/Kathleen Barry

Drinking the Cup ... in times of upheaval



REV. JOHN W. BOLEY
Clergy Assistant to the Bishop

So, many of us would agree that things seem to be in an upheaval almost unmatched in our lifetimes – upheaval in the world, the nation and in the United Methodist Church.

For many of us, these are the most unsettling times that we've ever experienced, except perhaps for us old geezers who remember the late 60s and early 70s, when Vietnam, assassinations, race riots, Watergate, and sex/drugs/and rock characterized the times. But then I was a carefree teenager. Now, the theory is that I'm a conscientious adult with significant responsibilities.

Here are ten remembrances that might help with context and hope in times of upheaval such as this ...

1. Remember that being a Disciple of Jesus Christ is still the best life possible, a gift from God, regardless of what the times are like.
2. Remember that the Church of Jesus Christ, with all of its human faults, is still the body of Christ and holds the content and unfolding mystery of faith.
3. Remember that Wesleyan theology, with its emphasis on free will, and prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace, is a most powerful theology, adaptable for all times and places.
4. Remember that the arc of history is long, but it bends toward justice (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.); and justice only comes through advocacy and activism.
5. Remember that the Church is always dynamic – never static; and despite what we can see or not see, the Holy Spirit is working in the Church; and as Phyllis Tickle reminds us, we are headed into a new era of Christian faith.
6. Remember that schism is the great Protestant heresy – anytime we Protestants do not agree we decide to break away – and it does not solve all problems; but sometimes schism is the only way to further justice in the long arc of history.
7. Remember that God never promises us comfort and stability; and that there is nothing inherently Holy about status quo.
8. Remember that while tradition is usually tradition for a reason, peaceful non-violent direct action is part of the prophetic tradition.
9. Remember that kindness and compassion are the fruit of faith regardless of what side we take on political or doctrinal issues.
10. Remember that the best thing of all is that God is with us! (John Wesley's final words.)

Five Michigan campgrounds to operate in Summer 2019



Campers at Judson Collins Center participate in worship at the lakeshore. ~ Facebook/Judson Collins Center



Lake Michigan Camp and Retreat Center's doors are open to people of all ages all year. ~ Facebook/Lake Michigan Camp



God's Treasures Camp brings joy to the Lake Huron Retreat Center. ~ Facebook/Lake Huron Retreat Center

With a deep commitment to the ongoing mission of Christian Camping and retreat ministries, the Michigan Area United Methodist Camping Board of Directors voted Feb. 18, 2019, to suspend operations at three summer camp sites and one RV campground for the 2019 season.

The facilities and staff affected are: Albright Park Camp & Retreat Center (Reed City), Camp Kinawind (Boyne Falls), Crystal Springs Camp & Retreat Center (Dowagiac), and Myers Lake (RV) Campground (Byron).

The Board expresses gratitude for the years of ministry at these sites. We know many, many people experienced God in Jesus Christ and grew in their spiritual journey because of time spent in these sacred spaces.

We acknowledge that this is a difficult message to read and want you to know it was a painful decision to reach.

A review of factors such as attendance patterns, financial history, site conditions, population concentrations, and a strategic view toward the future led to the Board's decision.

Long-term decisions about these camps have yet to be made.

With over 50 remaining programs for kindergarten through adults at four other facilities, plus RV/tent camping at two campgrounds, Michigan Area United Methodist Camping is still able to offer a vibrant and welcoming camping experience at our five active camps.

These sites are Judson Collins Camp & Retreat Center (Onsted), Lake Michigan Camp & Retreat (Pentwater), Lake Huron Retreat Center (Burtchville), Wesley Woods Camp & Retreat Center (Dowling), plus Lakeview Family Campground (Lakeview).

For those currently enrolled in camps or with reservations at sites that will not operate in 2019, the customer service team will be contacting you to offer alternative programs or, if necessary, refunds. If you have questions, please call 989-272-1116.

To our staff, volunteers, and supporters who are displaced by this decision, we are deeply grateful for your sharing of gifts and loyalties. Thank you for your faithful service. We hope you will continue to offer your talents and time at our other sites.

The Board of Directors, with the support of the Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church Council on Finance and Administration and the Conference Leadership Team, thanks you for your commitment to the camping ministry.

We are grateful for your partnership as we seek to fulfill our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ and to enrich relationships through outdoor ministries.

The Board asks you to surround all these changes in prayer. Please continue to encourage your congregation, friends and family to participate in our camp programs. We look forward to seeing you at summer camp.

Tornado recovery now underway in two Michigan counties

DAN O'MALLEY
Disaster Relief Coordinator
Michigan Conference

The National Weather service has confirmed that four tornadoes touched down on Thursday evening, March 14, 2019, resulting in 18 miles of damage across two counties in mid-Michigan.

The first tornado touched down southeast of Corunna in Shiawassee County with limited damage. The second tornado hit between Bancroft and Vernon, leaving significant damage to businesses, farmland and homes. The third tornado struck south-southeast of Flushing in Genesee County with minimal damage. The forth touched down northeast of Flint in Genesee County causing limited damage in the Camelot Villa Mobile Home Park.

At least 74 homes were damaged, 20 of which were determined to be destroyed. Harm was done to businesses, RVs and two mobile homes.

The Revs Jerry DeVine and John Hice, superintendents of the Mid-Michigan and East Winds districts, contacted pastors in the region. They verified safety of pastors and parishioners and inquired about damages to any churches and parsonages.

Members of the Michigan Conference Disaster Response Team went on site to view damages to homes and businesses in the communities. The team worked in close communication with Michigan Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (MIVOAD) and Shiawassee and Genesee County Emergency Managers to determine impact and allowed responses.

As of Monday, March 18 the Red Cross in Shiawassee County is coordinating family needs and leading case management. Crisis Cleanup 211 is up and running for residents to call in to register their unmet needs.

The Rev. Aaron Kesson, pastor of the Durand First United Methodist Church, has a Hospitality and Respite Center set up at the church café to support first responders and volunteers for this week.

Volunteers from Grand Rapids First



UMC and Brighton First UMC have contacted the Shiawassee help center and will be sending volunteers on Wednesday, March 20 to help with the cleanup.

The Michigan Conference Disaster Response Team will convene on Monday,

**Donations for the
Tornado Response may
be sent to the Confer-
ence Treasurer with
memo to
Disaster Response
#4407.**

March 25, to review updates and determine next steps for Michigan United Methodists to support the recovery process.

Please keep those affected by the storm in your prayers.

Donations for the tornado response may be sent to the Conference Treasurer, 1161 East Clark Road, Suite 212, DeWitt, MI 48829. Designate contributions for Michigan Area Disaster Response account 4407.

UMCOR from 3

Money remarks. "Folks see a flood happen and then the water recedes. UMCOR stays to deal with the long-term effects that people have to deal with."

She adds, "The United Methodist Committee on Relief is excited to have boots on the ground in Michigan to make sure folks are equipped and trained." Long-term, that level of readiness could be an asset to UMCOR with Michigan partnering in training across the jurisdiction. "Through people like Christy Smith, UMCOR has a heart for Christ and the people."

With UMCOR Sunday just ahead on March 31st, Money asserts, "The monies given to UMCOR make a direct impact in this state and elsewhere, helping people get back to live a life that they knew."

Gifts to UMCOR Sunday help pay the administrative costs of the United Methodist Committee on Relief. This enables UMCOR to use all other gifts for relief and recovery as designated by the donor. Money emphasizes that 100% is not a typical ratio of gift to assistance.

"With other organizations, some of the gift is lost to administration. Gifts to UMCOR are life-changing for people."

"I truly feel blessed to have been led to this role," Money concludes. "It was God who put me here."



EAST WINDS DISTRICT ... Lake Orion UMC fills "Resurrection Baskets" with comfort items, snacks and love to distribute on the streets of Detroit before Easter.



GREATER SOUTHWEST DISTRICT... This lovely prayer shawl brings a big smile to a beloved member of the Otsego UMC family.



CENTRAL BAY DISTRICT ... Thumbs up for HeBrews Coffee Shop hosted by New Heart UMC. Free coffee and treats on Wednesday mornings. Sweet!

Snapshots of Vitality



MICHIGAN MINISTRIES... Chelsea Retirement Community residents shared a wealth of memories when 77 quilts were on display at the Chelsea Retirement Chapel.



MID-MICHIGAN DISTRICT ... Sycamore Creek/Potterville holds an annual cake auction that sends kids from the congregation and community to camp. Summer is coming!!



NORTHERN WATERS DISTRICT ... PHAT Tuesday (Pretty Hot And Tasty) at Grayling: Michelson Memorial UMC. Proceeds from the dinner supported the youth group.



GREATER DETROIT DISTRICT ... Maelyn Miller Black was a deacon for "Dress As A Hero Day" at school . Good role models: Mom is a pastor at Flint: Court Street UMC and Dad is the Director of Music Ministries and Organist at Midland: First UMC.

MIDWEST DISTRICT ... Pastor Rebecca Morrison joins in the fun at the Cake Auction hosted at Big Rapids: First UMC. Proceeds supported the 27 Wesley House folks doing hurricane relief in Florida over spring break.



MICHIGAN MINISTRIES ... More March Madness!! Did you know that the Methodist Children's Home Society had a basketball team? Yes, they do! Meet the MCHS Hawks.



MIDWEST DISTRICT ... Rev. Sherri Swanson, pastor of Georgetown United Methodist Church reports: "Sharing the Imposition of Ashes a day later with the sweetest little fellow who really wanted a cross on his forehead, like his family members received last night. Oh, that we were all so eager to display the cross to the world!"

UMRC and Porter Hills together to serve state's seniors

March 1, 2019 | LANSING, Mich. — Two of Michigan's top-rated senior living organizations finalized their decision to affiliate at a press conference and official signing event held this morning at LeadingAge Michigan.

United Methodist Retirement Communities, Inc. (UMRC) and Porter Hills Presbyterian Village, Inc. (PH) have entered an agreement, effective today, to come together under shared governance and leadership.

Together, UMRC, PH and their affiliates now represent a \$150 million organization that serves more than 6,700 older Michigan adults annually across 22 counties in the lower peninsula. "By coming together as we have, our organizations create tremendous opportunities for

the people we serve," said John Nixon III, chair of the UMRC governing board. "Together, our organizations' ability to share widely-recognized best practices, knowledge and financial resources will achieve superior results for older adults and create an even greater dynamic in Michigan's senior living marketplace.

This is important as the latest demographics show Michigan as the fastest aging state in the nation."

UMRC is now the sole shareholder of PH; previously, the share was held by Westminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids. Both UMRC and PH remain in existence as nonprofit organizations and will continue to serve older adults as they have since being founded.



Left to right): John Nixon III, UMRC Board Chair; Alix Thompson, President, Board of Trustees, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Grand Rapids; Steve Fetyko, Interim CEO; Mary Wagner, Porter Hills Board Chair; and Kim Hoppe, Chief Financial Officer. ~ mic photo/Mark Doyal

There are currently no plans to change these names, given the strength of both brands.

"This decision follows a six-month due diligence process which began in August 2018," said Mary Wagner, chair of the Porter Hills governing board. "We worked thoughtfully to ensure not just the right financial and operational fit, but the right culture and ethos for a truly strong partnership."

According to the 2017 Ziegler LeadingAge 150 (a listing of the top 150 senior living organizations in the U.S.), UMRC and PH combined create the third largest nonprofit senior living organization in Michigan and rank in the top 75 U.S. nonprofit organizations. In addition, the new organization's commitment to affordable housing places it among the country's top 25 nonprofit affordable housing organizations.

UMRC and PH will maintain separate boards, with representatives of both organizations serving on each board. The UMRC Foundation and PH Foundation will also remain as separate entities with Wendy Brightman



Celebrating! Seated: Steve Fetyko, Interim CEO, and Bishop David Bard. Standing (L-r): John Nixon III, UMRC Board Chair; Mary Wagner, Porter Hills Board Chair; and Kim Hoppe, Chief Financial Officer. ~ mic photo/Mark Doyal

serving as president. Donations will remain local and be used for the purposes designated by the donor. "We know how important philanthropy has been in our history and how vital it is for our future," Brightman said. "Thoughtful donors have made a tremendous impact on improving the lives of the older adults and communities we serve, and we are committed to upholding each donor's intent. We will continue to be effective stewards of the funds with which we have been entrusted."

"Bringing together these two organizations has been a labor of love as well as due diligence, and a shared commitment of both organizations to the best possible care for older adults in our state," Nixon said. "We believe this affiliation will allow us to serve even more seniors, from coast to coast across Michigan. With over 160 years of combined history, serving thousands of older adults and their families, and a strengthened financial footing, UMRC and PH are well positioned for the future."

Bishop from p. 2

Conference are particularly appropriate: "Redeeming God, heal our broken places even as we acknowledge that we are often complicit in the brokenness of our lives and of our world."

Coming from General Conference it feels fitting to enter a season reminding me of limits, mortality, of brokenness and of my own complicity in that brokenness.

I think of a poem by Robert Bly, a Minnesota poet whose hometown was located in the district where I once served as superintendent. "Come with me into those things that have felt this despair for so long."

Lent invites us into deep and serious self-examination. It invites us to take seriously the pain, hurt, anguish, loss, uncertainty and injustice in our lives and in the world. Lent invites us to slow down and dig deep, to pray from the depth of our hearts.

Lent is a time to acknowledge grief, loss, sadness, brokenness, woundedness, and limits, but not for the sake of wallowing in them. God's Spirit invites us into Lent so the Spirit can do the work of expanding our hearts, enlivening our minds, enlarging the capacity of our souls. I invite us to stay with some of the difficult feelings of Lent, as uncomfortable as that may be, trusting that God's Spirit is at work in us.

God is about the work of moving us from sadness to tenderness. A number of years ago I read these

words that struck a deep chord within me. "We may think that by closing the heart we'll protect ourselves from feeling the pain of the world, but instead, we isolate ourselves even more from joy.... The opposite of happiness is a fearful, closed heart. Happiness is ours when we go through our anger, fear, and pain, all the way to our sadness, and then slowly let sadness develop into tenderness." (Wendy Lesser, The



New American Spirituality, 180) This is Lenten work.

God is about the work of taking ashes and breathing into them to create new life. The traditional liturgical phrase when ashes are imposed on one's forehead is, "you are dust and to dust you shall return." Yet we say that knowing we are also created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We hear the words of Genesis 2: "then the Lord God formed the human from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living being" (v. 7). We hear Paul write, "do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (I Corinthians 3:16)

God is about the work of resurrection. At the end of Lent comes Easter, the joyous good news that God raised Jesus, crucified by the Romans, from the dead. In the resurrection of Jesus comes the promise of new life for us. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!" (II Corinthians 5:17)

Thinking about Lent this year, words from another Robert Bly poem come to mind. "We did not come to remain whole./ We came to lose our leaves like the trees,/The trees that are broken/ And start again, drawing up from the great roots.... That we should learn of poverty and rags,/... And swim in the sea,/ Not always walking on dry land,/ And dancing, find

in the trees a savior,/A home in dark grass,/ And nourishment in death."

I think of the words of Jesus, "Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24)

I invite you, on the heels of General Conference 2019, to observe a holy Lent. Take seriously the pain, hurt, anguish, loss, grief, uncertainty and injustice in our lives and in the world. Slow down and dig deep. Pray from the depth of your hearts and souls. Trust that if you do, God's Spirit will continue God's work of moving us from sadness to tenderness, of taking ashes and creating life, of resurrection.

Home Words Bound ... knowing God is in the room



REV. BENTON HEISLER

Director of Connectional Ministries, West Michigan

I was about five-years-old. She was in her 70s. Everyone called her Aunt Peggy.

Marguerite Bradley was the widow of the pastor that served my parents congregation before I was even born. The congregation had built her a home and she lived there until a stroke required her to move to a care facility when she was in her 90's. She and her husband had seen my parents through some tragic life events before I ever was the tag along with my mom on those visits to her home.

I was easily occupied in the kitchen by some cookies and milk while the two of them would converse. The visits always ended in prayer. Aunt Peggy would place her hearing aid unit on the foot stool in front of us, so my hesitant voice might be heard better. Mostly I listened to her and my mom talk with their best friend, Jesus. I was young, but it sure seemed to me like **God was right there in that room** listening!

I remember going straight to Aunt Peggy with my newly acquired “third grade Bible” the Church gave to me. “Aunt Peggy, where should I begin?” She helped me find I Corinthians 13, and she helped me read through it. “You read those last words again by yourself. You can do it.” So, I did, “And the greatest of these is love.” “Don’t you ever forget that,” she said, in her quiet trembling voice. It felt to me like **God was in that room**, talking to me through her.

I went on to learn multiple verses:

Proverbs 3: 5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart....”

Joshua 1:6-9 “Be strong and courageous and do not be afraid....”

Isaiah 43 “Fear not...for I am with thee and will uphold you....”

Jeremiah 29:11 “I have plans for you... a future with hope....”

Memorizing those verses and others, meant all the difference in the difficult days of middle school and a move to a new community. In those same years, the world got even a little harsher as it was discovered that my father had a tumor that needed to be removed, followed by weeks of radiation in a hospital 45 minutes away. Many a tearful night was spent wondering if he would live or die. It was the reciting and reclaiming of those verses that time and again helped me feel that **God was in the room** and that whatever happened, God would remain by my side.

I visited Aunt Peggy when I was in my early 20s. A stroke had affected her capacity to move beyond the bed of here room, yet her faith was every bit as active as my early childhood moments in that house filled with milk, cookies and Love. She schooled me in a few short sentences about God’s abundantly provisional love and that grief was a necessary and important element of that love. It was a tearful goodbye transfigured into more of an eternal “see you later,” as we both sensed that **God was in that room**.

Life moved on with various experiences of joy and sorrow. In the past ten years there have been three life threatening hospitalizations for our two daughters. Sitting in the “hospital quiet” of blinking machines, muffled voices in the hall and sleep interrupting “wellness checks”, I clung again to various verses of promise, hope and comfort. Despite my vulnerability and the unknown future for a daughter in a hospital bed near me, **I knew God was in the room**.

Our mission as the Church and people of God is unwavering. “Go and make disciples in my name and teach them everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28: 18-20). My experiences noted above are no different than countless other persons’. There is incredible heartache, brokenness, animosity and anxiety in our world. Our responsibilities as disciples is to help others to see and hear in words and actions that God is in the room. There are next generations to teach the Scriptures and promises that will be a compass on their journey, a comfort in their trials, a celebration in their triumphs and grace for every misstep along the way.

I pray that as we leave every encounter with others along life’s way they may sense in us that Jesus was in our hearts, the Holy Spirit was guiding our conversation and that **God was in the room**.

'God wants me to be a deacon' says Sue Pethoud

SUE PETHOUD
Michigan Conference Deacon

I don't want to be a deacon; God wants me to be a deacon. It's not like when a young child wants to be a firefighter or a dancer. It is something more than that.

I was content to be a middle school math teacher. It wasn't an exciting job, but it had purpose and I did it well, but God was not content. God tried for a long time to let me know that, but it wasn't until a Friday night, after a week of serving in Appalachia, that I really got the message. It was an emotional experience and one that took me a long time to understand.

I got it right away that God was calling me to work in a setting where I would be connecting people and their faith to the world around them, but I didn't jump right into a deacon studies program. Hours of prayer led me to become more involved with our youth and to seek out ways to become more educated in my own faith. I found The United Methodist certification program. I thought I was following God's call in my life, but I was really trying to fit that call into the life I already had.

The certification program was a good place to start, but it was evident very early on that that was not the end of the story. I had to figure out how this call of God's was to fit into my life as a wife, mother, and teacher. Through classmates, professors, and our young pastor, I was encouraged to continue to pray about where I really needed to go with all of this. Clergy friends gave me books to read, prayed for me, and gave me encouragement to follow where I was being led. It was pretty apparent that I was really being called to ordained ministry in the role of a deacon, but I was very reluctant to follow that call.

I was in my 29th year of teaching and the logical, sequential part of me knew that financially, retirement with 29 years of experience would be less than practical. I was bargaining with God over this very thing when the state stepped into the process, offering a financial incentive to retire early! Perfect! The huge roadblock had been

removed and I was ready to finally jump in, feet first!

Seminary was exciting and full of learning and listening. During that time, I continued to be involved with the youth of my own church and through them found Cass Community Social Services. It was more than evident, that was where I was being called. I began volunteering there one day a week in 2010 just as I was getting into a full-time seminary schedule. I was hired for that one-day-a-week job in 2013 just before graduation. It became a three-day-a-week position by June and by Christmas, it was full-time.

I was commissioned in 2014 and ordained in 2017. My primary appointment is to Cass with the title of Church and Community Relations Liaison. I coordinate the over 7,000 volunteers that serve at Cass each year, correspond with donors, speak at churches and other community organization gatherings, run fund raising events and supervise Cass Green Industries.

My secondary appointment is to Cass Community UMC, the church that "birthed" Cass Community Social Services. There I sing in the choir, preach in the absence of the pastor, and help to

coordinate the behind the scenes tasks that keep a church running.

I often hear from other deacons that they struggle with feeling that though they are following a different call than elders, they are not treated as equals among their elder counterparts. I get that, but don't experience it, at least most of the time. A little education and self-advocacy goes a long way. If we as deacons, can explain our call and how it may be different but equal to that of an elder in a non-defensive way, we will all be better for it. We do have to remember that elders who came into the system before 1996 were deacons once and many of them still think of the Order as a stepping stone to elder.

I am fully part of the clergy team at Cass Community UMC. I work with three very supportive elders and share the responsibilities of running a church with them. It helps that one of those elders is also the Executive Director of Cass Community Social Services along with her Senior Pastor position at the church, and understands the demands of my week-day job. We work together well and I have never been happier.

~This blog is reprinted by permission of the General Commission on Status and Role of Women.



Sue Pethoud, center, is welcomed by the 2017 Michigan Annual Conference as a newly ordained deacon. ~ mic photo/John Woodring

UMCOR grants aid in cyclone response in Africa

LINDA BLOOM | JOAO SAMBO
UM News

United Methodists are starting to respond to those affected by Cyclone Idai, which left devastation in parts of three African countries on March 14 and killed 500 people, with hundreds more still missing.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief has allocated three \$10,000 grants for immediate, emergency short-term funding to meet basic human needs in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. Those needs include water transportation and storage for drinking, cooking and personal and domestic hygiene, along with temporary shelter.

“We’re assessing and working with our disaster management coordinator in the field,” said Laurie W. Felder, UMCOR’s director of international disaster response.

Cyclone Idai made landfall near Beira, the fourth-largest city in Mozambique, on March 14. Over the next week, Idai left a path of destruction in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi.

High levels of poverty in the region make the cyclone’s impact much worse, said Isabel Apawo Phiri, one of the top executives of the World Council of

Churches, who was born in Malawi. “We feel saddened by the news of so many people who have lost their lives in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe through this cyclone, and many more people have been displaced,” she said.

Disruptions in communications channels have made it hard for United Methodist leaders to reach each other and their membership. The Rev. Jacob Jenhuro, episcopal assistant in the Mozambique North Conference, had not been in touch with the office of Bishop Joaquina Filipe Nhanala until March 21. “We have no idea about how much rain we can still have, but we have received so much water that many houses (and) infrastructure including roads, bridges are still submerged,” he reported when he reached the office staff.

Thousands of families in Mozambique are among the displaced. Respeito Chirrinze, UMCOR’s disaster management coordinator in Mozambique, said that the \$10,000 grant would help meet needs in the communities in Nicoadala and Gondola. “Because there is aid being channeled to Sofala and Manica, many organizations seem to be forgetting other areas where people are isolated but in need of assistance, too,” he said.

“People in the affected areas have no potable water, so we need water purifiers, we need mosquito nets, we need medicine, we need school supplies, we need everything — including funds that will enable us purchase those items that we cannot bring from our own home,” he said.

But assessing both immediate and long term needs is difficult, especially with communication systems weak or inoperable. “It is estimated that more than 347,000 people are at risk because some are in isolated areas, others on trees, some because they have not been eating for many days,” Chirrinze said. “People are surviving under inhuman conditions,” he added.

Zimbabwe church members were affected in hard-hit areas, such as the Rusitu Valley Circuit. The Rev. Gift Kufazvineyi and his parsonage are on higher ground, so he was spared, but others were not.

“I have done my assessment,” he reported. “Three members are missing, houses of members destroyed are many and I have not managed to complete the assessment because some of the areas are inaccessible. Many members do not have any food, clothes or blankets, which all have been swept away by rains.”

The Rev. Simon Matende, Chibwe Rimbi Circuit, said he had to leave his vehicle at the parsonage and walked 11 kilometers to the nearest station to access transport to Mutare because water was everywhere. The homes of church members were destroyed, he said.

The United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe “has responded wholesomely” to the crisis, said the Rev. Alan Masimba Gurupira, assistant to Bishop Eben K. Nhitiwa. The UMCOR grant “will go a long way to respond towards provision of temporary shelter, food and water supplies,” he added.

“So far two truckloads of needed items has been dispatched to Mutare,” Gurupira reported. “The consignment included maize meal, cooking oil, water purification liquids, clothes and blankets.” The church also is making a guesthouse at Isheanesu Children’s Home available as housing for 20 doctors offering free service in the affected areas.



A child is transported inside an empty refrigerator during floods after Cyclone Idai, in Buzi, Mozambique. Gifts to UMCOR’s International Disaster Relief #982450 will help meet basic human needs of those affected in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. ~ photo by Siphiwe Sibeko, REUTERS

News in Brief

WESPATH ANNOUNCES COURT RULING



The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals has again knocked down a legal challenge by the Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) as it ruled for the second time on March 15 that tax-free housing allowances for pastors do not violate the U.S. Constitution. In a 3 to 0 decision, the Seventh Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals found that the clergy cash housing allowance under section 107

(2) of the Internal Revenue Code is constitutional under two different tests set forth by the U.S. Supreme Court

MISSIONARY TO RUSSIA COMING TO MICHIGAN



The Rev. Hyo-Won Park is a missionary with the General Board of Global Ministries serving as a new church planter in St. Petersburg, Russia. He will be coming to Michigan April 27-May 7, 2019. Hyo-Won Park is a clergy member of the Wisconsin Conference. He is a native of Seoul, Korea. To arrange a visit to your congregation, contact Jackie Euper at 810-441-7624.

TASK FORCE INVESTIGATES VOTING AT GC2019

General Conference organizers have appointed a task force to investigate possible improper voting at the recently completed special session of The United Methodist Church's top lawmaking body. The multinational Commission on the General Conference held an emergency meeting by teleconference March 16, after a preliminary review found that "a very limited number" of ineligible people potentially obtained credentials to vote. The commission has not reported a precise number. The task force expects to report its findings to the full commission before the group's next regularly scheduled meeting in the fall.

| Wespath Recommended Liabilities and CRS Traditional Plan (Except 90041 and 90048), 90032-90040, 90042-90047, 182-186, 190-194 | 459 | 55.57 |
|---|-----|-------|
| Disaffiliation – Taylor – NEW Par. 2553 - 90066, 205 | 412 | 50.06 |
| Disaffiliation – Boyette – NEW Par. 2549, 90059, 201 | 406 | 49.51 |
| One Church Plan, (Except 90015), 90014, 164-168 | 403 | 48.67 |

General Conference Secretary, Gary Graves, announced the voting irregularities on March 14. ~ umns photo



Hot Lunch Program ends

The Conference Board of Global Ministries and Haiti Covenant Partners announce that the Haiti Hot Lunch Program (Advance # 418790) is no longer an Advance project of the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM).

GBGM is responsible for ensuring accountability for the appropriate use of funds given through The Advance. A key part of this accountability is the submission of a simple annual report each Advance project. GBGM has not received an annual report from the Haiti Hot Lunch Program for multiple years.

In addition, GBGM has received inquiries from multiple donors expressing concerns about lack of communication and financial accountability relating to gifts to the project.

Because of these concerns of both Board and donors, the Cabinet of GBGM has decided to close the project. The General Board of Global Ministries remains committed to dispersing the funds on hand. GBGM will administer the remaining balance through a series of grants facilitated by their manager of Food Security programs.

This comes as difficult news

to Michigan United Methodists, after many years of faithful and generous giving by the Detroit and West Michigan conferences to the Haiti Hot Lunch Program.

However, the Michigan Conference's EngageMI program will no longer receive funds for the Haiti Hot Lunch Program.

If your congregation was planning to support the Haiti Hot Lunch Program, please consider supporting one of these EngageMI Advance Projects of GBGM:

- Grace Children's Hospital & Pediatric Clinic (Advance # 418520)
- Haiti Artisans for Peace International/HAPI (Advance # 3020490)
- Haiti Children Project (Advance# 3020507)
- Haiti Undesignated (Advance #00483A)

Each of these projects are engaged in meaningful mission and ministry with the people of Haiti.

If you have questions, please contact the Rev. Paul Perez, Associate Director of Mission & Ministry (pperez@michiganumc.org).

Central Bay team shares Christ's love in the Philippines

CARMEN COOK

Central Bay District

On February 15, 2019 Central District Superintendent, Rev. David Kim, Madison Meyer, Pastor Robert Richards (Saginaw: Swan Valley and Laporte UMCs), and Pastor Carmen Cook (Gladwin: First UMC) left Michigan for the Philippines. The team partnered with the First United Methodist Church in Cebu City in hosting a revival. Their ministry touched the congregation, local pastors, and children in the church and community. They also traveled to another island to minister there. The team left the Philippines on February 21.

The United Methodist Church Philippines Central Conference is part of the United Methodist Church connection worldwide. The church, with over 200,000 professing members, is committed to making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and is growing.

The team brought sermons, shared testimonies, taught 150 children from the streets of Cebu City and Olango Island, met with local pastors, built relationships with the believers, and proclaimed the message that Jesus Saves. During the revival services in Cebu City, 44 people came forward to make commitments to the

Lord. On Olango Island, ten persons accepted Christ as their Savior.

The Central Bay District Philippines Mission Team were able to see first-hand how the Lord is working in the world. They praise God for the lives that have been changed. As the team left, children called out with a request, Remember me." The team asks that United Methodists across Michigan join in that remembering.

They ask that prayers be raised:

—For God's continued work in the Philippines and the strengthening of the church;

—For the street children of the Philippines;

—For the bishops, district superintendents, pastors, and church leaders;

—For the Filipino men and women to answer the Lord's call to serve Him in ministry.

The Central Bay Team witnessed in the spirit of Romans 10: 14-15: *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

The team thanks those back home who supported them with prayer; we did not go alone.



Two children sharing Christ's love during the revival at Cebu City. A team from the Central Bay District, led by District Superintendent David Kim, was on the island February 15-21, 2019. ~ photo courtesy Carmen Cook