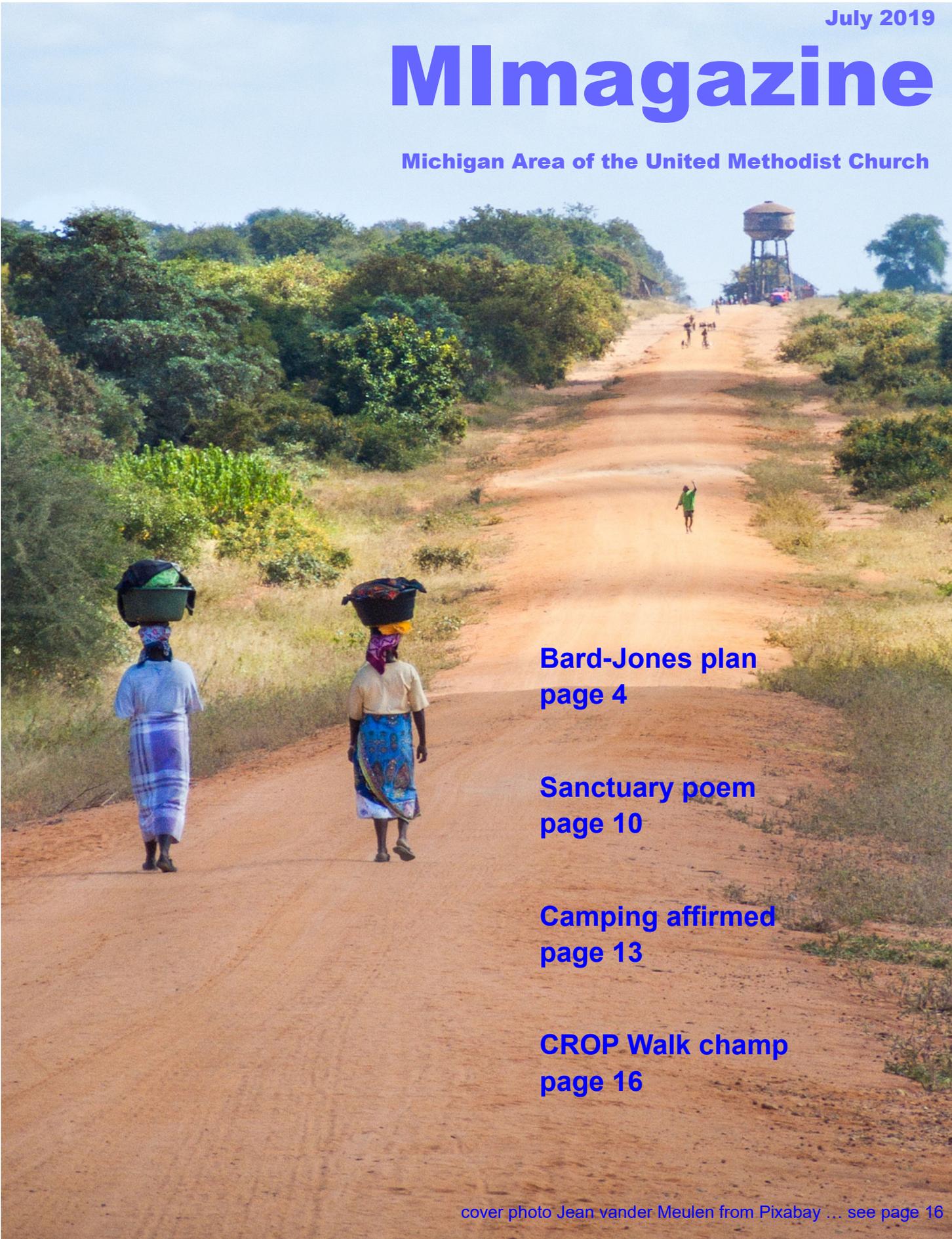


July 2019

MImagazine

Michigan Area of the United Methodist Church



**Bard-Jones plan
page 4**

**Sanctuary poem
page 10**

**Camping affirmed
page 13**

**CROP Walk champ
page 16**

cover photo Jean vander Meulen from Pixabay ... see page 16



July 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.

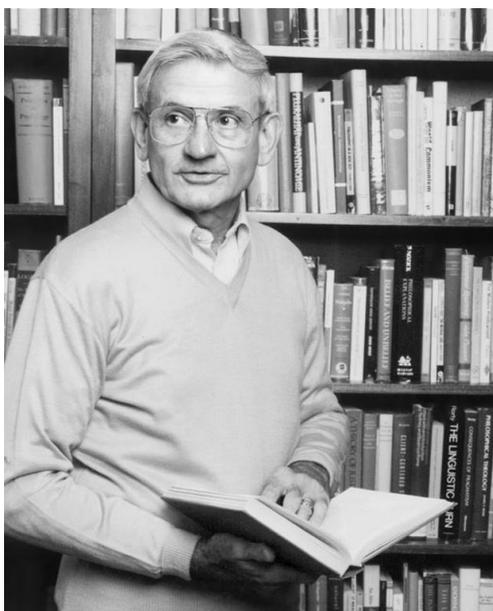
**Michigan Area
 Putting FAITH in ACTION**
 1011 Northcrest Road
 Lansing MI 48906
 517.347.4030
 Direct comments & stories
 to Kay DeMoss
 kdemoss@michiganumc.org



Bishop David Bard

The Joyful Journey

On June 6, United Methodist theologian, Schubert Ogden died. He was 91. Ogden taught for many years at Southern Methodist University (SMU) where he was also a long-time director of the Graduate Program in Religious Studies. I first “met” Schubert Ogden when I was inquiring about doctoral programs while serving my first pastoral appointment in the far reaches of northern Minnesota. He responded clearly and graciously to my inquiry, telling me that while he could not guarantee admission, my academic work made me a good candidate for their program. I applied, was accepted, and eventually earned my Ph. D. from SMU.



Schubert Ogden 1928 - 2019

While there, I engaged with Dr. Ogden in graduate seminars and worked on an independent study with him in philosophical theology. One other graduate student and I read with Dr. Ogden works by Paul Tillich and Charles Hartshorne, both theologians with whom Ogden had worked. I experienced first-hand Ogden’s reputation for deep thinking and for challenging students to think as deeply and clearly as he did. Upon his retirement from SMU, students of Schubert Ogden established the Schubert Ogden Fellowship for academic excellence in theology, and I was absolutely delighted and deeply honored to be its first recipient.

Three days later, on June 9, my uncle, Albert Bard, died at age 79. My uncle Albert, my dad’s brother, grew up in a family with significant struggles. His

father, my grandfather, had troubling issues with alcohol. In spite of the difficulties, my uncle Albert worked his way through college and then attended the Naval Officer Candidate School. He went on to serve 24 years in the Navy, including service in Vietnam, at the Pentagon, and as the commanding officer of his own ship. When I was a boy, I remember receiving a letter from him with Vietnamese currency. When I was heading for college, my uncle Albert encouraged me. When we lived in Dallas, he came through the area a couple of times and took my family for dinner at a nice restaurant.

Both of these men touched my life in important ways. Both helped expand my horizons, widen my view of the world. From Duluth, Minnesota, my uncle Albert ended up in places like Vietnam, Washington, D.C., and New York City. Schubert Ogden has studied with and thought with some of the great theologians of the twentieth century and developed his own deeply-thought, clearly-articulated theological position. He helped me feel more deeply and clearly, and in studying with him, I could say I was able to study with a significant theologian of the twentieth century.

Expanding horizons. Deepening thought. Widening our world. Cultivating curiosity. I think the church is supposed to be about this as well. Some of you have heard me quote Patrick Henry’s book *The Ironic Christian’s Companion*: Once upon a time the term “Christian” meant wider horizons, a larger heart, minds set free, room to move around.

Michigan young people and leaders attend Youth 2019

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Content Editor

"I came all the way from the U.P. because I love the Conference, I love these people and I love the church," says Sarina Maki. Sarina, from Wesley United Methodist Church in Ishpeming, is one of over 160 youth and leaders from 19 Michigan churches participating in Youth 2019.

She and others climbed aboard four buses on July 9th to travel to Kansas City for the event hosted by Discipleship Ministries.

Bishop David Bard was in Kalamazoo to meet the four bus-loads of people who converged on the Wesley Foundation at Western Michigan University on Tuesday morning.

Bridget Nelson, the Coordinator of Youth Ministry Development for The Michigan Conference reports, "We sang a few songs, we heard about the Wesley Foundation, and the bishop spoke. He told the kids that 'the church needs you' and added that he hopes they will stay close to the church, so they can be regularly reminded that God loves them."

After the blessing by Bishop Bard, the group headed southwest together, arriving in Kansas City by evening of July 9.

The General Board of Discipleship hosted the first national gathering of United Methodist youth in 1988. Youth 2019 "traces its roots" back to that event.

The theme was "Love Well" based on Romans 12:9-10. Sponsors explain: "[Those verses] remind us that authentic love means we are called to treat each other like brothers and sisters in Christ. And you know what? Siblings don't always get along. Siblings fight, they tease each other. Yet siblings also lift each other up, have each other's backs, and they love authentically ... at YOUTH 2019, you will worship and learn as a beloved family member, eat with new friends, and discover how you are a part of the incredible diversity of a family of United Methodist Youth."

Over 3,000 youth, grades 6-12, experienced Youth 2019 for four days of worship, Bible study, service opportunities, and life-changing fun. It was also an opportunity for leaders with youth to



Central Bay youth were among those who packed school supplies for Midwest Mission Distribution Center as part of hands-on mission at Youth 2019. "We were called the 'BEST YOUTH GROUP EVER' by our friends at Midwest Mission Distribution Center! Not only did we help to pack school bags, but we came back, helped to load the truck, and broke down all the boxes!" ~ Facebook/Reach Youth Ministries Mt. Pleasant UMC

connect and network.

The 50 workshops offered July 10-13 included topics like: Finding hope; Weird Bible — Relearning stories you thought you knew; Date Safe; Our dollars, God's economy; Creating a world without racial mascots; Hearing God in a noisy world; How to pick a fight with hunger; Haters back off — how to deal with relational aggression the Jesus Way; and Finding Faith in total darkness.

There were hands-on opportunities to put new learning to work like packing School Kits for Midwest Mission Distribution Center, meal-packing for Rise Against Hunger, and sorting and packing produce for Harvesters.

Here are some Michigan voices heard on the bus headed for Kansas City ...

"This is an opportunity to think about my future and better understand how God can guide me." ~ *Gavin Ward*, Port Huron, 15

"I hope to learn more about God, and I love trips with my church!" ~ *Reese Sloan*, Port Huron, 12

"I'm looking forward to the service opportunities and small groups, where we can meet new people from our larger Methodist church family." ~ *Ashley Olevnik*, Birmingham First, 14

"The adults at Adrian 1st UMC were so encouraging about wanting me to go. They supported fund-raising and donations to send us." She adds, "No bus ride is too long when you're surrounded by these cool people to talk to." ~ *Goldie Mesaros-Winkles*, Adrian First

The theme of the 2019 Michigan Annual Conference was *Bold and Effective Leaders*. These 160 teens, men, and women will doubtless come home from Youth 2019 more bold and more effective.

These world-changing disciples of Jesus Christ arrived back home in Michigan Sunday night, July 14th.

Bishop Bard and Jones offer plan for unity of UMC

SAM HODGES
Senior Content Editor

Two bishops propose turning The United Methodist Church into an umbrella organization for new, self-governing church groups that would offer different approaches on ordination of gay clergy and same-sex unions.

Michigan Conference Bishop David Bard and Texas Conference Bishop Scott Jones began collaborating on a plan after the rancorous 2019 General Conference and shared it with United Methodist News this week.

“We both envision a future where the church will focus on its mission of making disciples and spend less time and energy debating issues of human sexuality, which means we need to bless different parts of The United Methodist Church to be about the mission in their own ways,” Jones said.

The denomination has faced conflict for more than four decades over theological differences regarding homosexuality. The 2019 General Conference, held Feb. 23-26 in St. Louis, reinforced restrictions

on LGBTQ ordination and same-sex unions, but also led to protests and resistance by many churches across the U.S.

Bard and Jones’ plan comes as various groups of church leaders discuss options for the denomination, including schism. A Sept. 18 deadline looms for petitions to be submitted for the 2020 General Conference in Minneapolis.

Though bishops don’t vote at General Conference, Bard and Jones said they feel an urgency to stimulate debate and action. “We’re offering this plan as a thought experiment that we hope others will take seriously and consider as they are making decisions about the future of the church,” Jones said.

Bard added, “Scott and I acknowledge that there’s room for other ideas to be incorporated.”

Under the Bard-Jones plan – titled “A New Form of Unity: A Way Forward Strategy 2019-2022” – an annual conference would choose to join one of three groups the bishops are tentatively calling the Traditional Methodist Church, the

Open Methodist Church and the Progressive Methodist Church.

The Traditional Methodist Church would begin with a Book of Discipline that includes the Traditional Plan, which passed by a vote of 438 to 384 at the 2019 General Conference and strengthened enforcement of restrictions on LGBTQ ordination and same-sex unions.

The Open Methodist Church and Progressive Methodist Church would begin with a Book of Discipline modified to include the Simple Plan as presented in St. Louis. That plan called for eliminating restrictions on same-sex unions and ordination of gay persons as clergy, as well as removing the church’s official position that homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching.”

Under the Bard-Jones proposal, the Progressive Methodist Church’s Book of Discipline would be further modified to affirm clearly the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in marriage and ordination candidacy.

The Open Methodist Church and Progressive Methodist Church might choose to be one group, the bishops say. The two or three churches would each decide on a name (“Methodist” isn’t required to be part of it), and each would hold its own General Conferences, with complete freedom to revise its Book of Discipline. Each would fund its bishops and decide on approved seminaries.

The two or three churches would share in governing the General Council of Finance and Administration, Wespath, the United Methodist Publishing House and the General Commission on Archives and History. They would contribute proportionally to the Black College Fund and Africa University.

Other general church agencies would have their own boards and be accountable to the Open Methodist Church but would provide services as requested to the other churches.

The United Methodist Church would no longer have individual members but would continue to exist “as an umbrella to



Bishops confer over the issue of whether the legislative committee can refer items to the denomination’s Judicial Council for review during the 2019 United Methodist General Conference in St. Louis. Clockwise from lower left are Bishops Thomas Bickerton, John Schol, David Bard, Julius C. Trimble and Cynthia Fierro Harvey. ~ umns photo/Mike DuBose

ContinuedNEXT page

BARD-JONESfrom page 4

facilitate this new form of unity,” the plan says.

The churches would be in full communion, and each could use the cross-and-flame logo of The United Methodist Church.

Though specific in many ways, the plan leaves unanswered big questions, such as the global nature of The United Methodist Church.

“Churches in Europe and Asia could form their own Methodist Churches or belong to one of the two or three churches, with the precise nature of the relationship to be determined,” the plan says. “There would be a United Methodist Church in Africa, the precise affiliations to the two or three churches to be determined.”

Asked about the ambiguity, Bard said, “While we’ve had conversations with our colleagues from other parts of the world, we didn’t want to go too far in defining what they may wish to do.”

Another unknown: Would these new churches have a Judicial Council? “Each of the new church groupings would determine whether or not to form a Judicial Council or similar body,” Bard said.

The Connectional Conference Plan that failed at the 2019 General Conference would have realigned the denomination according to perspectives on LGBTQ inclusion, as does Bard-Jones.

But the Connectional Conference Plan required constitutional amendments, a lengthy process involving votes throughout the annual conferences. Bard and Jones believe their plan could be launched by General Conference action only.

“The key is the proposal to allow U.S. annual conferences to leave the denomination,” they say in the plan.

“It was contained in section 9 of petition 90041 of the Traditional Plan. This section of the petition was ruled constitutional by the Judicial Council. Because the petition died in the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, section 9 would need to be reintroduced and passed in 2020.”

The Bard-Jones plan foresees churches that disagree with their annual conference’s affiliation decision having the right “to transfer conferences with their assets, thereby joining a different church.”

The plan also lays out an implementation timetable, with the 2020 General Conference approving the major steps, followed by annual conferences choosing their affiliations with one of the two or three new churches in 2021 and the first General Conferences of those churches in 2022.

Bard and Jones have known each other

since long before they were episcopal colleagues, having crossed paths at Southern Methodist University, where they both earned Ph.Ds.

They said they have shared their plan with fellow bishops as well as with groups discussing the future of the church. The stakes are high, and the two bishops hope to have an influence.

“Our plan offers a vision for keeping as much unity as possible and a pathway for decisions to be made,” Jones said.

More comments from Bishop Bard

KAY DEMOSS
Senior Content Editor

A week after this UM News report released, Bishop Bard made additional comments to Michigan Conference Communications.

“Bishop Jones and I wanted to propose an idea we hope moves the conversation about the future of The United Methodist Church forward, that might help us move beyond our current impasse. Our plan attempts to maintain some unity within United Methodism while recognizing the need to create greater space between constituencies in our church, all for the sake of enhancing the United Methodist witness and mission.”

Bard explains that the report of the Commission on a Way Forward did inform their work. “We used ideas from the former Connectional Conferences Plan, but without proposing constitutional amendments. Annual Conferences are critical places for decision-making.”

Addressing a question frequently asked since announcement of the Bard-Jones plan, Bishop Bard observes, “People question whether there would be two or three emerging Methodisms and how they would be distinct. The question of two or three will need to be determined.” He clarifies that “an ‘Open Methodism’ would allow for LGBTQ+ persons to be considered for licensing and ordination and for churches and clergy to hold same

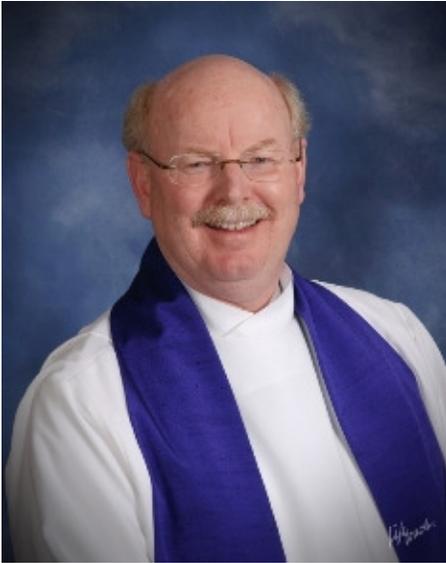
-gender weddings. It would also allow room for clergy and churches who, for reasons of conscience, are not yet willing to host such weddings, but are wanting to be part of a Methodism that allows them.”

He goes on to characterize a Progressive Methodism that “would fully affirm the possibility for LGBTQ+ persons to be ordained and licensed, would have every church open to receive LGBTQ+ clergy, and would expect every church to be willing to host same-sex weddings.” Bard adds that, “There is conversation about whether or not these two — Open and Progressive — might possibly continue forward together in one stream of Methodism. There are certainly other questions that remain unanswered.”

Bard looks ahead with hope. “Bishop Jones and I are aware that there are a number of important conversations happening about the future of the church. If our ideas contribute to these conversations and if they help move The United Methodist Church forward into the future in ways that circumvent the current cycles of reactivity and acrimony, I will be pleased.”

Input is welcome. “We acknowledge that there are unanswered questions and welcome ideas for improvement,” Bard concluded. Email to Bishop Bard at Bishop@michiganumc.org.

Drinking the Cup ... new opportunities



REV. JOHN W. BOLEY

Clergy Assistant to the Bishop

A couple of weeks ago Bishop Bard wrote an eloquent blog on the unfinished business after Annual Conference. I don't need to reiterate or elaborate. But here's my two cents ...

So now everyone is mad and victimized.

The progressives are angry over what happened at General Conference, and they are happy about what happened at Annual Conference. The conservatives are happy about what happened at General Conference, and they are angry about what happened at Annual Conference.

So now everyone is mad and victimized.

So, is this a deadlock or an opportunity? Well, probably both.

Here is my take on it in the form of ten pointed questions:

1. Since everyone is mad and victimized, can we now all have a little more empathy and compassion for each other?
2. Now that these matters have sucked the life out of us, can we become rejuvenated by doing the work of Christ in all of the other important ways?
3. Can we see the work of the Church and discipleship as being so much bigger than we have allowed it to be, bringing new opportunities and passion?
4. Is there now an opportunity for healthy discussions about the underlying substantive issues – about the use and interpretation of Scripture and about the change in our understandings due to the tension between understandings of sexual orientation v. sexual behavior?
5. Is there an opportunity to find an amicable path to separation?
6. Can we refrain from rancor and animosity and a binary, primitive desire to crush and defeat each other?
7. When separation comes, can we wish each other all the best so that we have thriving Methodist movements into the future – perhaps even supporting the different branches to enhance the overall ministry of the Church?
8. Are there ways to strengthen the Church so that, when separation comes, the Church and all of its new components can be in as strong a position as possible?
9. Can we agree that every human being is a precious Child of God?
10. Can we act accordingly?

All things are possible with God.

2019 Denman Award recognizes good vibes at Valley Church

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Content Editor

None other than Billy Graham once called Harry Denman, “one of the great mentors for evangelism.” Denman lived a simple life, made friends with everyone he met, and shared the love of Jesus far and wide. Denman died in 1976 but his spirit lives on in an award that honors those who bring people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Dirk Elliott, The Michigan Conference Director of Congregational Vibrancy, presented the Harry Denman Award to Matt Bistayi, Pastor of Valley Church in Allendale, during ceremonies on Saturday evening, June 1.

Matt Bistayi and his wife, Shellie, were sent to Allendale in 2009 to start a new church. “It was a parachute drop,” Matt says. “The pastor and family are parachuted into the community, and they say, ‘Good luck!’” He reports that 70% of parachute church plants fail in the first two to three years. But after five years Matt reports that Valley Church “had hit its stride,” and now, ten years in, “we are gaining traction.”

Matt and his team launched Valley on October 10, 2010 with over 100 people in

attendance. The church was totally self-sufficient, receiving no conference funding, by 2013, at which time they were chartered. The church is now averaging 175 in worship.

The pastor gives credit the community into which he was dropped saying, “We were blessed with people who came

infant Valley first met in the township hall and then moved to a banquet hall in the Main Street Pub. Outgrowing those spaces, the group leased space in the Chemical Bank building on M-45, and they have gathered there ever since. Eventually they would gut and repurpose the bank space to make it look like what it does

But the main hallmark of the Valley faith-style is “making a difference in practical ways in the lives and relationships around us.” In a phrase, Matt describes the Valley vibe as, “super real.” He continues, “That’s what a lot of people say. When we meet each month for Pizza with the Pastor, that’s often what we hear.”



One of the highlights of the Valley year is “Beach Worship and Baptism” in Lake Michigan. In 2017 the church celebrated ten baptisms, with eleven baptisms in 2018. In 2018 the church experienced 33 professions of faith. ~ Facebook/Valley Church-Allendale

on board, and who wanted to do something different here in Allendale.” The excitement of those young people about involvement in a local church became “a big part of why Valley succeeded in those early years.”

While Valley cared about the campus community, the young and growing congregation never met on campus. “We are not a college church,” Matt says, “though we do care about college students.” The

today. “It’s a non-traditional space that fits our vibe and culture well,” Matt remarks. “Valley is not auditorium-style. We have more of a warehouse-feel.”

The vision statement of Valley Church, which grew out of Matt’s passion, is: “Helping Others live For God, For People, For a Change.” Asked to describe the “vibe at Valley,” Matt says, “At Valley we believe it’s okay to have fun in faith. We are laughing with Jesus and with each other.”

Perhaps the realness factor at Valley merges out of their radical openness. “We value stories,” Matt shares. “Everyone’s story matters, and that means you matter to us.” The stories of individuals are just the starting point for relationship at Valley. Matt says, “Jesus changes everything. When Jesus gets ahold of someone, their life and story changes. They become infused with hope. Then they want to

share that hope with others.” Matt often reminds the Valley family that, “It is not about us. The most important person at Valley is the person who’s not here yet.”

When asked what exciting things are going on in the life of Valley in 2019, Matt mentions the “15 babies being born this year.” He notes that it’s scary, too. “Where are we going to put them if they all show up on the same Sunday?” he laughs. Valley

Go toValley p. 12



MICHIGAN MINISTRIES ... *studying with a mentor makes an exceptional reader at Pathfinders of Muskegon, an EngageMI ministry partner.*



NORTHERN WATERS DISTRICT ... *The Rev. Russell Logston installed at St. John Lutheran Church Lake City, with the help of Bishop David Bard and D.S. Jodie Flessner. The church is partnered with Lake City UMC.*



EAST WINDS DISTRICT... *Jesus Wants YOU! That's the message of this VBS craft activity at Sandusky First UMC.*

Snapshots
of Vitality



MICHIGAN MINISTRIES... *Bishop Bard sits at table with the young participants at Mission u hosted at Albion College. The United Methodist Women sponsor this excellent event.*



GREATER DETROIT DISTRICT ... *Flat Joseph accompanied the youth of Farmington: Orchard UMC on their recent mission trip.*



CENTRAL BAY DISTRICT ... D.S. David Kim helps provide lunch for hungry volunteers serving at One Week, One Street in Saginaw.



MIDWEST DISTRICT ... Pastor Mona Dye welcomes children to "Paul's Dangerous Journey to Tell the Truth," VBS hosted by Wolf Lake UMC.



MID-MICHIGAN DISTRICT ... Look at that sundae! Keeping his eye on the prize at the Ice Cream Social hosted at Mulliken UMC!



NORTHERN SKIES DISTRICT ... Marquette Hope celebrated two baptisms at their Connection Center on July 14! Blessings and love to these little ones and their families.



HERITAGE DISTRICT ... Lambertville youth spent a week at Henderson Settlement. Helping hands in Kentucky!

Psalm of a sanctuary sleeper

God of Refuge,
 You are my hiding place.
 When I have nowhere to call home,
 pews become my furniture,
 church bells, my alarm clock,
 and potluck, my manna.
 Old and elaborate,
 young and modern,
 or plain and practical,
 your home is a sacred space,
 A thin but sturdy tent of grace
 I zip myself into as a veil of protection
 from the mosquitos of malevolence
 and cold carriers of xenophobia.
 Stir up within me forgiveness, for they know not what
 they do.
 Drive away all fear and place within me a new heart.
 Oh, Lord, you hem me in with your constant love.
 Under a quilt sewn by church ladies,
 I rest in peace,
 Under the roof raised together
 by men long ago,
 before they had forgotten that their fathers,
 and their grandfathers,
 were also pioneers and strangers in a strange land.
 Behind these four walls and before your altar,
 Constrain me with your love,
 fill me with faith,
 keep me safe,
 heal my heart with hope,
 and grant me peace. Amen.

Rev. Jack Amick
 UMCOR Director of Global Migration



~ UM News photo/Mike DuBose

Go to michiganumc.org to learn what
 you can do to address conditions at the
 U.S.-Mexico border. Search on "Justice
 & Advocacy." Learn. Give. Act.

Further from home and closer to God



REV. BENTON HEISLER

Director of Connectional Ministries, West Michigan

My wife and I once backpacked five days across 25 miles of Isle Royale leading eight middle school students on that trek.

We had traveled over 60,000 miles in about 20 years across 35 states in a motor home with our two daughters when they were younger children.

I have driven the 18 different vehicles I have owned since I was age 16, approximately 1.3 million miles.

I am convinced that admittedly, I must be “Further from Home and Closer to God.”

Genesis 5:18-29 records, in brief notes, the reflections of some of the oldest biblical characters. “Enoch walked steadily with God. After he had Methuselah, he lived another 300 years, having more sons and daughters. Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch walked steadily with God. And then one day he was simply gone: God took him.”

“Walking steadily with God” was the noted characteristic of Enoch, which was repeated twice in these few verses. Our many long hikes and miles traveling in a camper have generated notations that fill three different journals with stories and our hearts with countless memories.

One hike, early in our married years, was in the mountains of New Hampshire. The wide, wood chip padded trail had become a challenge of steep boulders and narrow spaces made only more difficult by the hot sun, and a much longer than expected hiking time. We arrived at the peak of this mountain, only to encounter a group of persons who looked fresh, clean and perky. They looked nothing like the dirty, sweaty, covered with bug bites, scrapes and bruises bodies we had.

“How did you all get up here?” we asked. “The cable car right down the trail over there!”

“Have not because we ask not...” (James 4:2-3) How many other trials and trails in life do we simply endure because we fail to inquire of God first?

“...Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in Prayer.” God knows our every need and can provide in abundance for it.

In that last step to eternity, we only cover the distance of that “trail” by faith. What we did, who we knew, how much money we made or didn’t make, doesn’t matter.

“Enoch walked steadily with God. And then one day he was simply gone: God took him.” (Genesis 5:24) I can picture God and Enoch talking on that steady walk. And one day, God said to him. “Enoch, you have walked a long way. It’s closer to my home, why don’t you just come with me.”

That would be my prayer for each of us this day. I don’t know what grief you have experienced or in what relationships you struggle. I don’t know if you struggle with having the necessary provisions of one kind or another, that would make your life a little easier.

I don’t know what call and passion you have burning in your heart or companionship and encouragement you need by your side. But I do know, “What a friend we have in Jesus!”

“Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged, take it to the Lord in prayer.”

And every time we pray, we are indeed, a “little further from home and closer to God.”

Bishop from p. 2

Curiosity, imagination, exploration, adventure are not preliminary to Christian identity, a kind of booster rocket to be jettisoned when spiritual orbit is achieved. They are part of the payload.

I am reminded of the words of Jesus, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

This remains a difficult and challenging time to be the church, and it is an especially trying time to be The United Methodist Church. Certainly, you've heard me say that over and over again. Even so, life goes on.

"This remains a difficult and challenging time to be the church, and it is an especially trying time to be The United Methodist Church. Certainly, you've heard me say that over and over again. Even so, life goes on."

People whose lives have touched ours in ways that helped us learn and grow die, and we go on, remembering and celebrating their lives. Birthdays and anniversaries come and go. We celebrate, and we mourn. We laugh, and we cry. We walk to get someplace, and sometimes just to walk. We listen to music and maybe dance. We pick up a book sometimes to learn and sometimes just to get caught

up in a good story. Sometimes both at once. In all things, we seek to follow Jesus Christ, to grow in love and godliness, to be people whose lives so bear witness to the love of God in this world that those to whom love is a stranger might find in us, generous friends.

Life goes on. Ministry goes on. Even amid our difficulties and arguments, worship happens regularly. Churches are holding Vacation Bible Schools. You are evaluating this past program year and thinking about the next one. Children are being baptized, couples are being married, loved ones are being celebrated and mourned. Hungry people are being fed. Addicted people come together to offer support for sobriety.

In one version of the liturgical/church calendar, this time after Pentecost is called "ordinary time." Ordinary time, a time to remember that life goes on, that ministry goes on. Even when there are difficulties and crises, there is also always ordinary time.

Don't get so caught up in crisis that you miss moments, moments when your horizons might be broadened, your imagination expanded, your curiosity cultivated, your thinking deepened, your faith strengthened, your heart enlarged.

Don't get so caught up in denominational debates about the structure of the church and new Methodisms that ministry is neglected.

Ordinary time. Life goes on. Gifts of God's grace.

Thanks be to God.



Rev. Dirk Elliott (r) congratulates Matt Bistayi, Lead Pastor of Valley UMC in Allendale. Bistayi is the 2019 recipient of the Harry Denman Award. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

Valley from 7

Kids Ministry is already repurposing space. Go Groups is another ministry that generates energy. Go Groups are 8-12 people meeting regularly to build community and to go deeper with what was preached on Sunday. "Go Groups do life together," Matt says. "And we like to say, 'Go somewhere and make a difference.'" Three Go Groups each received \$500 grants during 2019 to enable their creative service projects. With that support one of the college Go Groups sponsored a Family Fun Day for those not able to go away on spring break. Another Go Group is planning a Back to School Boutique, open to the community to do "school shopping on the cheap."

Now a decade old, the pastor says, "We are still learning who we are, what that means, and how we can become more of what God wants us to be." They continue to "lean into growth."

Valley looks head to the next ten years. SENT is a two-year big-vision-initiative for

mission ministry, and multiplication. "It's also about a home for our church in the future as a launching pad for Disciples to be SENT from." The SENT outlook is expressed this way on Valley's website: "We don't want to be a bunch of saved people, we want to be a bunch of SENT people. Who send other people. Across the street. Across the city. Across the world."

Upon presenting the award Dirk Elliott said, "Matt describes his ministry by saying, 'Reaching more people for Jesus is the vision. Because, we know that God is crazy in love with people and the more people who know that; the more lives become filled with the hope, grace, and love of Jesus.'"

A "Super Real Evangelist" is not doing what he or she does for personal glory. The 2019 recipient of the Harry Denman Evangelism Award in the Michigan Conference concludes, "God and Valley are in the zone." And that is what brings Pastor Matt Bistayi joy.

Michigan Conference re-affirms camping ministry

KAY DEMOSS
Senior Content Editor

It is not often that an account in Volume 1 of the Journal provokes significant discussion on the floor of Annual Conference. But that's what happened on Thursday afternoon, May 30. During the motion to accept the historic reports, the Rev. George Covintree rose to speak about camping in the Michigan Area. Speaking as a former camper, counselor, and dean, Covintree said, "I've seen what camping has done as an important ministry," Covintree said. "We as a conference need some sense of oversight." The Rev. Eric Stone then introduced a motion calling for resignation of the present board and the hiring of an outside consultant to design a new organizational structure and strategic plan for camping.

The Rev. Benton Heisler, Director of Connectional Ministry, addressed the concerns expressed. He pointed out that the Conference's Committee on Nominations, Council on Finance and Administration, and Leadership Team are taking measures to eliminate partisanship and to bring skilled executive leadership to the camping table. "That will do things this motion points to," Heisler added. "We are making decisions now that every other conference in the jurisdiction made ten years ago." Members did not approve suspension of the rules to act on Stone's motion.

On February 22, 2019 the Michigan Area United Methodist Camping Board announced that operations would be suspended at four of the nine conference sites: Albright Park, Crystal Springs, Myers Lake and Camp

Kinawind. The board reported, "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." In April Bishop David Bard wrote a letter of encouragement to the community of Michigan campers. He noted, "When United Methodist camping in Michigan was spun off into a separate corporation from the Annual Conference, the hope was that the organization would be able to more independently assess the needs and resources of United Methodist camping in the state and arrive at a strategic plan on the basis of which challenging decisions could be made to secure the long-term future." The bishop continued saying, "For a number of reasons, that kind of plan was not able to be developed before difficult financial realities forced tough decisions."

On Friday afternoon of the Annual Conference, May 31, Camp Board Chair Paula Timm acknowledged that for the past three years the board sought to unite "two programs run very differently and to stop a financial hemorrhage." Timm said that "downsizing was talked about from the beginning but was postponed for lack of data."

By February 2019 "painful decisions had to be made for the long-term survival of camping ministry in Michigan." She remarked of "shuttering of properties and potential sale." "There were too many camps for the number of users," Timm reported. (Two years ago it

was reported by the Executive Director of Camping that Michigan camp sites were then experiencing only 22% occupancy.) "As disappointed as some of you may be," Timm said, "we pray your passion for camping will find a way to forgiveness, understanding, and support."

In legislative work done on Thursday evening, those working on Resolution 2019-8 voted 103 to 3 to approve the *Reaffirmation of Michigan Conference Support for Camping Ministry*. The motion stated: *That Michigan Conference churches, ministries, laity, and clergy be challenged and encouraged*

to support Michigan Conference United Methodist Camps through prayer, volunteer service, promotion, and financial gifts.

The Board of Michigan United Methodist Camping has expressed gratitude for that action. In addition, they are grateful for the conference members' support at the Snack Table that offers various refreshments during the Annual Conference session. "Your donations of \$6,000 for snacks will help more young people to experience the power of camp!" "We believe our best days and years are ahead of us," the Board concludes.



Michigan United Methodist sites in operation this year are: Judson Collins Center (Onsted); Lake Huron Retreat Center (Burtchville); Lake Michigan Camp and Retreat Center (Pentwater); Lakeview Family Campground (Lakeview), and Wesley Woods Camp and Retreat Center (Dowling). ~ photo Lake Michigan Camp

AC elections in United States shift GC 2020 delegates

HEATHER HAHN
UM News

Months after a bruising 2019 special United Methodist General Conference, U.S. annual conference voters elected a significantly different slate of delegates to make big decisions in 2020.

Bottom line: More U.S. delegates now publicly oppose the Traditional Plan than did so during February's gathering, when the plan prevailed by a vote of 438-384. However, advocates from various perspectives agree the shift is unlikely to be big enough to overturn the plan that strengthens bans in the Book of Discipline on same-sex weddings and "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy.

This prediction assumes African, Filipino, Eastern European and Russian delegations to next year's legislative assembly offer the same overwhelming support for the plan as they did this year. Most of the denomination's annual conferences — church regional bodies — have already elected their delegates.

The 2020 General Conference in Minneapolis will have 862 delegates overall, equally split between clergy and laity. Of those delegates, 55.9% will be from the U.S., 32% from Africa, 6% from the Philippines, 4.6% from Europe and the remainder from concordat churches that have close ties to The United Methodist Church. Compared to the 2019 session, the U.S. will have fewer delegates overall while African delegations gain 18 and the Philippines two.

The U.S. votes indicate the Traditional Plan faces strong resistance to enforcement — including in conferences where restrictions related to LGBTQ ministry have faced little pushback before.

"The power of governing comes from the consent of the governed, and clearly there is not consent to the Traditional Plan passed by the General Conference," said Lonnie Chafin, a re-elected General Conference delegate and treasurer for the Northern Illinois Conference. He has been tallying the number of fellow

U.S. delegates who, like him, oppose the Traditional Plan.

The Rev. Thomas Lambrecht, one of the primary authors of the Traditional Plan, also has been keeping his own U.S. delegate count. "Obviously, there will be a tighter margin of those voting for a Traditional Plan approach to the denominational conflict," said Lambrecht, vice president of the advocacy group Good News. "That may make it more difficult to strengthen the accountability provisions in the Discipline or move forward with other reforms we hope to make."

By Chafin's count, 118 support the Traditional Plan; ten have an unknown stance and 354 oppose the plan. That's a 21-vote gain in the U.S. for the plan's opposition and means about 73% of U.S. delegates oppose the Traditional Plan, he said.

Lambrecht counts a higher number of elected U.S. Traditional Plan supporters with 130 definite and more possible. He estimates a 19% drop among U.S. traditionalist delegates, all on the clergy side.

Chafin, however, counts fewer traditionalist lay delegates heading to GC2020. By his estimation, there are 38 U.S. delegations where at least 80% of both lay and clergy members oppose the Traditional Plan. A number of delegations also have more openly LGBTQ members.

At annual conferences, clergy elect clergy delegates and lay voters elect lay delegates. Both Lambrecht and Chafin agree that in conferences that saw big

shifts in their delegations, the lay were likely to go in a more traditionalist direction while the clergy were likely to go against the plan.

Until they vote, delegates remain free to change their views.

But General Conference is not the only place where delegates have an impact. U.S. conferences also made a shift in the delegations that will elect at least 12 new U.S. bishops during next year's five jurisdictional conferences.

By Chafin's estimate, at least 70% of the delegates in each of the five jurisdictions oppose the Traditional Plan. Usually, jurisdictions require around a 60% vote to elect a bishop. "I think it means there will be jurisdictions that will only elect bishops who refuse to implement the Traditional Plan," Chafin said.

Lambrecht agreed that "it appears that most of the jurisdictions will have the ability to elect bishops who oppose the traditional definition of marriage and favor the ordination of practicing LGBT persons."

"Given that reality," he added, "it may mean that many annual conferences will not hold clergy accountable to abide by denominational standards and that it may be unrealistic to expect the Council of Bishops to hold its members accountable to the Discipline."

Delegate elections weren't the only signs of resistance to the Traditional Plan. At least nine U.S. conferences commissioned or ordained openly LGBTQ+ individuals including Michigan, Baltimore-Washington, North Texas,



The 2019 Michigan Annual Conference used electronic voting for the first time. Diana and Duane Miller learn to use their devices prior to the first ballot for General Conference delegates on May 30. ~ mic photo/Jonathan Trites

News in Brief

AFRICA UNIVERSITY CELEBRATES 25 YEARS



On June 8th 526 students from 22 African countries graduated from Africa University in Zimbabwe. The school opened in 1992, making this the 25th graduating class. Most of the 2019 students are first-generation college graduates, and 54.6 percent are women. The university has a current full-time enrollment of 1,800 students, a 97 percent graduation rate and more than 9,000 alumni as of June 2019. More

than 90 percent of Africa University's graduates have remained on the continent of Africa.

NEW UM HYMNAL NOW ON HOLD



The United Methodist Publishing House and Discipleship Ministries are working on a new *United Methodist Worship Resources Collection (UMWRC)* that will combine all currently approved UMC official hymnody and liturgies and will be supplemented with a curated assortment of additional products. The new collection will be available in multiple digital (including downloadable) and print formats. The

UMWRC will be available as early as Fall 2020. Meanwhile, work on a new version of the General Conference approved *UM Hymnal* will be deferred.

SANCTUARY FAMILY STILL AT DETROIT CHURCH



Michigan has the second highest rate of arrests of immigrants by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); Michigan's rate of arrest is about twice as high as the national average. (*Detroit Free Press*, June 20, 2019.) Flora and Ded Rranxburgaj and their sons turned to Central United Methodist Church in downtown Detroit when threatened with

deportation. Central UMC has now been their home for a year and a half. Originally from Albania, the family fled the oppression and hardship of communism. Flora suffers from multiple sclerosis and Ded has been her primary caregiver while their sons, one who is a DACA recipient and the other a U.S. citizen, go to school. Those wishing for more information about ways to support Detroit Central UMC in their sanctuary ministry with the Rranxburgaj family, should contact the Rev. Jill Zundel at 313/965-5422. Photo shows Rev. Zundel and others with Flora Rranxburgaj (red hat) at a rally in March 2018 protesting separation of migrant family members.



Bishop Scott Jones prays during a session of the 2019 General Conference. ~ umns photo/Mike DuBose

VOTE from p. 14

Northern Illinois, New York, Oregon- Idaho, Mountain Sky, Desert Southwest, and California-Nevada.

By Chafin's count, half of this year's annual conferences also passed resolutions that rejected the Traditional Plan, apologized to LGBTQ community or suggested an alternative approach. In at least five conferences, similarly worded petitions either did not pass or had the denunciation of the Traditional Plan amended out.

Randall Miller, California-Nevada jurisdictional delegate who helped Chafin's calculations, said he did not expect the outcry against the Traditionalist Plan. "After the called session of the General Conference, there was a lot of churn in the church and a lot of anger," he said. "But after each General Conference, that tends to die down. This only seemed to build." In the U.S. elections, he said, he sees "a new wind of hope."

The Rev. Forbes Matonga, delegate from West Zimbabwe and leader in the advocacy group Wesleyan Covenant Association, also

sees reasons to celebrate. Given the denomination's demographics, he expects support for the Traditional Plan to only grow in the future. "Africa is growing in membership as the USA is declining," he said. "This means Africa will determine the future of the UMC."

Matonga noted that most conferences in Africa are returning the same delegates to 2020 as served in 2019. And while he has heard of some in the United States threatening to withhold funds to African ministries, he has faith God will provide. He is the pastor-in-charge of Nyadire Mission.

Closed-door conversations are happening among leaders across the denomination about developing General Conference proposals to divide the church or completely restructure it into different theological expressions.

(Among these efforts is a recently released proposal by Bishops David Bard (Michigan) and Scott Jones (Texas). See more about, "A New Form of Unity," on pages 4-5 of this publication.)

She walks because they walk ... meet Karol Kesterke

KATHLEEN PULLANO
The Journal Era

Karol Kesterke of Berrien Springs participated in her final Blossomland CROP Walk on May 19th, ending a 25-year tradition of raising funds for the hungry not only locally but worldwide through the nationwide Communities Responding to Overcome Poverty program. She has raised a total of \$126,339 in the fight against hunger—"one step at a time."

"I was surprised when I added it up," Karol said. "What has been most rewarding is knowing that others are being helped with hunger issues. We don't realize how blessed we are in this country—a lot of people do without and CROP Walk helps a little bit."

"My first year of walking was in 1995, and I raised \$245," she said. In 2007, Karol

raised \$5,000 and received the traveling Blossomland CROP Walk Plaque for the person who raised the most money for that year. She continued to receive the plaque every year to the present time except in 2009. "In 2009 the walk was on Pastor Esther Knott's 50th birthday and in lieu of birthday gifts she sought sponsors to help feed the hungry," Karol said. "She raised \$7,365 and I raised \$5,400."

Karol's first year as top money raiser for the state of Michigan was in 2011 when she raised \$9,020, and she continued as first in the state each year from then on with increased totals, always hoping to reach a goal of raising \$10,000. She reached that goal in 2016, 2017, and 2018, raising \$10,000 each of those years and giving her the honor of being the top CROP Walker in the State of

Michigan for the eighth year in a row.

"I raised \$11,000 this year as I wanted to go out with a bang," said Karol, who wore her special hat during the walk featuring a pin from each CROP Walk she has participated in over the past 25 years. She is grateful to all who have sponsored her in the CROP Walk.

The total amount raised at the Blossomland CROP Walk each year averages between \$35,000 to \$45,000 with 275 to 350 walkers. Twenty-five percent of the money raised at the Blossomland CROP Walk stays in this area, and helps to support the Bread of Heaven Food Pantry at the United Methodist Church in Berrien Springs, of which Karol is the director; the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen, the Benton Harbor Street Ministry, and the Catholic Community Center, the Fairplain Presbyterian Food Pantry, and the Salvation Army.

"Last year, our food pantry received \$1,560 from the CROP Walk," Karol said. "We assisted 1,860 families in 2018 and gave out 30,871 pounds of food. Our year-end expenditures totaled \$9,860 so the funds we receive from the CROP Walk are a vital part in keeping this important ministry available to those in need right here in our area."

Karol has walked through good times and bad, even when she was receiving her third round of chemotherapy for ovarian cancer in 1997. Her brother, Jim Kesterke, helped her complete the walk by pushing her in a wheelchair. She has survived both breast and ovarian cancer. "Jim has always been there, and our late mother, Ruth

Kesterke, also walked with me many times," she said. "The Lord must have a purpose for me as I could not have done the walks for the past 25 years without everyone's support and prayers," Karol said.

She has always made it a point to write a letter to her contributors directly and to mail them personal, handwritten thank you notes for their support. "They know it is going to a good cause and are dedicated to the mission," Karol said.

She is retiring from the walk because her legs are not as strong as they used to be. "It is time for someone else to step up and take over," Karol said.

The funds raised through the CROP Walk, a program that is over 50 years old, not only go to alleviate hunger, but to provide clean water sources like wells and filtering systems, seeds, agricultural tools, livestock and more to give families in 80 countries the chance to survive.

"I want to thank my many sponsors for their support over the years," Karol emphasized. "My sincere and heartfelt thanks to each and every sponsor for each and every donation made throughout these 25 years. Together we have made a difference in the fight against hunger."

Fall CROP Walks are scheduled around Michigan. Go to CropHungerWalk.org to find a walk near you.

~This feature is reprinted with permission of The Journal Era, a weekly newspaper published in Berrien Springs serving Central Berrien County. With thanks to the Rev. Chris Momany, pastor Dowagiac UMC.

