

MImagazine

Michigan Area of the United Methodist Church
June 2019



**Bishop talks about
“creating space”**

**AC 2019 signals
greater inclusion**

**Celebrating power
in God’s people**



June 2019

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

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

We are 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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 Putting FAITH in ACTION**

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Bishop David Bard

The Joyful Journey

Coming from the 2019 Annual Conference session for the first ever Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church, I recall words I read a number of years ago in a small magazine called *The Sun*. The editor was interviewing a psychologist named Francis Weller, someone I had never heard of before. In the

interview, Weller offered these words: "The work of the mature person is to carry grief in one hand and gratitude in the other and to be stretched large by them."

Annual Conference stretched me as I carry both grief and gratitude away from it. I am deeply grateful to each person who attended. Overwhelmingly we conducted ourselves with graciousness and generosity of spirit in our sessions. Worship was wonderful as always. Our preachers and speakers were of the highest caliber. I was particularly grateful for and moved by Becca Farnum and Kristen Grauer, children of our Annual Conference whose lives demonstrate the power of God's Spirit through the church to make a difference. Rooted and grounded in the love of God they learned in The United Methodist Church, these women are doing remarkable work in the world.

Each Annual Conference, I am grateful for the simple connections made. So many of you took the time to offer a handshake or a hug, ask me how I am doing, let me know you are praying for me, asked for a picture with me. Please know how touched I am by each of these offers of grace. Even though it is not always easy, even though I have to make some tough decisions that displease some, even though we cannot possibly agree on everything, I remain honored to be the bishop of the Michigan Conference. Whatever the future holds, I treasure these experiences with every one of you.

The service of recognition, commissioning, and ordination is always moving to me. This year, one moment of particular delight was your celebration of the ordination of Lucinda Eastman of Liberia. Bishop Samuel Quire had emailed me just at the beginning of our

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Bishop David Bard and Nichea Ver Veer Guy confer on the agenda at the 2019 Michigan Annual Conference. Guy is chair of the Commission on the Annual Conference and she also served as a co-chair of the Michigan Conference delegation to the 2016 and 2019 General Conferences. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

Annual Conference 2019 signals greater inclusion

ACME MI... Amid the global debate on the future direction of The United Methodist Church, members to the Michigan Annual Conference indicated a need to test the waters to learn where those in attendance stood on decisions made during the General Conference in St. Louis, MO last February.

Three times, clergy and laity members voted on measures that would provide Bishop David Bard and conference leadership with aspirations for greater inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the Michigan Conference.

In addition to the ordination of nine persons, nine Elders and two Deacons were commissioned. Of those commissioned, two are openly gay persons.

Members to Annual Conference approved **GCR 2019-2**— Aspirations for The Michigan Annual Conference: “The Michigan Annual Conference aspires to live into an expression of Methodism that includes LGBTQIA people in full life and membership of the UMC.” By more than a two-thirds margin, 819 (68%) to 377 (32%), the measure aspires to promote reconciliation and focus resources on the mission of the Michigan Conference, not trials and investigations based on sexual orientation. A ruling of law on the constitutionality of this resolution was requested and will be acted upon by Bishop Bard within 30 days.

Voting members also approved the taking of a non-binding straw poll, **GCR 2019-3**. Before taking the vote, the Rev. Amy Mayo-Moyle, chair of the Michigan Conference Leadership Council, who presented the resolution said, “We are in a hard place... however, we are at a place where we must best discern how to go forward. The reality is that we very well may be facing schism. We don’t know what is to come. This will help us know the sense of the Annual Conference.” The result of the straw poll indicated a two-thirds preference (69% — 789 votes) for “a United Methodist Conference whose policies allow for but do not require clergy to officiate at same-gender weddings, allow for consideration for ordained ministry of persons regardless of sexual orientation, and in which appointments

are made with consideration given to the full range of contextual realities.” Three hundred fifty members (31%) of Annual Conference members favored instead, “a United Methodist Conference whose policies include the current *Book of Discipline* language on ‘homosexuality,’ same-gender marriage and LGBTQIA+ ordination along with enhanced enforcement of those policies determined constitutional by the Judicial Council.”

After the vote Bishop Bard made clear this straw vote was only one indicator of where Michigan congregations stand, “It does matter how this poll is interpreted.” He said, “This is a vote of the people gathered, lay and clergy, in this particular place in this particular time.”

The Bishop acknowledged the pain and difficulty of taking the poll and the importance of caring for everyone’s feelings, “Jesus of the parables cares as much about the 30% as the 70%. I encourage us to continue to do the hard work.”

Finally, by a nearly identical margin, annual conference members also approved **GCP 2019-4**, a petition to be

considered at the General Conference in May 2020 in Minneapolis MN, for the creation of a Central Conference in North America. If adopted by GC 2020 this would “provide for the creation of a Central Conference encompassing North America” allowing more contextualized ministry and mission. In other words, United Methodists in the United States would be able to make denominational decisions impacting American congregations and clergy without the input of United Methodists in other countries.

On Sunday, June 2, during the Service of Recognition, Commissioning and Ordination, two deacons and seven Elders were ordained, including one Elder as a courtesy to Bishop Samuel Quire of the Liberia Conference.

Two Deacons and nine Elders were commissioned, including two openly LGBTQ persons, Alex Plum, and Joan Van Dessel.

All were commissioned within the parameters of the current language of *The Book of Discipline* and church law as defined by the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church.



Two young adults who served as delegates to the 2019 General Conference -- Alex Plum and Megan Walther -- present a resolution to the 2019 Michigan Annual Conference regarding aspirations toward inclusion of LGBTQIA persons.
~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

AC 2019 was a greenhouse for growing leadership

KAY DEMOSS
Senior Content Editor

ACME, Mich. (MIC) – The Michigan Annual Conference, under the leadership of Bishop David A. Bard, took place May 30 – June 2, 2019, at the Grand Traverse Resort.

Three years of preparation brought Michigan United Methodists to this place – the first ever Annual Conference session as one body in Michigan. New districts and a new staff model began in July 2018. The Detroit and West Michigan conference officially transitioned on December 31, 2018.

However, the “liminal (in between) season” talked about in June of 2017 by then conference teacher, Susan Beaumont, stretches on as the future of The United Methodist Church is now uncertain. The shadow of a possible split in the denomination shaped both the agenda and the tone of the gathering, situated as this Michigan Annual Conference was just months between two landmark sessions of The General Conference.

Nevertheless, when God’s people come together in the name of Jesus Christ and John Wesley, it’s an occasion for worship, celebration, learning, fellowship, and decision-making. In that regard, this Michigan Annual Conference was like all those that came before over 50 years of making disciples and transforming the world as a United Methodist Church.

Planting seeds

Conference preachers and teachers all explored the question of what it means to be faithful in turbulent times. The theme for the 2019 Annual Conference was *Bold and Effective Leaders: Wisdom, Courage, Heart*.

On Thursday, May 30, Bishop David Bard exclaimed, “If I only had a brain!” then talked about *WISDOM* as a leadership focus. “This is something of what leadership of wisdom, heart, and courage looks like, and our church and world need this kind of leadership, our churches need to be greenhouses growing such leaders.” He described the nurture and equipping that needs to happen. “We need to



Laura Witkowski, the first lay person to preach at Annual Conference in years, shared a message about “ordinary courage on Friday morning.” ~ mic photo/ Jonathan Trites

be places that plant seeds that are skills necessary for such leadership – skills in listening well, skills to tolerate ambiguity and not knowing, skills that help people grow in their self-knowledge in light of knowing that they are loved by God, skills in working with conflict, skills in reading and learning together.

The COURAGE it takes to be a leader was the topic of Friday’s speakers, Laura Witkowski and Becca Farnum. Witkowski offered examples of leadership – a US-2 working in Detroit, wives of city workers in Memphis in 1968, and the disciple Peter. “The water is where Jesus is; the water is a task too big for us to do alone. Be ridiculous like Peter. Be more like Jesus,” Laura urged. “Find your ordinary courage. Get out of the boat.”

Farnum, returning to her home conference said, “I’ve seen this courage at work in Michigan. I am a product of the leadership greenhouse Bishop Bard preached on yesterday ... I am forever blessed by the skill-set I developed because of

opportunities afforded to me by the United Methodist Church.” She added a challenge, “I was an easy plant. But to truly live up your potential for youth empowerment, for world change, for discipleship, for developing leaders, it is not the Beccas of the world you need to be investing in ... If you want to grow courageous leaders, you must adapt to the plant and give it what it needs.”

On Saturday the Rev. Dr. Jennie Browne and Kristen Grauer, spoke on *HEART* as a characteristic that leaders must have. Browne, with children at her feet, retold the story of Esther and her uncle, Mordecai, an account of the Jewish people living under constant threat. She addressed the question, “What was a nice girl like her doing in a place like that?” then turned to the thought in the minds of conference members, “What’s a nice person like me doing in a place like this?” Browne spoke of ways that Esther and Michigan’s United

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Conference members celebrated their baptism and shared holy communion during the Opening Worship Service on Thursday, May 30. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

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Methodists have what it takes to lead and closed with, “Maybe God has called you to this place for just such a moment as this.”

A second PK (Preacher’s Kid), Kristen Grauer, described how her life in parsonages across Michigan prepared her for life on the world stage. Speaking as the daughter of the Rev. Charles and Pat Grauer, and not as a foreign service officer of the U.S. Department of State, Grauer recalled happy times, “I made bags of gumballs and gave them to my friends and told them to ‘Chew this in remembrance of me.’” She remembered learning parliamentary procedure at Youth Assembly at Lake Louise, a skill that now serves her well. Grauer closed her remarks with, “Six reasons why being a PK in small-town Michigan gave me skills to succeed anywhere on earth.” She concluded, “You, the church, taught me this. Commit to a cause bigger than yourself. Find your moral compass. Care for others. Challenge convention. In other words, ‘Let your little light shine.’”

On Sunday, June 2nd Bishop Bard took listeners back on the yellow brick road of leadership. Encouraging those present, especially those being ordained, to be leaders with wisdom, courage, and heart, Bard acknowledged, “The United Methodist Church is different just since the February General Conference. This 50-year iteration of the Christian Church in the Wesleyan tradition may be coming to an end, or at the very least is on the verge of significant change.” Then he added perspective, “It will not be the first time the broader

Methodist movement has morphed into something new, but we are not sure just what this will look like or how we are going to get there. We have no yellow brick road and no good witch, Glenda.”

Full transcripts of these messages are available at news.michiganumc.org.

Relating globally

All five speakers at AC 2019 asserted that leadership faces outward as well as inward. An Ingathering at Opening Worship took in \$41,180. Gifts were divided among three important Michigan ministries: \$18,439 for Grace Children’s Hospital as designated by the Haiti Covenant Partners; \$18,649 for the Bishop Judith Craig Children’s Village as designated by the Liberia Covenant Partners; and \$4,091 for the Michigan Disaster Relief and Recovery Fund. A pre-conference 5-K Event earned an additional \$1,980 for the Disaster Fund.

A celebration of international relationship took place in the Service of Recognition, Commissioning, and Ordination on Sunday, June 2nd. Bishop Samuel Quire, leader of The Liberia Conference, asked Bishop David Bard to ordain, the Rev. Lucinda Eastman. It was a joyous moment.

George Howard, a representative of the General Board of Global Ministries, was on hand Saturday evening to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Methodist mission. Howard shared a report of 2018 giving to The Advance. Once again, The Michigan Conference excelled in the areas of Disaster Response \$564,704 and Missionary Support \$273,320.

The Ministerial Education Fund received \$7,378 in gifts



The Edwardson family from Escanaba — Revs Ryan and Elise and son, Elliott—took medals in the 5k event that raised money for disaster relief. ~ photo courtesy Board of Pension and Health Benefits

given during the Service of Recognition, Commissioning, and Ordination. The fund prepares men and women for effective ministry through scholarships, support for Course of Study, funding of seminaries and more.

Taking action

The following resolutions were approved:
—Supported legislation lifting a ban on professional and trade licensing for

parolees;

—called for increased handicap accessibility in churches and parsonages;

—approved the development of a new Covenant of Ministry and Working Understanding between the Michigan and Liberia conferences;

—pledged support for

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Becca Farnum, a PK (Preacher’s Kid) from Michigan shared about her international experiences during teaching time on Friday. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

Celebrating the power in God's Michigan disciples

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Content Editor

The theme of the 2019 Michigan Annual Conference — Bold and Effective Leaders — was expressed in many ways, not the least of which was in the recognition of those who have offered exceptional service.

John Buxton Award

Four formal awards were conferred through the days together on May 31.

The first was the John Buxton Award, given to the Rev Don Emmert on Friday morning. Emmert, the Conference Director of Benefits and Human Resources, gave a spirited report using images and metaphors from the 1968 Detroit Tigers World Series Championship. He concluded, “The ball is in our hands,” at which time Conference Lay Leaders, Anne Soles and John Wharton, presented Emmert with the John Buxton Award. First conferred in the Detroit Conference in 1996, this honor recognizing creative leadership. On the conference staff since 2000, Emmert has helped establish best practices in Pensions and Benefits. “He goes unnoticed for most of the work, but if you have ever been in need you know he goes above and beyond because he truly knows everyone in this Conference,” Soles said.

EPI Award

Saturday evening saw a parade of kudos across the conference stage.

The Rev. Gary Henderson arrived on the stage at the conclusion of a report by Mark Doyal, Director of Communications for the Michigan Conference. Henderson, the Chief Relationship Officer for United Methodist Communications (UMCOM), was present to “celebrate excellence in communication ministry with an EPI, a communications Oscar or Emmy of sorts.” He explained that the Greek word, “Epikoinonia” is about a deep, intimate connection to community. The EPI Award was given to Doyal, “who embodies the spirit of such Christian communication ... where there is no communication, there is no



The Rev. Don Emmert, Director of Benefits and Human Resources, was honored with the 2019 John Buxton Award for Creative Leadership after giving a creative account of his office's work over the past year. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

community.” Doyal accepted the award saying, “This is my tenth year with you. It has changed my life being with all of you.”

Harry Denman Award

The Rev. Dirk Elliott, Michigan Director of Congregational Vibrancy, came to the stage to present the Harry Denman Award, named for a “crumpled, driven, faithful man who introduced many to Jesus Christ.” The 2019 recipient of the Denman Award is the Rev. Matt Bistayi, Lead Pastor of Valley Church in Allendale. Bistayi was appointed to the new church start in 2009 and launched the church a year later with over 100 in attendance and has been growing ever since. Elliott said, “Matt attributes the growth to a focus on worship, community and mission. Valley is one of the youngest congregations in the Michigan Conference.” Elliott commented on Bistayi's belief that, “The mark of a healthy church is not seating capacity but sending capacity.” Pastor Bistayi offered thanks for the award noting, “This is really about the amazing people at Valley who believe

and breathe the love of Jesus. We are a community of crazy people.”

One Matters Award

The Hartford United Methodist Church, Greater Southwest District, was then honored with the One Matters Award conferred annually by Discipleship Ministries. The award recognizes intentional discipleship and was created in 2015 to lift up churches moving from zero baptisms and professions of faith into positive numbers. Doc Hall, present from Discipleship Ministries, explained that in addition to a plaque, the congregation receives \$1,000 to advance their ministry. The Rev. Gary Step, Associate Director of Congregational Vibrancy, said, “This is exciting good news!” as he introduced Pastor Ryan Wenburg as, “a bold and effective leader.” Step highlighted various reasons that Hartford overcame a pattern of “stalling out”: The Bridge, a program that reaches out to the ethnic diversity in their community; single board governance; and a well-equipped laity. “Pastor Ryan is not a go-alone. He helped train the congregation to lead and

Continued next page ...

not depend on the pastor.” Calling on the Conference theme, Step concluded, “As this conference is challenging us to step out of the boat to be bold and effective leaders; Ryan is doing this with courage, passion and humility! I am honored to present this award to this day for such a time as this!!”

Honoring retirees

Another group of people recognized for their service – 360 years of combined ministry – was the 2019 Michigan Conference Retirees. They were among those included in, “Celebrating the Journey of Ministry,” on Saturday, June 1. That program, hosted by the Board of Ordained Ministry, featured Slam Poetry by five creative presenters. The Rev. Jeff Nelson, Royal Oak UMC, addressed the Retirees ... “Live like climbing Mt. Everest is something you might actually do, once a year every year for the rest of your life ... Live like the wall you are leaning on is holding the whole world up ... Live like you’ll never have to go to a Board of Trustees meeting ever again ... Live like you’ve never heard of hate...”

Personal tributes and congratulations were offered to all retirees. Poems are now online at news.michiganumc.org. Find the story, “AC members learn



A surprise guest from United Methodist Communications, Rev. Gary Henderson (left) was on hand Saturday night to present Mark Doyal with the new EPI Award, “a communications Oscar of sorts.” ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

about leadership” under the heading, “View All Michigan News.”

For photos and bios of those retiring from active service this year, go to 2019.michiganumc.org/Materials and find the link to “Preview the 2019 Program.” Pages 66-84 celebrate the retirees.

Later during the celebration, the Rev.

Barry Petrucci, Chair of the Order of Elders, announced that the Rev. Arthur Spafford, retired in the Detroit Conference in 1991, is the holder of the Conference Cane. The Conference Cane, now in the conference archives, honors the oldest living United Methodist Elder in The Michigan Conference. The Rev. Bernard Randolph, the 2018 holder of the West Michigan Conference Cane died in July of last year.

Many other expressions of thanks were made throughout the Annual Conference, some marking times of transition. These people were honored for jobs well done:

- to Jen Peters after years of service as Conference Registrar. She is succeeded by Sarah George-Vollmer;
- to Ron Iris, who retires as Conference Statistician. Pamela Stewart is taking on that important work;
- to Dean of the Cabinet, the Rev. Dr. Charles Boayue, for his service in that role. The Rev. Elizabeth Hill is the 2019-2020 Dean;
- and to the Rev. Anita Hahn for eight years as Superintendent of the Northern Waters (Grand Traverse) districts. We welcome the Rev. Jodi Flessner to leadership in the north.



The Rev. Matt Bistyi, pastor of Valley Church in Allendale, was welcomed to the stage Saturday night by the Rev. Dirk Elliott to receive the Harry Denman Evangelism Award. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites



Bishop David Bard blesses the supplies conference members brought to the Midwest Mission Distribution Center trailer parked at Grand Traverse Resort.



Rev. Jennie Brown retold the story of Esther on Saturday morning asking, "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?"



Rev. Kristi Hintz assists during Opening Worship/Memorial Service as saints are remembered with the lighting of candles.

Snapshots
of Vitality



On Sunday morning Superintendent Dwayne Bagley announces that all the appointments on the Greater Southwest District are set.



St. Paul would be proud of these men, "Running the race set before them." Two more cross the finish line during the 5K competition on Wednesday afternoon that netted \$1.9280 for Disaster Relief.

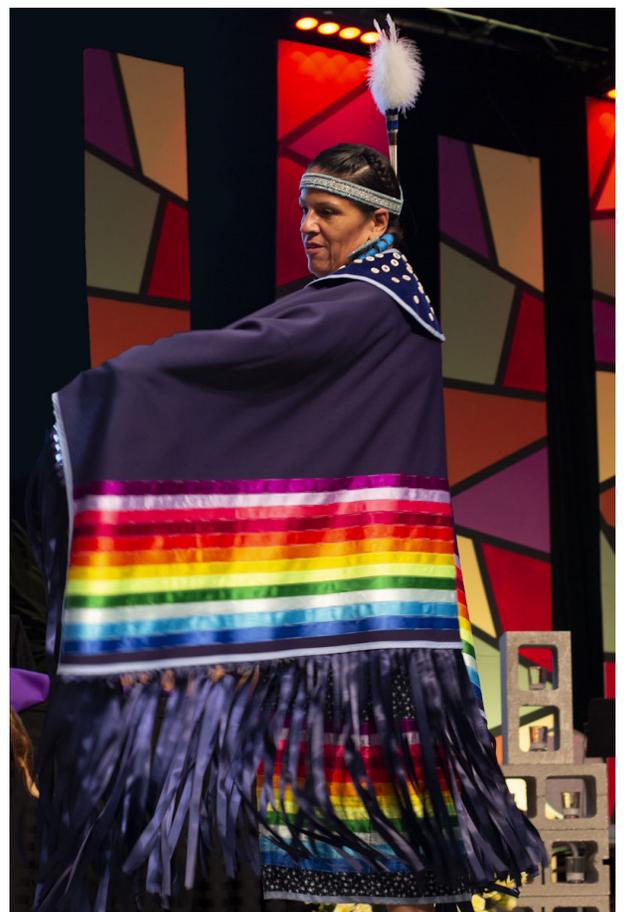


Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place ... seated on the head table between Bishop Bard and Assistant John Boley.



Always a highlight of any Annual Conference, the Service of Recognition, Commissioning, and Ordination took place Sunday. Center: newly ordained deacon, Sarah Alexander, is welcomed by the Revs. Paul Perez and Marsha Woolley.

Kristen Grauer, shared anecdotes of her growing up in Michigan as a PK (Preacher's Kid) during Teaching Time on Saturday morning.



A demonstration of dance was shared by Native Americans from around the state of Michigan on Friday evening.



Dillon Burns was one of five Slam Poets who honored those remembered during Celebrating the Journey of Ministry on Saturday afternoon.

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Michigan Area United Methodist Camping with prayer, volunteer service, promotion, and financial gifts;

—called for immediate reuniting of families separated at the US-Mexico border;

—established an Older Adult Ministries Team on the Board of Congregational Life.

On legislation related to General Conference, see story on page 3.

Looking ahead

Conference members came together in the space between the 2019 General Conference last February and 2020 General Conference next May.

During the course of the 2019 Annual Conference, Bishop Bard made comments addressing that context. Some of his remarks were made

during the legislative process. Following the taking of the aspirational vote (GCR 2019-2) the bishop asked all members to help in the careful interpretation of Annual Conference actions: “We will leave from this place some disappointed, some pleased, many bruised, many experiencing moments of delight and grace. To the best of your ability, you will help lead your churches to witness for the grace of God in Jesus Christ. It will be so in the power of God’s spirit.”

After the results of the straw poll (GCR 2019-3) were announced, Bard stated, “It does matter how this poll is interpreted. This is a vote of the people gathered, lay and clergy, in this particular place in this particular time.” The Bishop acknowledged the pain and difficulty of taking



Diana and Duane Miller get acquainted with the voting devices introduced at the 2019 Michigan Annual Conference. This was the first time electronic voting was used to facilitate Annual Conference legislation and election of delegates. ~mic photo/ Jonathan Trites

the poll and the importance of caring for everyone’s feelings saying, “Jesus of the parables cares as much about the 30% as the 70%. I encourage us to continue to do this hard work.”

The bishop addressed the current state of the church in his preaching. On Thursday, May 30, he reported, “General Conference 2019 did not find a way forward for The United Methodist Church but instead revealed even more starkly the depth of our differences. If some space is not created within Methodism we will continue to be swept up in an increasingly intense cycle of action and reaction.”

He then, with sadness, said to the newly-born Michigan Conference, “Part of the reality we are facing, friends, is that we may not be together long. I may be the first and the last bishop of the Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church.”

Bard then assured the Annual Conference of the strength of his commitment in the present. “Yet we are

together, here, now. I am the bishop for all Michigan United Methodists, here, now, and I remain deeply committed to this ministry, committed to engaging in this ministry with all the wisdom, heart, and courage I can muster by the grace of God.”

Bishop Bard also peached June 2nd during the Service of Recognition, Commissioning, and Ordination. Bard again addressed the unsettled nature of the moment. “There will be a Methodism that fully welcomes and includes LGBTQ persons, celebrates their relationships, and offers the opportunity to be considered for commissioning, licensing and ordination. There will remain a Methodism that retains traditional positions.”

The bishop acknowledged the uncertainty — “How the two will relate, or how many movements forward there will be, I don’t know” – and concluded with trust —” I

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Sometimes votes were taken the old-fashioned way during the 2019 Michigan Annual Conference, with hands raised high in the air. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

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hope we might find a way into the future [through the power of God's love] rather than like a tornado sweeping through."

He again encouraged his listeners to a leadership style characterized by wisdom, courage, and heart.

Find Bishop Bard's post-conference thoughts in his most recent blog, "Unfinished business from AC 2019" on page 2.

Electing delegates

Members elected a delegation of 20 persons to participate

in setting the course for the future of The United Methodist Church at the 2020 General and Jurisdictional conferences.

The first election took place on the first ballot on Thursday morning; the last ballot results were read on Saturday at 7:45 pm.

Delegates, in order of election, are:

General Conf Laity: Laura Witkowski, Diane Brown, Jennifer Peters, Nichea Ver Veer Guy

General Conf Clergy:

Kennetha Bigham-Tsai, Paul Perez, Joy Barrett, Megan Walther

Jurisdictional Conf Laity: Ruby Anderson, Hoon-Yung Hopgood, Ruth Sutton, Lisa Hahn

Jurisdictional Conf Clergy: Charles Boayue, Joel Fitzgerald, Christina Wright, Brad Bartelmay

Jurisdictional Conf Lay Alternates: Brenda DuPree and Gordon Grigg III

Jurisdictional Conf Clergy Alternates: Sherri Swanson and Matt Weiler

The 2020 delegation is the

first to be elected by the new Michigan Conference. Laura Witkowski and the Rev. Kennetha Bigham Tsai will serve as co-chairs.

The delegation is a diverse group regarding gender, race, and age. There was an intentional effort to elect young leaders.

Eight delegates (40% of the full delegation) are under 40 years of age: Lisa Hahn (16); Gordon Grimm III (21); Rev. Megan Walther (32); Rev. Joel Fitzgerald (34); Rev. Paul Perez (37); Rev. Matt Weiler (37); Rev. Christina Wright (38); and Laura Witkowski (39).



The Michigan Conference Delegation to the 2020 General Conference. Front row left-right: Hoon-Yung Hopgood, Brenda DuPree, Megan Walther, Ruth Sutton, Ruby Anderson, Kennetha Bigham-Tsai, Laura Witkowski, Joy Barrett, Diane Brown, Sherri Swanson. Back Row, l-r: Christina Wright, Gordon Grigg III, Nichea Ver Veer Guy, Brad Bartelmay, Jen Peters, Matt Weiler, Paul Perez, and Lisa Hahn. Laura Witkowski and Kennetha Bigham-Tsai will co-chair the Michigan Delegation. ~ mic photo/ Jonathan Trites

Home Words Bound ... some farm wisdom for the church



REV. BENTON HEISLER

Director of Connectional Ministries, West Michigan

Father's Day will be celebrated across our country this weekend. I am blessed to have many fine memories of my father and his father, my grandfather. If you have read this blog over the past 11 years, you know I have told any number of stories of times together with them on the family centennial farm in northern Indiana.

My grandmother was one of five sisters, born to a German immigrant family that settled there in the mid to late 1800s. My great aunt never married and died at the age of 86, just three weeks after needing to move from the house that had been the only home she had ever known, other than her four years in college, which is a whole other legacy story for another time. My grandmother and grandfather raised my father and his sister in the small Sears Craftsman home across the dusty dirt road from the family estate.

A few months after my great aunt's death, the family all gathered one summer day, for another "reunion on the family farm." There was less croquet, and the attire was more work-friendly. There was a job to do. My great aunt had indicated that the estate was to be divided among the ten great-nieces and nephews. No one at that time was interested in or able to farm, so the family reunion was the event for sorting, selecting and dividing artifacts, heirlooms, mementos and telling stories of the days gone by.

My aunt had included some Scripture in the will that made it clear, the sharing of this legacy was a gift to be treasured, not squandered, and peace among us all was a paramount value. *"How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity!"* (Psalm 133) When the estate was distributed there were tears of gratitude, but no anger or bitter resentment. There was no "winner take all" or attitudes of "by any means necessary, justified by a personal self-righteous end."

Then I take time to get off the usual direct routes and find my way down the 1-mile dirt road, past this farm, much has changed and yet everything is still the same. The two homes still stand. The 1860s barn now has a metal roof and siding, but all the hand-hewn structural beams remain intact, having withstood the test of time and winds and purpose.

Seven generations later this clan still gathers on what is usually a hot August Saturday in Indiana when you can almost hear the corn grow. We reminisce, reacquaint, meet the newest spouses, grieve another saint who has gone before us and celebrates the latest infant to arrive. If we all were present, there would be nearly 100 persons who are the family of these five sisters.

We have all branched out from the Church of the Brethren family faith roots. We are Mennonite, Independent Community, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Wesleyan, United Methodist, Nazarene, Brethren, searching... We are Republican, Democrat, and Independent. There are teachers, nurses, attorneys, pastors, construction workers, IT specialists, professors, piano teachers, coaches, and a nuclear physicist. Some have gardens, but nobody is a farmer.

I spent most of last weekend in the woods of northern Michigan on the end of a chainsaw removing dead and dangerous trees to make space for a variety of outdoors opportunities. I showed my 8th-grade nephew some techniques for using a double-edged ax, splitting maul and wedges. He was the 5th generation to put his hand on those very tools. I vividly remember a day in the woods in the 1960s, watching my father and grandfather use a two-man crosscut saw on a large log. They set me up to chop down a tree with the very same ax my nephew was using. (Yes, I know they now have hydraulic log splitters and machinery that can quickly accomplish every step it took us hours to complete. But, expediency is not always the best guiding principle.)

We face some similar challenges as a denomination. ... There is a substantial amount of clear disagreement. There is clearly some "sorting, selecting and dividing of artifacts, heirlooms, mementos and telling stories of the days gone by" that will need to take place. There is some "splitting" that may need to be accomplished.

Will we divide the "estate" in such a way that lives can be transformed, dreams fulfilled, and the legacy of faith expressions continue? Or will we live out an ugly "winner take all" or "by any means necessary, justified by a personal self-righteous end" pattern of self-destruction?

What lessons will we model for the world, the sake of Christ and His Church, and the children of the next generation?



Rev. Dr. Charles Boayue delivered the report of the Dean of the Cabinet on Sunday, June 2. "It ain't over until God says, 'It's over,'" he concluded. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

Keep mission at the center

The Rev. Dr. Charles Boayue, Jr., Dean of the Cabinet, shared his remarks on Sunday morning, June 2, titled, "The Mission Imperative."

He began, "At a time like this what you would expect me to say about The Michigan Conference and the work of your Cabinet?" He continued, "While I could spend time lamenting all the sad commentaries on the collective behaviors and divisive rhetoric that characterize the current climate across our Church, I would like to take another approach."

The Dean then turned conference members' eyes to God, "The Apostle Paul, in the 12th chapter of Hebrews, invites them to lay aside their preoccupations and set their priority straight ... The race is the mission. Participation requires patient endurance because God gets to call the shots, not us!"

Boayue told stories of mission and ministry taking place in each district of the conference. "The 94 churches of the East Winds District ... sent a VIM Team to engage

hurricane recovery work in Puerto Rico in January 2019." He mentioned, "A day-long work camp, 'Heritage Goes to Camp,'" held at Judson Collins Center. "The Northern Skies District celebrates Pickford UMC for increasing worship attendance from 90 to 187 in five years." On his own Greater Detroit District, "there is excitement for new church starts" like French UMC and the Vietnamese Ministry in Madison Heights.

The Dean then called people beyond the brokenness of the present moment. "The mission is imperative because without it the journey leads nowhere worthy of the travel," he asserted.

Quoting lyrics from *Onward Christian Soldiers*, Boayue concluded, "Let us remain caught up in this amazing mission, realizing that it ain't over till God says, 'It's over!'"

The message can be found at news.michiganumc.org.

The Rev. Elizabeth Hill, Heritage District, will serve as Dean of the Cabinet during the coming year.

News in Brief

HELP UMCOR RESPOND TO SPRING STORMS



To assist with immediate relief efforts in the wake of flooding and tornadoes, UMCOR has awarded \$10,000 solidarity grants to the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, Oklahoma Conference, Arkansas Conference, and West Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church. Will you join UMCOR in showing

solidarity for our neighbors? 100% of your gift is used to bring relief to those in need. So each gift, no matter the amount, will make a difference. Donate to UMCOR US Disaster Response #901670.

TOTALS OF THE OFFERINGS TAKEN AT AC 2019

An Ingathering at Opening Worship took in \$41,180. Gifts were divided among three important Michigan ministries: \$18,439 for Grace Children's Hospital as designated by the Haiti Covenant Partners; \$18,649 for the Bishop Judith Craig Children's Village as designated by the Liberia Covenant Partners; and \$4,091 for the Michigan Disaster Relief and Recovery Fund. A pre-conference 5-K Event earned an additional \$1,980 for the Disaster Fund. The Ministerial Education Fund received \$7,378 in gifts given during the Service of Recognition, Commissioning, and Ordination. The fund prepares men and women for effective ministry through scholarships, support for Course of Study, funding of seminaries and more.

WHERE ARE MICHIGAN PASTORS SERVING?

The full list of appointment read-outs shared at the 2019 Michigan Annual Conference is available online. Go to news.michiganumc.org. Strike *News/Events* in the bar at the top of the page. Strike *New Appointments*.



The Michigan Conference Appointive Cabinet for 2019-2020. ~mic photo/Jonathan Trites

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Annual Conference to ask if I would ordain Pastor Lucinda Eastman. The request arrived out of the blue, and I needed some further clarification. Additionally, I had no idea who Lucinda Eastman was. In just a few days, questions were clarified, arrangements were made with our Board of Ordained Ministry and those planning the RCO service, and Lucinda Eastman arrived. During the service, I explained what was happening, I ordained Rev. Eastman, and you all received her with joyous celebration. At this time, when some of our global United Methodist relationships are strained, I was completely taken with that welcome.

I am grateful for much, but also deeply and painfully aware that many struggled with this annual conference session. The pain of our differences as United Methodists was often palpable. I remain convinced that The United Methodist Church needs to create more space between people in our church, whether that comes through forming separate Methodist denominations or organizing unique streams of Methodism whose relationship will need to be defined. There were moments when a pop song from the 1970s played in my head, The Carpenters, “we go on hurting each other.”

I leave Annual Conference stretched by gratitude and grief. I also leave with a

sense of unfinished business. No, there were not resolutions that we failed to consider. We have some longer-term unfinished business.

We need to continue to listen to the stories of LGBTQ persons, or persons whose ancestry is not European, and of indigenous persons. This can be difficult work. All people do matter. All are loved by God and created in God’s image. All voices need to be heard. At the same time, we cannot ignore the history that has quieted and even silenced some voices. I am not requesting you to change your mind about something. It is a request for us all to acknowledge that sometimes our traditions and our biblical language have been used in ways that demean and damage. Can we hear those stories? For the kind of healthy conversations, we still need to have, we need to recognize our difficult history. I often thought this week of Jesus’ parables about coins and sheep, that though small and numerically slight, nevertheless were sought out. I am committed to continuing to listen.

We need to continue to listen to those whose voices were in the minority on a number of our votes. We took the temperature of our Conference. In our non-binding straw poll, 69% of those voting said that, given a choice, they would prefer a Michigan United Methodist

Church that offered more openness to and inclusion of LGBTQ persons. Let’s acknowledge that this is a single snapshot, and it is the opinion of those gathered at this place and this time. 31% prefer a more traditional United Methodism for Michigan, at least when it comes to the place of LGBTQ persons. These are our siblings in Christ. Even if at some point we will be in separate Methodisms, we are together now, and we would do well to figure out how we might best bless each other in this in-between time. I am committed to reaching out and asking what mutual blessing might look like.

I heard from some of you that you have questions about our Board of Ordained Ministry. I am committed to continuing the conversation with them about the relationship between important values they have articulated and the disciplinary requirements for examining candidates for commissioning and ordination. Our *Book of Discipline* separates the power of the board and the work of the bishop, but I have appreciated the strong relationship we have developed with one another. Having served for many years on the Minnesota Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, I know how valuable a good working relationship is between bishop and board.

One of the most essential bits of unfinished business, and frankly business that will never be “finished,” is deepening the capacity in our congregations and relationships to discuss deep and difficult topics gracefully and thoughtfully. In our polarized world, we are not very good at giving each other a little space. We are quick to jump on a word that comes out wrong. We are quick to impugn negative motives to those with whom we disagree while neglecting to examine our own ability to be too narrow in our thinking or mixed in our motives. In our polarized world where counting votes can become more important than depth of discussion, we can neglect to plumb the deep resources of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience to help us understand church, world, each other. Through the years, I have often asked, “What kind of gift might the church be to the world if we deepened our capacity for thoughtful

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Bishop David Bard preaches during Opening Worship at the 2019 Michigan Annual Conference held in Acme, MI, May 30-June 2. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

Treasurer talks dollars & cents

David Dobbs, Director of Administrative Services and Conference Treasurer made his report to the Michigan Annual Conference on Friday afternoon, May 31.

He reviewed the efforts he and his staff made to give financial birth to a new conference and nine new districts.

Dobbs thanked outgoing Statistician Ron Iris and welcomed the new keeper of the records, Pamela Stewart.

Dobbs shared significant numbers including 58% of churches paid 100% of ministry shares in 2018, down from 63% the year before; 82 churches paid 0%.

The total budget for 2020 is \$14,700,910, reduced by \$124,723 from 2019.

Dobbs offered details of what happens to the Ministry Shares money. (See graph) Dobbs helped members “do the math” of every Ministry Shares dollar spent...

- Conference Benevolences is the largest section of the pie at 38 cents
- Clergy Support accounts for 22 cents
- 15 cents on every dollar goes for Administration
- The remaining 25 cents goes to the General Church; 13 cents of that allocated to the World Service Fund, “the financial lifeline to a long list of Christian mission and ministry throughout the denomination.” No other General Church apportionment gets more than 4 cents of the ministry shares dollars.

Dobbs concluded, “Please understand that 88 cents of every dollar you give in Ministry Shares either stays in the conference or does the missional work of the denomination.”

The full report is available online.



Opening Worship celebrated oneness in Christ as children of God. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

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conversation about really difficult concerns?” Sometimes we are remarkably good at this. Sometimes we are barely distinguishable from the network news talk shows. I am committed to working with whomever to see how we might deepen our capacity for rich, thoughtful, grace-filled, passionate conversation whose aim is a more profound connection and understanding than quickly convincing someone our position is superior.

The final bit of unfinished business that I feel is this need to find a way into the future that indeed creates more space within The United Methodist Church. I would like to think we might have arrived there through the kind of rich and deep conversations I have just described. However, I don’t believe such conversations about LGBTQ inclusion are possible right now in our current institutional configuration, with our four-year cycle of General Conferences and our annual cycle of Annual Conference voting, with a denominational system that has brought us to a place of tightening rules and escalating reaction. We need new space,

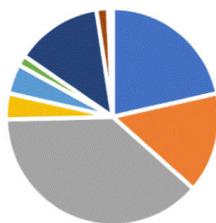
new birth, new creation. We need space for healing. We need space for fresh winds of God’s Spirit to blow.

I am committed to working with others in the wider denomination and here in Michigan to figure out how we can create such space. I am grateful that there are new possibilities even as I grieve that this United Methodist Church as we know it will need to change dramatically to create sufficient space.

There is much unfinished business, and I also need some rest. I will be engaging all of the above while caring for the usual tasks of being a bishop. I am also going to find some time to disengage from work this summer. We have a daughter getting married later this month, and I am going to be fully present with her as dad. Julie will not be planning lessons in the evening, so there are walks to take and time simply to enjoy.

You all need rest and healing and time to breathe and laugh and play. Please take it. We will soon be at this work again, and all the work of being disciples of Jesus Christ so that our lives and the world can be different.

Where Your Money Goes



- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ■ Clergy Support | ■ Administration |
| ■ Conference Benevolences | ■ Episcopal Fund |
| ■ Ministerial Education Fund | ■ General Church Administration |
| ■ World Service Fund | ■ Black College Fund |
| ■ Africa University Fund | ■ Interdenominational Fund |

AC 2019 ... coming home to grace, hope, and love

REV. KENNETHA BIGHAM-TSAI
 Connectional Table

Attending my own annual conference is always like coming home. I meet and greet clergy who have been with me on the journey in ministry since my journey began. There was my clergy friend who was on my first District Committee on Ministry when I was coming through the process. There was my first district superintendent, and my second, and my third. There were the clergy friend and her family who accompanied mine to family camp. There was the friend that I have leaned on for years for counsel and support.

It was the same with the laity. Invariably, at every annual conference, I encounter, eat with, reminisce with, pray with lay people who were at the churches or in the district I served. On one of the days, I attended with my now 20-year-old son and ran into laypeople who were at our first church. They remembered him as a babe in the nursery or as a child in a Sunday School class.

Annual conference is family. And so, it was with trepidation that I attended this year, fearing that my family would be torn apart. Every time I encountered a former clergy friend or layperson who I had grown to love, I wondered, would we hurt each other in our ideological debates? Even worse, would this be the last time that we gather as this body, as this family before we divide?

This annual conference, like so many others around the world, is being shaped by the impact of the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference and our impasse over how to be in ministry with our LGBTQIA siblings. In Michigan, there was open acknowledgement of the possibility that we would not be able to go forth together, and there was open grief.

But there was also a healthy measure of grace, of hope, and of love. At one point during floor debate, a delegate stood and began to use words that are harmful to LGBTQIA persons. Another delegate stood and called an end to the debate, noting that the conversation was doing harm though he knew the person did not intend to. This was an act of maturity and



Sus'ann Busley greets Terry and Jackie Euper as they visit the registration table at the 2019 Michigan Annual Conference. Annual Conference is experienced as a special homecoming for many. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

grace that valued people and the health of the body above an outcome.

There were moments of hope as well. In Michigan, we elected one of the youngest General and Jurisdictional Conference delegations we have in our history as far as I know—four young adults and half of the delegation younger than 45. We elected a delegation that is half women and a quarter people of color. Many were first-time delegates. That happened because some long-term delegates chose not to run to allow fresh voices a chance at the table.

Other glimpses of hope came from young women, two of them daughters of clergy, who are out in the world transforming it and blazing trails to new ways of being the church. One, Becca Farnum, talked about shaping values through environmental justice and sustainability work in the Middle East. I remember her from the days of my service at a local church connected to a Wesley Foundation.

Then there was Kristen Grauer, who talked about ways in which growing up as a pastor's kid brought her into ministry in the foreign service. She soon will be the top U.S. diplomat in France. Her father Chuck Grauer, now deceased,

served three of the churches on my former district. And a young laywoman who I have known for years, Laura Witkowski, brought a powerful message about courage to our annual conference as one of its preachers.

These are the places that I found hope. And there were many glimpses of love as well. There was deep love in the commitment of the people working hard for a church that includes and celebrates all people no matter ethnicity, class, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation or any other kinds of distinctions. There was deep love in the commitment to do no harm—a commitment that stretched across ideologies. There was deep love in our ability to be on opposite ends of the spectrum ideologically, but still, see in each other the very image of God. And there was love in our just being there, worshipping together, grieving together, eating and playing together as a family.

I do not know what will happen to our United Methodist Church. I do not know what we will become. But I am convinced that what we can become became real at my own annual conference. Our becoming can be full of grace, hope, and love. May it be so in all of our annual conferences around the world.