

December 2019

MImagazine

Michigan Area of the United Methodist Church



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December 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
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We are 850 churches making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Connected in the Spirit with our neighbors, we are making a difference across the state of Michigan.

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Bishop David Bard

The Joyful Journey

I am thinking of the verse from Isaiah often read on Christmas Eve: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined."

I am hearing echoes of other phrases and songs – the title of Bruce Springsteen's album released just before I saw him in concert in St. Paul when I was in college, "Darkness on the Edge of Town;" the line from a Robert Frost poem, "the woods are lovely, dark and deep;" the last line of a poem by William Stafford, "the darkness around us is deep."

Darkness, deep darkness, the darkness around us is deep. The body of a migrant fleeing violence in his country floating dead next to his daughter's also lifeless body in the Rio Grande River. Deep partisan divides that seem to get in the way of accomplishing things for the common good. The tenacity of racism. A church trying to navigate its way toward a less contentious future, yet escalating contentiousness along the way. Human frailties leading to human wounds.



There are moments when the darkness feels deep, where it seeps into the marrow of my bones, into the recesses of my soul, moments of profound sadness and grief.

Yet I hear the echo of another song, "Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings" (Charles Wesley, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing"). God's redemptive work continues on – healing, wholeness, compassion, kindness, justice, feeding, caring loving, light. We don't ignore all the pain, sadness, grief, deep darkness, but we trust that God remains at

work, shining light that helps us see more clearly and deeply and helps us love more profoundly as we move into an uncertain future.

The Christmas story is not just about angels singing and stars shining, it is also about the difficulty of birth, about living in occupied territory in an imperial system, about being on the margins. It is, then, a story about hope caked with mud, or perhaps whatever else manger animals leave behind. Hope caked with mud understands that there may be times when the epitome of courage is showing up, taking the next step when the way forward is shrouded in darkness, making the next phone call, sending the next email, starting the next sermon. I hear the echo of a Bob Dylan song, "They say the darkest hour, is right before the dawn."

I cannot promise an easy new year for the Michigan Conference. We face some financial challenges. We face the challenges of our denomination. We face the challenges of every denomination in the United States – declining participation. I cannot promise that there will not be days when the darkness feels deep. What I can say is that I will work with you to live more in the light (an echo of another song – "We Are Called"). I will work with you so that we might all better work with God toward healing, wholeness, compassion, kindness, justice, feeding, caring and loving. God's redemptive work in the Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church is not over yet.

After the first of the year, I will be gathering groups of people to help us think together about the future and to manage current uncertainties. We don't know what might come

New spaces for new faces in midtown Detroit

JOHN E. HARNISH
Michigan Conference Communications

In 1880, the Rev. C.C. McCabe heard that the famous atheist Robert Ingersoll had predicted that within a generation all the churches would be dead. McCabe fired off a telegram to Ingersoll saying, “Dear Bob, in the Methodist Church we are building a new church a day and we hope to make it two. All hail the power of Jesus’ name.” That spawned a song which became a favorite at Methodist camp meetings and revivals:

The infidels, a motley band, in council met and said / “The churches are dying throughout the land and soon they will be dead.” / When suddenly a telegram came and caught them with dismay, / “All hail the power of Jesus’ name, we’re building two a day.”

Today with the decline of the Christian church in America, Ingersoll’s prediction could possibly come true. At one time there were about 50 Methodist and EUB churches (now United Methodist) in the city of Detroit. Today there are 13. But in the face of those statistics, Michigan United Methodists are building new churches and creating “new spaces for new faces.” One of those is a new venture underway on Cass Avenue in

Midtown Detroit. Once known for its crime and poverty, the area has seen exponential growth in new condos and businesses as decrepit buildings that have been shuttered for years find new uses and the area hums with new life.

Several years ago, the Rev. Faith Fowler, Senior Pastor of Cass Community United Methodist Church, and District Superintendent Charles Boayue could see the change coming and began to envision a new worship ministry to reach the new residents through Cass Church. Bishop David Bard appointed the Rev. Jon Reynolds to lead this new outreach.

Over the past two years, Jon has been spending most of his time “on the street” meeting people in coffee shops or on the sidewalk, trying to connect with the rapidly growing population of young adults and professionals. He has had about 1,100 conversations with people in the neighborhood.

The vision is to create a new expression of Cass Church focused on “justice, the arts, inclusion, and transformation.” Reynolds says, “Given that we are close to the College for Creative Studies it makes sense to focus on the arts as part of our vision.” For example, in their first

preview worship service, they had two poets offer readings about David and Goliath and the need to risk.

The next challenge was to find a venue. Jon visited 17 places—art galleries, theatres, abandoned warehouses, even a bowling alley—but either people were not interested in renting to them or the cost was exorbitant. Clearly, the best venue was the Cass Activity Center, across the street from Cass Church. Making use of a tea company that was given to Cass some years ago, the plan is to combine a tearoom with the new worship service. With the popularity of the coffee and tea shops in the area, it seems like a perfect fit and will model the kind of hospitality they are seeking to offer.

Rev. Reynolds is quick to give credit to the team at Cass Church. The Rev. Fowler, Deacon Sue Pethoud, the Rev. Latha Ravi, and recently commissioned Deacon Alex Plum have been instrumental in the project. Beyond that, Jon says, “Every church which pays its apportionments can take credit because significant financial support has come through the Annual Conference partnering with the existing congregation. It’s a wonderful example of what United Methodists are able to do when we work together through the Connection.”

At their first preview worship service on October 23, they had standing room only, with over 70 people present. The second preview was November 23, and a third trial service is scheduled for December 18. They hope to launch in January 2020. When asked how it feels, Jon said, “Whenever you step out on faith, there are days when it feels like it’s the greatest thing in the world and other days when you say, “I have no idea what’s going on here.” In the end, you trust the Spirit and move on faith.”

This is only one of several new ventures in church planting and church renewal underway in the Michigan Conference right now. It represents our passion for “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” by creating new spaces for new faces. Though we might not be building two a day, all hail the power of Jesus’ name, we are building *to-day*. And Rev. C.C. McCabe would be pleased.



In the old spirit of “we’re building two a day,” the Rev. Jon Reynolds (standing) is taking the lead in a new Midtown Detroit church start today.

~ Facebook photo

God told Pickford United Methodists, ‘Just do it!’

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Content Editor

Google “asset-based approach” and learn it is “ministry development based on strengths found in the community.”

If you ask Pastor Tim Bashore about asset-based ministry, his enthusiastic answer is, “Pickford is blessed to have many retired teachers. When God gave me this idea and said, ‘Do it!’ I was able to use what we have here.” Then he adds, “EVERY congregation has a gift.” Pastor Tim hopes that every congregation is listening when God says to them, “Just do it!”

Tim and his wife were living in Lapeer when he was appointed to Pickford in 2014. Tim says, “Coming here was harder for my wife because of the grandchildren in the Thumb and in Indiana. But she said, ‘Hey, we have been called to go to Pickford, of course, we’ll go!’” Five years later, they have settled in nicely above the bridge, in this village just 45 miles north of the Straits of Mackinac.

Upon arrival, Tim was welcomed by a congregation of 75-80-year-olds. What many of them said to him was, “We need kids!” Tim remembers, “I would pray every week that we would have two kids

come up for children’s moment.” That’s when God gave Tim eyes to see. “I looked more closely at the community. The church is two blocks from a school. I looked more closely at the congregation. We have a lot of school teachers in this church. We can use them!” That’s how Homework Club was born.

He shared the vision with the congregation. “They wondered, ‘How many will we have?’ I said, ‘I didn’t know. Maybe 10?’ Their response was, ‘Do you really think we’ll get 10!’”

The next step was to approach the school. “I said, ‘Hey! We have a lot of retired teacher and we would like to start a tutoring program for kids,’” Bashore recalls. The school’s response? “Of course!!” The program launched. Tim reports, “We got 30 the first week. Wow!”

Since then Tim has gone back to the school every Tuesday at 3:00 pm. The school has a list of students from each grade who are signed up, by their parents, for Homework Club. “They have 25-32 students lined up for me. I look like the Pied Piper walking them back to the church!” Tim says. If the

weather is bad, he picks them up in a van.

Once at the church, the young people get a snack and do homework until 4:30. After that, they go to the sanctuary for the Christian part of the program, followed by supper back downstairs. Parents pick their children up at the church after dinner.

“In the beginning, about six would stay after the tutoring was over,” Tim says. “Now, if we have 30 for Homework Club, 29 stay.” It takes about 14 volunteers to make such an after-school ministry happen each week.

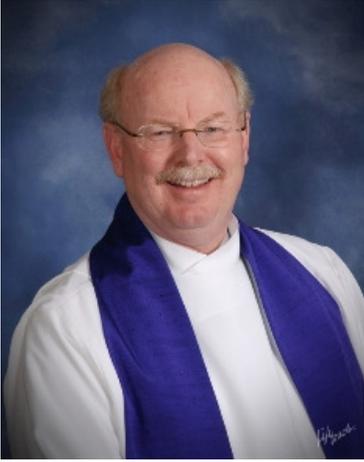
Tim notes that “We have great tutors. One man, who was a principal and superintendent, helps the older kids. His wife is an author and school teacher and she leads the reading program.” Tim is thankful for this broad base of support among the members. As he describes it, “I began as head guy, principal, and teacher. Now a wonderful volunteer named Melanie Bolton has taken the reins and I am more like the superintendent.” That’s a blessing in the United Methodist system. “Before Homework Club would have just left with me,” Tim

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A church full of retired teachers has opened its arms to the students in their community. The hearts and minds of all have been filled. ~ photo courtesy Tim Bashore

Drinking the Cup ... miracle at the manger



REV. JOHN W. BOLEY
Clergy Assistant to the Bishop

Preparations

Christmas Lights
and decorations.

Trips to the attic, again and again.
Should the nativity set go here or there?

Shopping for food and things.

Scheduling the visitor.

Laundry.

Tests to take and worry about.

Place reservations to secure.

Who will sleep where?

It's my favorite time of the year.

With all the preparation, or none at all,
magic happens.

by Andy Vorbrich

I would like to take the liberty of revising Andy's poem by adding "miracle" to "magic." "With all the preparation or none at all, magic and miracle happen."

And I would like to expound by adding another "M" to the equation – to say that one of the great miracles of Christmas is the Manger of Jesus.

You see, the Manger of Bethlehem was and is a miraculous thing; it is the smallest of things, and the largest of things.

It is so small that it barely holds a baby infant, and yet it is so large that it can hold the Messiah of the world.

It is so small that it cannot hold arrogant pride, but it is large enough to hold self-respect;

It is so small that it cannot hold self-righteousness, but it is large enough to hold righteousness;

It is so small that it cannot hold human power and prestige, but it is large enough to hold sacrificial service;

It is so small that it cannot hold the baggage of past sins, but it is large enough to hold forgiveness and life-long learning from our mistakes;

You see, this Manger of Bethlehem is a miraculous thing ...

It is so small that it cannot hold prejudice and bigotry, but it is large enough to hold loving tolerance;

It is so small that it cannot hold jingoistic national pride, but it is large enough to hold love of country in Thanksgiving;

It is so small that it cannot hold greed, but it is large enough to hold generosity;

It is so small that it cannot hold bitterness, but it is large enough to hold thankfulness and understanding;

It is so small that it cannot hold despair, but it is large enough to hold hope;

You see, this Manger of Bethlehem is a miraculous thing ...

It is so small that it cannot hold cynicism, but it is large enough to hold trust;

It is so small that it cannot hold hedonism, but it is large enough to hold joy;

It is so small that it cannot hold vengeance, but it is large enough to hold forgiveness;

It is so small that it cannot hold violence, but it is large enough to hold peace and understanding;

It is so small that it cannot hold hatred, but it is large enough to hold love;

It is so small that it cannot hold death, but it is large enough to hold salvation.

Thanks be to God for the Magic and the Miracle of the Manger of Bethlehem.

God's light shines in Haiti in a place called Mizak

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Content Editor

Recently Jim Patterson reported for UM News on current conditions in Haiti. "United Methodists with longtime ties to the embattled nation say it is tough to intervene with any effectiveness," Patterson began.

He quoted Brulan Jean-Michel, manager of the Methodist Guest House near Port-au-Prince: "The mood of the Haitian people right now is sadness and disappointment. Adults and kids are depressed. The businesses are closed. Schools are closed. Roads are blocked."

Several days after that report was released, the Executive Team of the Haiti Covenant Partners met to consider what, if anything, could The Michigan Conference contribute to such a desperate situation. Present in the room was Mario Damis, a young man from a rural area of Haiti called Mizak.

He told the Covenant Partners, "Our schools and clinic are open. We have

food. The people of Mizak are hopeful."

With Mario was Valerie Mossman-Celestin, co-founder of HAPI, an organization that calls Mizak home.

Haitian Assets for Peace International has been empowering leaders and changing lives in that mountain-top community since 2007.

The Covenant Partners prayed for all suffering through the present crisis in the country. In addition to prayer, the Covenant Partners decided to call The Michigan Conference to action through support of "points of light" that exist in the midst of the nation's darkness. HAPI was identified as such a "point of light."

How is it that HAPI has kept the light on in Mizak? Valerie says, "For one thing, the majority of HAPI employees are from the communal section of Mizak. That encourages others, like the students, to be able to project themselves into a similar job."

Valerie gives an example. "High school students stop by to speak with Monique,

our Operations Manager, to ask her how she got a job like that. They ask her, 'What do I need to do to prepare myself?'" Valerie adds, "Monique is someone they know and can approach. 'If she did it, I can!'"

Mario is himself such a "someone." Mario, who grew up in Mizak, has been the Director of HAPI Tech since 2016. At the time of the Covenant Partners meeting, Mario was in the U.S. to tell the HAPI story. "I am here," he says, "to strengthen the relationships we have and to build new relationships for HAPI."

His dream growing up on a farm supporting a family of eight children, was to go to university and become a pastor.

Mario's family was able to afford his education through high school in Mizak but was unable to "pay the lot of money" it took to enroll in university in Port au Prince, a three-hour drive down the mountain from Mizak. When he was in 12th grade in 2011, Mario had the good fortune to serve as a translator for an Indiana team volunteering at HAPI. An individual from the team supported him as he studied Computer Science for four years in Port au Prince.

In the meantime, HAPI acquired 20 computers. So, upon completion of his degree, Mario returned to Mizak in 2016 as IT Manager (Information Technology) for HAPI. "I believed this was a good idea," he says. "When I grew up in the community, I couldn't use a computer," Mario relates, "so, when I went to university, I had a problem. I wanted to help people be updated and prepared to get their education."

He invited adults and teens to learn the technology and ESL (English as a Second Language). Mario observes, "Most were more interested in learning English." He says one of his biggest challenges is the economic hardship his students suffer. "Sometimes they want to stay but they have to leave," he explains. "People don't come to HAPI and just get everything free."

Next, due to a staff change, Mario continued as IT director but also took on

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Mario Damis speaks at HAPITech's 2019 Graduation ceremony. Sixteen students completed the Computer Basics Class. ~ Facebook/HAPI

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new responsibilities as Coordinator of HAPItech, vocational training for youth and young adults. Courses include Computer Basics and ESL, both two-year programs; Electrical Training one-year; Floor Tiling six-months; Electronic Trouble Shooting six-months. Those were the trade skills people were asking for. Mario teaches the computer classes but hires and supervises instructors in the other areas.

Mario had an opportunity to in 2017 to spend two months as an intern at CQL, a digital agency based in Grand Rapids. He took his new knowledge of software development back to Mizak and began to teach students things like how to build a website. Valerie adds that the management skills he learned as an intern also has been of direct benefit to HAPI staff.

Mario Damis is most excited about a unique partnership between HAPItech and Central Michigan University, now in its second year. He describes it: "There is a group in Mizak studying ESL and another group in Mt. Pleasant is taking a business class. They would like to learn from another culture and my student want to practice English." So, for an hour a week by internet, "I connect them. My students learn English and the others learn from the Haitian Culture."

A personal encounter took place during Mario's recent time in Michigan. He met with CMU students enrolled in Professor Mike Pisani's "Managing Cultural Differences and Diversity in a Global Economy" class. "Tuesday was a wonderful conversation on everything from gender roles, international politics, God, and dating!" Valerie reports.

Does he still want to be a pastor? "I want to serve my community better but maybe not as a pastor," he reflects. He celebrates the difference HAPI makes in his community. "If HAPI didn't exist, we would have more kids die," Mario says, "and HAPI creates jobs that help people send kids to school to learn a profession." He adds, "What I do gives people hope."

Upon his return to Haiti this month, he will be handling "a good problem." Valerie says, "Until this fall, we've never had greater than 35 students in HAP-



Valerie Mossman-Celestin, co-founder of HAPI, accompanied Mario on a series of visits around the state of Michigan in November of 2019. ~ mic photo/Mark Doyal

Itech. We have jumped to 105 and are turning students away. That was an unexpected 'wave.'" Now Mario will assist in gearing up for an enrollment of 50.

HAPI takes an integrated approach to development through "Jobs-Health-Education." Which comes first? "Mario would say education. Our nurses would say health," Valerie answers. Currently HAPI focuses on the expressed needs of the community. "We aren't there yet," Valerie states, "but I hope that, later, we can offer more on business with a lot of emphasis on ethics, accounting, project management, and marketing."

She identifies three additional aspects of HAPI's "light-keeping" in Haiti.

The first is the **fabric of that community** before HAPI existed. "There was a strong sense of 'community,' of people being peaceful and wanting to work to better their lives. Tranquility. Dignity," Valerie observes. That fit with HAPI's basic approach that, "We all have assets and something to contribute."

Another bright factor is HAPI's staying power. "Haitians are not quick to **trust**," Valerie says. "Our programs adapted across the years, but we have been there. People have openly shared that they look for **consistency** because so many

nonprofits are there and gone." There is also a high return rate of visiting volunteers. "Those who come back have maintained relationships," Valerie adds.

Finally, over those years HAPI has "touched many persons in the community, directly or indirectly." Some have received health care, others have been employed as artisans, builders, and translators, and there are those who had their houses fixed following earthquake and hurricane. Valerie emphasizes, "Many have received **some kind of benefit** at some point through HAPI."

No one can deny that Haiti is in turmoil, politically, economically, and socially. Valerie Mossman-Celestin asks people to "see Haiti through a new lens. There's a dark side right now but that's not the whole picture." She concludes, "There is still good that can be done despite the huge, overwhelming needs."

As they struggled to determine what good The Michigan Conference can do, the Covenant Partners asked Mario Damis, "As a Haitian, what do you think when you listen to us ponder?" Mario answered, "I think about education. You need to do something that is both transforming and sustainable."

"It only takes a spark."



NORTHERN SKIES ... *Volunteers from Engadine United Methodist Church help pack Thanksgiving Food Boxes to be delivered by God's Country Cooperative Parish.*



GREATER DETROIT ... *Metropolitan UMC's Bell Choir performs at the Winter Fest in the city's Palmer Park.*



MINISTRY PARTNERS ... *Big Rapids Wesley students head into finals week in a holly jolly and yummy way.*

Snapshots
of Vitality



CENTRAL BAY ... *"Bag Ladies" of Frankenmuth UMC made 150 pairs of PJs to be delivered to three clothes closet ministries.*



MINISTRY PARTNERS ... *Muskegon County Sherriff's Dept. Beards for Bucks raised \$1,000 for Mission For Area People in Muskegon Heights*



HERITAGE DISTRICT ... Pastor Matt Hook joins the 20-something guys for an awesome night at the bowling lanes.



GREATER SOUTHWEST DISTRICT ... Saint Nick visits Vicksburg United Methodist Church and shares some of the history behind the Santa Claus tradition.

MID-MICHIGAN ... Williamston UMC celebrates 300 years of singing, "Joy to the World" during the town's Holiday Light Parade.



EAST WINDS DISTRICT ... Following yonder star at the Christmas Pageant hosted by North Street United Methodist Church.



MIDWEST... Mary and Joseph chill during a performance of "An Unplugged Christmas" at Wolf Lake UMC.

Michigan pastors get a move on toward good health

DIANE BROWN
MI Communications

Getting a move on in Michigan's beautiful outdoors is a cherished spiritual practice for three United Methodist elders. These two active clergy and one retiree daily feed their souls and bodies while engaged in movement activities and enjoying trees, water, and sunshine. The Rev. Taek Kim, pastor at Carleton United Methodist Church; the Rev. Mary McInnes, senior pastor at South Lyon UMC; and the Rev. Dr. Brent McCumons, retired, have found different ways to partner with family members as they move for their health.

"This is one way I can love God," Kim said about his physical activities. "I want my kids to see that as well. I take care of my body for God. God gave me this body; it is a temple and houses my soul." McInnes has discovered that as she's become more active, she's found more opportunities to build relationships with her children, family members, church members, and friends.

"I was able to put healthy things in place for my girls before I could for me," McInnes said. "Now, as I've gotten healthier, it has strengthened my relationship with them and my ability to do things with others."

When McCumons and his wife, Marlene, both retired from active employment, they launched into an intentional retirement plan. "We vowed to spend more time with each other, with family and improving our health," Brent said. Marlene added, "And we really like the outdoors."

Activities with children

Kim finds that merely moving around makes a big difference

in his health. "I used to think that walking was a waste of time," said Kim, a former competitive tennis player. "Then, I started dating my now-wife, and she wanted to go for a walk. Now, I get paid to walk. I love it!"

Active and retired clergy enrolled in the group health plan of the Michigan Conference can participate in the Virgin Pulse program. Participants receive an activity tracker to monitor progress toward health goals and rewards. Points can be earned for accumulating steps or active minutes. Each move results in rewards such as cash, health insurance premium reductions, or deposits in a health savings account.

"Exercise helps maintain good cardiovascular health, strength, flexibility and overall physical health," Kim said. "Spiritually, I believe that by taking care of my body, which

not only is my earthly vessel but also the host of my soul and God's Holy Spirit, through exercise, healthy eating and living allows me to be at my best in my walk with God and service with others. I am not hindered by issues and ailments that can be kept at bay with being physically active and healthy."

In recent years as Kim's three children have grown and undertaken new sports, Kim has found opportunities for trying new activities, such as coaching their soccer team and completing triathlons after an injury sidelined his tennis playing. "My goal is to stay engaged with my family," he said. "There are all kinds of ways to do that. I keep trying new things.

"I am closer with my children and wife since we walk, bike, swim, and play together. I have more energy than

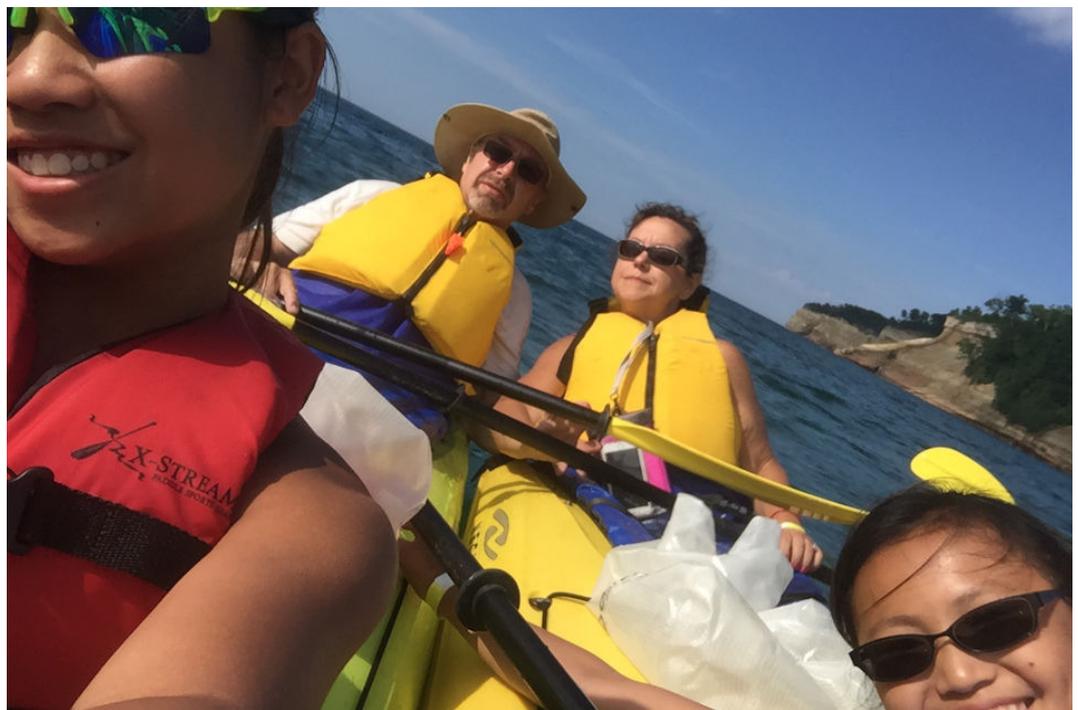
before and do not say I'm too tired or can't play very long with them as I used to at certain points in my life when I wasn't as physically active." In addition to building good relationships with his wife and family, Kim believes exercising helps reduce his stress levels.

"When I am swimming, I think about the stress and let it go – I give it to God," Kim remarked. "Then, when I go back to church, I can be fully present and compartmentalize it better. Sometimes going for a long walk, I can process better. I have more energy in the pulpit and dealing with challenging situations."

Fitness after weight loss

Several years ago, McInnes found herself spending precious time with logistics planning for visits with parishioners because her

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Mary McInnis, Senior Pastor of South Lyon UMC, enjoys time on the water kayaking with her family. ~ photo courtesy Mary McInnis

HEALTH from 10

weight had created mobility issues. “My highest weight was 463 pounds,” she said. “All movement was a lot (of work and planning). Even as a pastor to make hospital visits, I had to make a plan. Luckily, I could still move, but I was limited in what I could do. Serving communion while standing and holding the bread in one hand and the cup in another, my back would begin to hurt. I wasn’t able to focus on each person.” McInnes chose to launch a journey of health and wholeness in body, mind, and spirit. She has lost 300 pounds in recent years.

“I lost 100 pounds with basic changes and movement,” McInnes said. “Then I stalled and couldn’t lose. So I added a tool of bariatric surgery, and I lost another 100. Then I had to lose another 100 on my own. I said yes, post-surgery to do missionary work in Haiti. Before, I was limited because I had to purchase a second airplane seat.”

McInnes’s husband, Damon, has joined Mary on the weight-loss, improved-health journey. “Part of what Damon and I do is try to have date nights,” Mary said, “and we try to make those events active events — sometimes taking a walk downtown or inside a mall at a quick pace. Or grabbing the bikes and having a picnic while we’re there. Our favorite thing is kayaking — so maybe kayaking and coffee in the morning or eating dinner in the kayaks. Instead of making date night eating out at a restaurant, we are incorporating movement.”

In addition to being able to do more activities with her children, including kayaking at the Upper Peninsula’s Pictured Rocks and being a

band mom running props onto the field, McInnes believes she now has even more new ventures ahead. “I’ve had a good relationship with God,” she said, “but I realize I probably limited what God could do with me if I had been in a physical healthier spot. I love the fact that I have created health for my body that doesn’t limit my possibilities anymore. At work, if I feel led by the Holy Spirit, I can kneel at the rail and not worry about how to get up.”

Adjusting to aging

The McCumons love being outdoors, particularly enjoying woods and water. They find physical movement essential as they age.

“We have to stay active,” Brent said, “to maintain muscle tone, flexibility, and particularly for balance. Also, we no longer have yard work, so we needed to replace those chore activities.”

Previously active bicycle-riders, Brent said that he was having back pain after a ride from what was diagnosed as arthritis in his lower back. So, they opted to research and purchase two recumbent trikes.

“They are like riding a bike on a Lazy Boy,” Brent said. “There’s support for the back and your rear while getting exercise and enjoying being outside.”

The McCumons found a growing network of new biking trails locally and across Michigan that has been built on old railroad beds or along rivers and lakes. They also ride their trikes or walk each day to meals in their retirement community.

“The nice thing about living



The Rev. Brent and Marlene McCumons enjoy time with their grandchildren triking the trails near their home in Chelsea. ~ photo courtesy Brent McCumons

here,” Marlene said, “is that there is little vehicle traffic, the roads are smooth, and we see lots of people we know to stop and chat.” When the winter weather hits, the McCumons plan to make regular visits to the community wellness center to use the pool, walking track, and exercise equipment.

“When our grandkids were here this summer, we weren’t able to ride the trikes because the kids were riding them all day,” Brent said. “Loved it!”

Never too late to start

All three pastors embody the spirit that it is never too late to begin exercising for one’s physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Transformation is possible no matter what — it is never too late,”

McInnes said. “Never give up on yourself and putting things in place for a healthy life.” Making time for exercising activities is a priority for all three clergy and their spouses. Though McInnes no longer has to spend time planning around her old mobility constraints, she is intentional about scheduling exercise. “We have to schedule those activities,” she said. “We have to make them a priority. I, as a pastor, have to schedule and make the activities and me a priority. I’m responsible.”

Kim encourages others who may not have an exercise routine to begin by walking. Do something to get moving. “I think walking is what God wants us to do,” Kim said. “Think of it — Jesus walked. We can walk with Jesus, too.”

Home Words Bound ... the wonders of his love



REV. BENTON HEISLER
Director of Connectional Ministry

Joy to the World, the Lord is come! Let every heart prepare Him room ...

This year is the 300th anniversary of Isaac Watts' writing of this classic Christmas hymn based on Psalm 98. Notice the verb tense? "... is come!" A **present tense**, not a future expectation or a past memory, but **God with us NOW**. I celebrate this reality of God's presence with us in so many ways this Christmas season and as we look back across the year.

And wonders of His love ... indeed they are many! I invite each of us to look back over 2019 and note the remarkable ways God has been revealed to us. The struggles and negative stories that are far too pervasive can be changed to more

positive narratives of seeing the many places that God has truly been at work and continues to touch our lives and others with wondrous love.

No more let sin or sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground ... The hymn speaks to the harsh realities of life and at the same time proclaims the Kingdom of God as a presence to experience even if not yet in all its fullness. The year has had its ample moments of this tension between "the now and the not yet" of all of God's complete blessing. Where each of you has lived in this tension, know that you have been held in prayer. There has been weeping as you have wept and celebrating with you as you have been filled with joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace ... The promises of God's word in Scripture are full of images of such truth and evidence of abundant grace. The world so needs to hear and receive this message of healing and hope. I pray that each of you knows these "wonders of His love" in your life and can feel the expanse of God's reach as "... He comes to make, His blessings flow, far as the curse is found..."

So, with every new discovery, beach wandered, woods explored, quiet "I love you" spoken, picture painted, cookie baked, board drilled, bike ridden, book read, trip taken, blissful nap time paused, there has been true "joy in the world," and I trust a deep love is in your heart. I pray that many and more blessings like these have been true for you.

May heaven and nature sing, let heaven and nature sing ...

Peace on Earth, and Goodwill to all People.

~ "If you make my Word your home, you will indeed be my disciples. You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."
(John 8:13 New Jerusalem Bible) Each article I write for this column is based in the guidance of a Scripture passage. I pray that these reflections, stories, and information will assist you in your own witness and service as a Disciple of Jesus Christ.

KIDS from 4

says. “Now the program will go on when I receive a new appointment.”

From the beginning, the goal was to help the children learn, Bashore explains. “Whatever else comes is extra. Gravy and great.”

And some great things are happening for the community, for the church, and for the families.

“This is a shining light in Pickford,” Bashore notes. The witness has been powerful. “Seeing us walk the kids we love from the school to the church has itself made a difference in the town,” he continues. “The people in the Coop Store watch us go by and they understand what we are contributing. That’s been good for the community.” The pastor adds, “People have come to church because they have seen us walk the kids to Homework Club and think it’s a great thing we’re doing”

What about those older folks in the pews who greeted Pastor Tim in 2014 saying, “We need kids!” They are the people who make Homework Club happen. “They help with the young people now and it’s exploded!” Bashore goes on, “Today Pickford is a very busy church with something going on every day and every night. All because we love the kids.”

Pastor Tim’s passion for the program is contagious. “Homework Club has been very energizing. We now have 20 people attend Ad Board when there was almost no one before.” Something that’s never been done before by a church can become something quite amazing. “We are under anointing by God,” Tim says, “It’s a wonderful thing because we are doing what God has led us to do.”

In 2014 there were 75 in worship on Sunday and now there are 180. Pastor Tim’s prayers have been answered. “We sometimes have 25-30 children up front for children’s moment. Families are coming to church on Sundays because their kids come on Tuesdays.” These newcomers were unchurched. “I would not want them to leave another pew to come to ours.”

Bashore notes that not every family



involved in Homework Club has become active in the congregation. “But all the students call me, ‘Pastor Tim.’ And those who come on Tuesday get church that night.”

God is indeed in the asset business. As the pastor of Pickford United Methodist Church reminds us, “EVERY congregation can have something special going

on.” Pastor Tim Bashore believes a program like Homework Club can work for other churches. “If you are a small-town church, you are not that far from a school,” he asserts. “All I can tell you is, give it a try. Even if only four kids meet you in front of the school, you will be helping four kids with their education. And you will be telling them what Jesus is doing in their lives.”

Jeffrey Maxwell named interim Central Bay D.S.

LANSING MI | December 4, 2019 — Bishop David Bard announced the appointment of the Rev. Jeffrey R. Maxwell as Interim Central Bay District Superintendent, effective January 1, 2020.

“It is with deep gratitude that we welcome Jeff’s return to work alongside the faithful people of the Central Bay District,” said Bishop Bard. He added, “Jeff brings a warm, calm, and deep spiritual presence, and he has an excellent knowledge of the region that will be very helpful.” In the coming weeks, Bishop Bard expects to announce the appointment of a permanent superintendent for the Central Bay District, to begin on July 1, 2020.

Maxwell, a retired Elder, served as Superintendent of the Saginaw Bay District in the Detroit Annual Conference from 2010 to 2015. Prior to sitting on the Appointive Cabinet, he served at Farmington First United Methodist Church, Holly United Methodist Church, Kilmanagh United Methodist Church, Unionville United Methodist Church, and Garfield United Methodist Church.

He and his wife Jan currently live in Midland, MI.





Is Asti White serving in the Middle East? No, he is a young adult missionary in ministry in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Asti took time away from his US-2 assignment at Kalamazoo Wesley to participate in the live nativity hosted by Parchment United Methodist Church. ~ Facebook/Parchment UMC

Loving our missionaries on Christmas and every day

United Methodist missionaries are deployed around the world by the General Board of Global Ministries. The 350 missionaries are church planters, medical professionals, theology professors, agricultural experts and so much more. They come from everywhere and go to everywhere—more than 65 countries around the world.

Thomas Kemper heads the Board, and he has this to say about these persons who are transforming the world in the name of Jesus Christ. “So, the traditional idea very often still when you come to churches here in the United States is that missionaries are people who are sent, Americans sent from the U.S., very often white, going to—I sometimes simply say to hot countries somewhere. This is the traditional ideas. But this is not the reality

because we are a global church. We are worldwide network. So we are really dipping into the gifts and graces of people from all around the world, to be sent and commissioned as missionaries.” Of the 350 missionaries more than half are no longer from the U.S.

Kemper adds, “Mission is really about sharing your lives, coming alongside people. And I am very impressed by this word and the solidarity, the pastoral elements, but also the advocacy missionaries do for people who suffer in almost slave-like relationships sometimes.” He cites an example from missionary history. “It was D. T. Niles who famously said, ‘Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. And that really changes the perspective on how we are in mission

and how we want to send missionaries.”

Christmas is a good time to pause and say, “Thank you,” to missionaries who are making a difference in the lives of men, women, children and teens everywhere. You can begin by turning to the Mission Personnel section of EngageMI, found on www.michiganumc.org. Search on “Ministry Partners.” There you will see the faces of the 24 Missionaries relating to The Michigan Conference. Click on the “Learn” buttons to read each individual’s bio, which contains his or her email address. Send your Christmas greetings. (Note: Grace Okerson and Lynda Sylvain have completed their term of service. Two new US-2s now serve in Michigan: Kathryn Sappington (Kalamazoo 1st UMC) and Yeo Jin Yun (MFSA).

News in Brief

YOUNG MISSIONARY DIES IN ZIMBABWE



Tawanda Chandiwana, 29, a former United Methodist Global Mission Fellow has died. Reports from church contacts in Zimbabwe indicate that the young man, seven days shy of his 30th birthday, had been hospitalized for several weeks, likely suffering from leukemia. His health situation and treatment were complicated by a prolonged strike of many doctors in Zimbabwe. Chandiwana returned to his home in Zimbabwe in July 2018 after having been jailed for two months, arrested May 9 while attending a training seminar at the Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute.

US MEMBERSHIP DIPS BELOW MAJORITY



The U.S.'s majority status in The United Methodist Church is coming to an end — and may be there already. That's according to projections from the denomination's General Council on Finance and Administration — based on the continuing decline in U.S. membership as much as growth in Africa. According to the agency's forecast, total membership in the central

conferences — church regions in Africa, the Philippines, and Europe — will exceed that of the U.S. jurisdictions in 2020. Kevin Dunn, the agency's director of data services, told the GCFA board at its November meeting, "We may fall below 6 million (U.S.) members by 2025." He said the U.S. decline has largely resulted from members' deaths. However, starting in 2014, Dunn said, the overall drop has exceeded the number of funerals. Even with shrinking U.S. rolls, The United Methodist Church is still the country's third largest denomination — behind the Catholic Church and Southern Baptist Convention.

TONY SHIPLEY RECEIVES ASBURY AWARD



The Michigan Conference Division of Higher Education and Campus Ministry nominated Dr. Anthony Shipley for the Francis Asbury Award celebrating his commitment to United Methodist higher education and his 30 years of service as a Trustee at Adrian College. Dr. Jeffery Docking, President of Adrian College said, "Rev. Shipley has been one of the most respected and thoughtful trustees I've had

the pleasure to serve under during my 15 years at Adrian College. His love for the church was matched equally with his love for higher education, and he combined both into a powerful message for our students." Tony retired from full-time ministry in 2007 after more than 40 years of distinguished service in the United Methodist Church. The Rev. Charles Boayue presented the award on November 13, 2018 at Hope UMC in Southfield.



DETROIT HOSTS GLOBAL WATER SUMMIT

Cass Community UMC will host a Global Water Summit January 24-25, 2020. Presenters from three continents will explore issues surrounding accessibility to clean water. Learn more and register at www.michiganumc.org/water-summit/. Early bird rates through Dec. 31st. ~ Facebook photo

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with GC 2020, but we need to make some preparations for likely scenarios. As ideas are developed, they will be widely shared for feedback and improvement.

It seems clear that as we consider a future, there will not be an overarching vision around which all Michigan United Methodist will unite, at least unite in the way we are currently organized. We will need to think together about what compassion look like as new space is created within the denomination, even here in Michigan.

Moving into the future will require our most creative thinking, our most adventurous spirits, our deepest listening, our most capacious hearts – hearts enlarged by courage and kindness. We are anxious, but giving in to our anxiety tends to restrict our thinking, mitigate our sense of adventure, interfere in our communication, and shrink

our hearts. The new year will not be dull, and I've often been reminded in recent days that I ran for this job. Stay tuned and hang on.

Moving into the future will require our most creative thinking ... and hearts enlarged by courage and kindness.

As the year comes to a close, and a new one begins I remain grateful to you, Michigan United Methodists, for being people who, knowing the light of God's grace seek, in turn, to shine that light into the world. Thank you for being part of God's work of shining light and love into our world where the darkness around us is often deep. It is my privilege to share this work with you, and it remains a joy, a joy also caked with mud.

Michigan pastor helped fulfill century-old dream in Africa

JOHN E. HARNISH
MI Communications

In 1898 Bishop Joseph Hartzell stood on the peak of Mt. Chrimba and looked out over the broad valley surrounding the Old Mutare Mission in what was then Southern Rhodesia. He had a vision of children and young adults coming from across Africa to a place of learning in the valley. Almost a century later, that vision came to fruition in 1992 when the first class of 40 students from six African nations gathered for their first semester at Africa University.

Today the university boasts about 1,800 students from 36 countries and over 4,000 graduates serving across the continent. It is one of the great success stories of United Methodist connectionalism and

would never have come to pass without the commitment and financial support of United Methodists around the world and a Michigan pastor, the Rev. Dr. Roger Ireson years.

In 1988, Roger was the pastor at St. Timothy's United Methodist Church in Detroit when he was elected General Secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM). That was the same year the General Conference approved the "Africa Initiative" which included \$2.5 million per year for the quadrennium for the initial funding for a new university. Roger remembers that even in the interview for the job the significance of this project for the new General Secretary was stressed. It would be the first General Conference approved United Methodist

university on the African continent, built upon a long history of Methodism's commitment to education in seminaries and schools like Old Mutare Mission around the world.

One of Roger's first tasks was to gather the team to create the new university. One of the people on that team was Dr. John Kurewa, a classmate of Roger's at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in the 1960's. Kurewa would ultimately become the first vice chancellor of the school. Roger called upon Methodist educators from around the world whom he had known as a PhD student at Manchester and Cambridge and through his many contacts from living abroad. Other Michigan United Methodists included Harold Stanton, layperson from Birmingham, Michigan, the Rev. Ted Halsted, pastor of Redford UMC and the Rev. John E. Harnish, staff member at GBHEM.

Roger says, "My first glimpse of a global vision was at Methodist-related DePauw University and then at Garrett where I met people from around the world. All of that, along with the experience of working in a predominately African American city and multi-racial congregation, prepared me for this position." Working with bishops from Africa and Dr. Ken Yamada, staff member at GBHEM, they created a plan for a truly African university which would draw on the British, Belgian and French educational models being used in Africa at the time.

The grand opening of Africa University took place in April, 1994, with several thousand celebrants from around the world including Robert Mugabe, president of Zimbabwe. Looking back on those times, Roger said, "It's really incredible to think about all the behind-the-scenes negotiations and roadblocks we had to deal with. In one year, I made seven trips to Zimbabwe! That's a lot of miles in the air!"

"Though Zimbabwe had state universities," Roger remembers, "there were no laws or policies to guide private colleges. We had to work from scratch and now other

denominations are moving forward with similar projects." For the record, the university in Zimbabwe was not the only new global educational initiative undertaken while Roger was at GBHEM. The first Methodist-related university in Argentina opened and after the fall of the Soviet Union new seminaries were created in Estonia and Russia. The International Association of Methodist-related Schools, Colleges and Universities, which Roger helped form, now includes institutions from more than 80 countries. "It was an exciting time", Ireson said, "to be part of a global church living out John Wesley and Frances Asbury's commitment to education."

At the 20th Anniversary of Africa University, Ireson was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters degree. With pride Roger said, "Even though I have received eight honorary degrees from Methodist-related institutions around the world, this one means the most to me."

In 1996 the classroom building for the Faculty of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Humanities was named the "Ireson/Kurewa Center" in honor of these two key figures who were central to the founding of the University. It created a pattern where every building includes the name of an African leader paired with an individual from outside the continent.

In September, 2019, Roger was given the Albert Nelson Marquis "Lifetime Achievement Award" in recognition of his global leadership in higher education and he continues as the Founding President Emeritus of the International Association of Methodist-related Schools, Colleges and Universities.

Reflecting on his work with Africa University, Roger says, "After all these years, Bishop Hartzell's vision has come to pass, and we were privileged to be part of it. You can see God's spirit has been at work. Thanks be to God!"

