

January 2020

# MImagazine

Michigan Area United Methodist Church



**Two new DSS**

**page 3**

**Back to 2019**

**page 4**

**Camp closing**

**page 10**

**Bishop pick**

**page 13**



## January 2020

*MICNnect 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 MICNnect Weekly. Find the "rest of the story" at MichiganUMC.org.*

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

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

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**Bishop David Bard**

## The Joyful Journey

**P**erhaps some of you are familiar with the beautiful words of Howard Thurman's, "The Work of Christmas."

*When the song of the angels is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost, To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry, To release the prisoner,  
To rebuild the nations, To bring peace among people,  
To make music in the heart.*

I have been pondering those words in recent days as we begin a new year, a new decade. I have been thinking about them as tensions with Iran have escalated following the killing of an Iranian general, which followed the deaths of Americans in Iraq. Our president has said that he does not wish to start a war, and I think we will need to hold him and other elected officials to that as part of the work of rebuilding nations, the work of the Prince of Peace whose birth we have just celebrated.

I have been thinking about these words as we head into another presidential election year. The divisions in our country are significant, often accompanied by anger and the use of words as weapons. How might we, followers of Jesus Christ, be leaven, calming tempers and promoting genuine conversation? How might we remind ourselves and others of the common good, of the importance of the general welfare which has to do with healing the broken, feeding the hungry, setting free?

I have been thinking about Thurman's words particularly in light of the release of the "Protocols of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation," a proposal for the future of The United Methodist Church. I have said that I think this is a hopeful development even as I am saddened by the idea of separation. I need to be clear, that this is only a proposal and there is a long road ahead in the coming months for this proposal to become legislation which might then become an official United Methodist Church agreement approved by the delegates of General Conference. I am committed to meeting with our Michigan delegation to discuss this proposal and look forward to hearing their ideas and feedback. I am looking forward to wider conversations within our conference about this proposal.

If this proposal, or something like it, becomes an approved plan for the future of The United Methodist Church, it seems likely that the Michigan Conference would remain affiliated with the post-separation United Methodist Church, though a vote could be taken to determine otherwise. If the Michigan Conference remained part of the post-separation United Methodist Church, I know that there will be churches that will affiliate with another Methodist denomination formed pursuant to the protocol. I am committed to working with every congregation and pastor with grace and with all the wisdom God's Spirit might impart. Change is likely coming, and we will navigate that change best if we seek to be loving, grace-filled, compassionate, wise, courageous, and if we continue to do the work of the church, the work of Christmas.

On the other side of whatever changes are coming, and in the coming months of this new year and new decade, the work God has given the church in Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit is this work of finding the lost, healing the broken, feeding the hungry, setting free, rebuilding the nations, bringing peace, helping each unique person find the song God has put in their heart and helping them sing and dance to it. It remains needed work. The world is still plagued by war. The world and the church are

Go to ..... **BISHOP p. 15**

## Bishop Bard names two new district superintendents

January 07, 2020 | LANSING MI — Today, Bishop David Alan Bard announced the appointment of the Rev. John Kasper to serve as Central Bay District Superintendent, and the Rev. LuAnn Rourke, to serve as Heritage District Superintendent. Both those named will begin their new positions on July 1, 2020.

"Rev. John Kasper has been serving as a chaplain for the Central Bay District, and in that position, he has come to know many of the churches and pastors," said Bishop Bard. "He brings a wealth of pastoral experience to the position of district superintendent, but even more importantly, a deep faith in Jesus Christ, a pastor's heart, and a strategic outlook."

Rev. Kasper currently serves as pastor of Clare United Methodist Church. Previously, he served congregations at Dowagiac First UMC, Galien UMC/Olive Branch UMC, and Hershey UMC. He will take over for interim District Superintendent the Rev. Dr. Jeff Maxwell, who



***The Rev. John Kasper and the Rev. LuAnn Rourke are the newest members of the Michigan Area Cabinet. They begin their duties on the Central Bay and Heritage districts on July 1, 2020.***

began serving on January 1, 2020. "I am so deeply grateful for Rev. Maxwell's willingness to step away from his retirement to support the people of the Central Bay District in ministry," said Bishop Bard. "We are all blessed by his leadership."

Rev. LuAnn Rourke is currently the pastor of First United Methodist Church of Port Huron. Previously, she served congregations in Clio, Seymour Lake, and Swartz Creek.

In announcing her appointment to the Heritage District, Bishop Bard highlighted her significant work in the Michigan Conference in the areas of church growth and revitalization. "Rev. Rourke has a passion to see local churches be their best in ministry for Jesus Christ," Bishop Bard said, "She is a strategic thinker with genuine care and concern for persons and their lives."

Rev. Rourke will succeed current Heritage District Superintendent the Rev. Elizabeth Hill, who will retire in June. "Please join me in expressing gratitude for Rev. Hill's significant contributions of calm, caring leadership to the Michigan Conference in her service with both the Blue Water and Heritage districts," said Bishop Bard. "I encourage you to pray for both of these leaders during this transition," he added.

### Did you know?

**Early in January the Michigan Area Cabinet was in retreat and they are now making moves. The Cabinet announces appointments at [news.michiganumc.org](http://news.michiganumc.org). Just go to the News/Events drop-down menu and click on New Appointments. You will find a chronological listing of appointment changes.**

# Michigan United Methodists weather turmoil in 2019

## KAY DEMOSS

Senior Content Editor

The year 2019 promised to be an historic one for United Methodists in Michigan. In June, the very first ever session of The Michigan Annual Conference was scheduled to meet in Acme, Michigan. Long separated organizationally, east and west, the followers of John Wesley were to be fully united at last in the same house.

Then the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference took place in February. The passage of a Traditional Plan sent shock waves through The UMC, as many decried the denial of full inclusion for LGBTQIA brothers and sisters.

When Bishop David Bard preached the sermon that would open the 2019 Annual Conference he said, "Part of the reality we are facing, friends, is that we may not be together long. I may be the first and last bishop of The Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church."

As the months counted down to the 2020 General Conference in Minneapolis, Bishop Bard and other Michigan leaders would be involved in various efforts to find a way forward for the denomination. At the same time, congregations across the state continued to make disciples and transform the world around them.

Here's a month-by-month look back at 2019 as reported in the weekly MIconnect e-newsletter ...

## JANUARY

Bishop David Bard named the Rev. Jodie Flessner Superintendent of the Northern Waters District effective July 1, 2019.

With the help of a major UMCOR grant, Nancy Money was hired as the Michigan Conference Coordinator of Disaster Recovery Ministry.

Bishop Judith Craig died on January 18th. The third woman consecrated to the episcopacy, she served The Michigan Area from 1984-1992.

The East Winds District sent a Volunteer in Mission Team to Puerto Rico to assist with recovery efforts after Hurricane Maria.

## FEBRUARY

Eight Michigan delegates previously elected for the 2016 General Conference, were among those voting at the Special Session of the 2019 General Conference in St Louis. They were led by Nichea VerVeer Guy and Charles Boayue.

The Michigan Area Board of United Methodist Camping suspended operations at four campgrounds for 2019: Albright, Kinawind, Myers Lake, and Crystal Springs.

The Conference Board of Global Ministries announced that Haiti Hot Lunch was no longer an Advance Special of the General Board of Global Ministries due to issues surrounding accountability.

## MARCH

United Methodist Retirement Communities (UMRC) and Porter Hills announced their affiliation with shared governance and leadership.

Bishop David Bard gathered all Michigan clergy to Midland First UMC for a time of conversation around the 2019 General Conference.

Four tornadoes touched down in mid-Michigan. United Methodist volunteers assisted in the clean-up.

## APRIL

Bishop Bard expressed his support for Michigan Area United Methodist Camping as the camping season prepared to get underway with five sites: Judson Collins, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan Lakeview, and Wesley Woods.

The bishop held four listening sessions around the Conference to discuss next steps after General Conference 2019.

Michigan Conference Communications launched a new weekly e-publication called mifaith focused on spiritual life and active discipleship.

## MAY

Volunteers and dollars from the Michigan Conference responded to flooding in Dearborn Heights; some of the same homeowners affected as in 2014.

Bay View residents and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development settled lawsuits begun in 2017.

**Go to ..... 2019 p. 6**



***The 2019 General Conference met at The Dome in St. Louis, MO, February 23-26. The Michigan Conference had eight delegates seated in the assembly. ~ mic photo/Mark Doyal***

# Drinking the Cup ... on tyranny and discipleship

**My** Christmas reading included a short book called, "Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century," by Yale History Professor Timothy Snyder. Snyder does a study of the democracies, which turned into dictatorships in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, focusing on Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and Russia. From this study, he pulls forth 20 lessons that are appropriate for today and every-day.

This is a decidedly secular book on citizenship, but we know that there are always ties between citizenship, politics, and discipleship. Perhaps the ties are strongest when, like in our times right now, we are facing so many political movements that tend toward authoritarianism and tyranny.

Here are Snyder's 20 lessons and warnings, somewhat edited:

**Do Not Obey in Advance** – Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given ahead of time.

**Defend Institutions** – Institutions are what help us to preserve decency. They fall one after another unless each is defended from the beginning.

**Beware the One Party State** – The parties which remade states and suppressed rivals were not omnipotent from the start – they exploited a historical moment to make political life impossible for their opponents.

**Take Responsibility for the Face of the World** – The symbols of today enable the reality of tomorrow. Do not get used to the symbols of hate.

**Remember Professional Ethics** – Authoritarians need obedient civil servants. Insisting on professional ethics inhibits control possibilities.

**Be Wary of Paramilitaries** – When men with guns who have always claimed to be against the system start wearing uniforms and marching with torches and pictures of a leader, the end is nigh.

**Be Reflective if You Must Be Armed** – If you carry a weapon in public service, may God bless you and keep you. But know that the evils of the past involved policemen and soldiers finding themselves, one day, doing irregular things.

**Stand Out** – Someone has to. It is easy to follow along.

**Be Kind to Our Language** – Avoid pronouncing phrases everyone else does. Try to separate from the Internet. Read books.

**Believe in Truth** – To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power because there is no basis to do so.

**Investigate** – Figure things out for yourself. Take responsibility for what you communicate for and to others.

**Make Eye Contact and Small Talk** – This is not just polite. It is part of being a citizen and a responsible member of society.

**Practice Corporeal Politics** – Power wants your body softening in your chair, and your emotions dissipating on the screen. Involvement in local politics is essential.

**Establish a Private Life** – Nastier rulers will use what they know about you to push you around. Tyrants seek hooks on which to hang you. Try not to have hooks.

**Contribute to Good Causes** – Be active in organizations and pick a charity or two and set up autopay. Then you will have made a free choice to support civil society and help others to do good.

**Learn from Peers in Other Countries** – Keep up your friendships abroad, or make new friends in other countries.

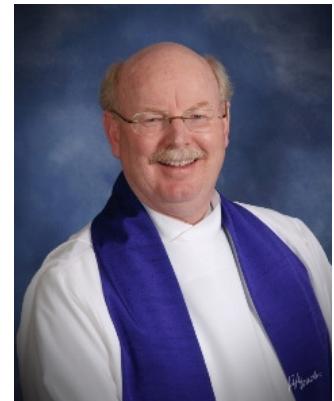
**Listen for Dangerous Words** – Be alert to the use of the words "extremism" and "terrorism." Be alive to the fatal notions of emergency and exception. Be angry about the treacherous use of patriotic vocabulary.

**Be Calm when the Unthinkable Arrives** – Modern tyranny is terror management. When the terrorist attack comes, remember that authoritarians exploit such events to consolidate power. The sudden disaster which requires the end of checks and balances, the dissolution of opposition parties, the suspension of freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial, and so on, is the oldest trick in the Hitlerian book. Do not fall for it.

**Be a Patriot** – Set a good example of what America means for generations to come.

**Be as Courageous as You Can** – If none of us is prepared to die for freedom, then all of us will die under tyranny.

Friends, we are closer to these underlying challenges now than we'd like to think. Thanks be to God for Christian discipleship which upholds human rights and institutional goodness. Christian discipleship is still the best path of life given to us by a gracious God.



**REV. JOHN W. BOLEY**

Clergy Assistant to the Bishop

# 2019 .....

..... from page 4

## MAY cont.

Twelve Michigan United Methodists attended a UMCNext meeting in Kansas City, a conversation of those opposed to the Traditional Plan adopted in February.

The 1st Session of The Michigan Annual Conference met in Acme, MI May 30-June 2, 2019 with the theme Bold and Effective Leaders.

- Three laywomen—Laura Witkowski, Kristen Grauer, and Becca Farnum—and one clergy woman—the Rev. Dr. Jennie Browne—provided insight into the courage and heart needed to be a bold and effective leader.

- A 16 member delegation plus 4 alternates were elected for duty at the 2020 General Conference in May and North Central Jurisdictional Conference in July. Laura Witkowski and Kennetha Bigham-Tsai share leadership of the delegation.

- In a series of votes on matters related to the 2019 and 2020 General Conferences, the Annual Conference members expressed aspirations for greater inclusion of LGBTQIA individuals. And a non-binding straw poll showed 69% of members preferred a Conference whose policies allow for but do not require clergy to officiate at same-gender weddings, and



**Annual Conference members elected a 20-member delegation to the 2020 General and North Central Jurisdictional conferences.**

allow for consideration of ordained clergy regardless of sexual orientation. (See news.michiganumc.org, “AC 2019 signals greater inclusion.”)

- Approved a 2020 budget \$14,700,910 (\$124,723 less than 2019).
- Recognized excellence: Denman

Evangelism Award to the Rev. Matt Bistayi; EPI Communications Award to Mark Doyal; One Matters Award to Hartford UMC; and John Buxton Award to the Rev. Don Emmert.

▪ Nine churches closed; 33 pastors retired; two deacons and six elders were ordained.

▪ The Conference was recognized by the General Board of Global Ministries for Disaster Response and Missionary Salary Support. Offerings were taken for mission: \$18,430 for Grace Children’s Hospital in Haiti; \$18,649 for Bishop Judith Craig Children’s Village in Liberia; and \$6,071 for Michigan Disaster Relief and Recovery.

On June 11 the Michigan Conference Trustees outlined a disaffiliation process, as ordered by The Judicial Council.

## JULY

160 Michigan young people and their leaders attended Youth 2019 in Kansas City.

Karol Kesterke, laywoman from Berrien Springs UMC, was celebrated as the top Michigan CROP Walker, 2011-present.



**The wheels on the bus went round and round carrying 160 Michigan young people and their leaders to Kansas City July 10-13.**

Go to ..... 2019 p. 7

# 2019 .....

from page 6

Bishops David Bard (Michigan) and Scott Jones (Texas) announced the Bard-Jones Plan for seeking unity in The UMC.

Cheryl Tipton hired as an UMCOR Case Manager for spring flooding in Dearborn.

Area Board of Camping announced that Crystal Springs and Myers Lake camp grounds were for sale.

The Rev. Kim Bos begins ministry as the Director of Big Rapids Wesley House at Ferris State University.

## AUGUST

ABC features Cass Community Tiny Home Town in Detroit. At that time 13 homes occupied and six almost ready to welcome new residents.

Two new Global Mission Fellows (US2s) come to Michigan. Kathryn Sappington serving at Kalamazoo 1st UMC and Yeo Jin Yun in Detroit at Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA).

The Rev. Peggy Paige, retired Michigan pastor living in the U.P., was certified as a Rural Chaplain of The United Methodist Church.

Michigan Conference celebrates 20 years of the Mission Intern Program.

## SEPTEMBER

The Michigan Area Board of United Methodist Camping begins a search for a new Executive Director.

### SEPTEMBER cont.

A feature film, "Flint, the Poisoning of an American City," debuts in Flint and then tours the country.

A judge dismissed a suit against the U.S. government by Ded Rranxburgaj. He and his wife, Flora, continue their 18-month residence in sanctuary at Detroit Central UMC. Michigan United Methodists continue their "Let Ded Stay" effort.

## OCTOBER

The EngageMI Fundraising Challenge blesses Michigan Ministry Partners with over \$43,000 of giving in three weeks.

The Michigan Conference United Methodist Women met for the first time

on an area-wide basis when they gathered at Howell United Methodist Church on October 16.

On October 23 the a new worship ministry in Midtown Detroit held their first preview service under the leadership of the Rev. Jon Reynolds.

Dave Wiltse receives the Earle Copes Award for his many years of service as editor of *Worship Arts*, the magazine of the Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts. Wiltse served on the West Michigan Conference staff from 1977-2009.

## NOVEMBER

The Rev. Dr. Anthony Shipley was presented the Francis Asbury Award on November 13 at Southfield: Hope UMC. The award recognizes significant contributions to United Methodist ministries of higher education.

Bishop Bard calls Michigan United Methodists to direct their Advent giving to Disaster Relief and Recovery. Three UMCOR Case Managers finish their work: Cheryl Tipton in Dearborn and Marci Vivian and Dennis Leopold in the Keweenaw Peninsula.



***The Rev. Dr. Anthony Shipley was honored with the Francis Asbury Award for his support of higher education as a trustee of Adrian College.***

## DECEMBER

Bishop David Bard names the Rev. Jeffrey Maxwell as interim Superintendent of the Central Bay District.



***Cass Community's Tiny Home Town was celebrated by ABC News and United Methodist Videos. Rev. Faith Fowler said, "I figure by the time I retire that at least 35 people will own their homes. That feels pretty good." ~ umcom video image***



**EAST WINDS ...** United Methodist Women of Linden UMC are working hard making School Bags for Midwest Mission Distribution Center.



**HERITAGE ...** The elves of Adrian First UMC put on their warm coats and helped staff a Red Kettle for The Salvation Army.

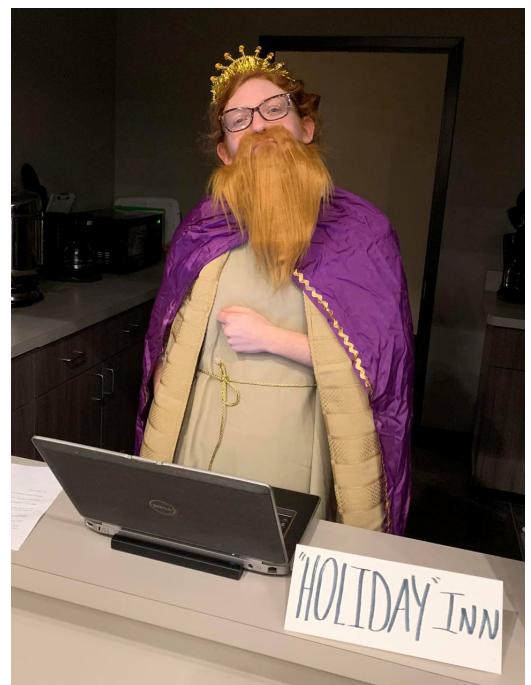


**CENTRAL BAY...**  
“Crown Him with many crowns!” Kids of Mt. Pleasant First UMC think about the Newborn King during Parents Night Out in December.

## Snapshots of Vitality



**MID-MICHIGAN ...** Kingdom Kids of Holt United Methodist Church are Kings and Queens for a Day as they celebrate Epiphany.



**GREATER DETROIT ...** Is there room at the inn? “Let me check my computer.” See more of the Christmas story by the Impact Kids of DownRiver UMC.



**NORTHERN WATERS ...** January 18 was Serve Saturday for Traverse City Central UMC. Eleven volunteers helped out at Cherryland Humane Society.



**GREATER SOUTHWEST ...** "What can you do to have a God-centered perspective?" Center Park's Praise Band lights things up for Jesus during Epiphany worship.



**MID-MICHIGAN...** Pastor Hillary Thurston-Cox reports that January 19 was a "Great Sunday celebrating our veterans, who inspire me with their sacrifices."



**MICHIGAN MINISTRIES ...** The King lives! At Clark Retirement Community! Elvis sighting Clark during the January Birthday Celebration. "He treated residents to a few hits. We're 'all shook up!'



## Camping Board closes Judson Collins Center for 2020

**STUART SMITH  
JOEL WORTLEY**  
Board of Camping

The Michigan Area United Methodist Camping Board of Directors knows one thing very well: camping changes lives. Our board has been working hard to be good stewards of the many wonderful spaces we have in the state of Michigan to do God's work.

Michigan Area United Methodist Camping receives a significant portion of its funding from the Michigan Conference and due to declining support in Ministry Shares, the Conference is asking its ministries to make immediate changes to bring spending in line with income.

In early 2019 we had to close four of our properties for financial reasons. Then 2019 was a difficult year financially, requiring another significant change in order to move the camping ministry forward.

It is with heavy hearts we announce we will be suspending operations at Judson Collins Camp & Retreat Center for the 2020 camping season.

We acknowledge the hurt that may particularly be felt by those whose lives have been transformed by this space. We believe this difficult decision will strengthen the ministries at our other sites for this current season.

As we look to the future, the Board has engaged

Kaleidoscope, a nationally recognized firm that provides professional services to camps, retreats, and outdoor centers to help them thrive. Kaleidoscope will help the Board develop a "Master Plan" for the organization.

This work will involve an extensive review of all of our camp locations and programs, including Judson Collins Camp. It will result in a strategic plan to guide and direct our ministry in the coming years. This work will be completed in late spring and the Board believes this will ensure we move forward to change lives in meaningful ways for years to come.

We want to see camping thrive in Michigan. We

continue because of your ongoing support! Our other camps — Lake Michigan Camp & Retreat, Lake Huron Retreat Center, and Wesley Woods Camp & Retreat Center — are ready to welcome new and returning campers for summer programming while Lakeview Family Campground is available for families.

There are many different events to choose from for all ages — our full lineup of 2020 summer programs is available at [umcamping.org](http://umcamping.org).

~ Stuart Smith serves as President of the Board of Michigan Area United Methodist Camping and Joel Wortley is the Interim Executive Director.

## Keswick United Methodist Church follows the sun

**FRED ELMORE**  
Keswick UMC

Keswick United Methodist Church in Suttons Bay gives new meaning to the phrase, “solar system.” No, it’s not about planets and stars. But it does revolve around the sun.

When the installation of solar panels was proposed for Keswick UMC, the predictable response of “We can’t afford this,” was heard.

But after consultation with Michigan Interfaith Power and Light and Northport Energy, Keswick’s finance committee discovered a plan that costs the church virtually nothing.

That’s when a church member stepped forth to form a private LLC (Limited License Corporation). The LLC is called *Keen Weh*, an Ojibwe word meaning, “All of us together.”

This new business covered the total cost of installation of two solar systems designed to

provide close to 100% of the electricity needed for the church and the parsonage. The LLC’s solar systems generate and sell power to the church at the same rate as Consumers Energy, our local energy supplier. End result? No increase to the church’s budget!

Churches and non-profits pay no federal income tax so they cannot benefit from the current 30% tax rebate. But the LLC is eligible for this 30% rebate and was also awarded a 25% REAP grant through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Because of these factors, Keswick’s system is more than half paid for in just one year.

The remaining debt to the LLC will be covered by normal energy payments in about six more years. At that time ownership of the solar system will revert to the church and significant savings to the congregation’s energy



***The sun does shine in Michigan in the winter. Pastor Patti Haas and Nancy Elmore stand with the array of solar panels that is fulfilling most of the the energy needs of the Keswick church and parsonage. ~ photo courtesy Fred Elmore***

budget will occur.

Bob Chapman, Director of Interfaith Power and Light at the time of our installation, gave encouragement.

“Around Michigan and the entire country, we are seeing houses of worship exercise good stewardship of creation and their own finances by adopting solar energy. This is true faith in action.”

The Rev. Patti Haas, the pastor of Keswick UMC, said, “Not only are we attempting to take care of our earth, our church stands to benefit financially in the long run. It seems like a win/win situation to me.”

We United Methodists have a clear mandate, as shown in our Social Principles, to move in the direction of renewables. Actually, we have lots of things we should be doing and most of them cost us money. Changing to some form of renewable energy will very likely save us money.

Please be aware that the tax rebate is decreasing to 26% in 2020 and will continue to decrease in the future. Churches should act soon to

realize maximum financial benefits from the installation of a solar system.

The Rev. Anita Hahn was Superintendent of the Northern Waters District at the time Keswick undertook this project. She said, “Thank you Keswick UMC for seeking to take responsibility for how you are using God’s creation. This is an exciting step up and a model for how we all can be better stewards of the energy resources that God has entrusted to us.”

The Rev. John Scott, Properties Committee Chair for Northern Waters, added, “Hat’s off to the Keswick UMC folks for thinking outside the box with a bold and innovative way to strengthen the church while being good stewards of our natural resources.” Scott encourages other congregations to learn from Keswick’s experience. “After carefully wading through some uncharted territory, they have arrived at a great place. Don’t hesitate to call upon them to help guide your church through this process,” Scott concluded.



**Contact Fred Elmore (right) for more information. Email Fred at [fredelmore0405@gmail.com](mailto:fredelmore0405@gmail.com) or phone 231.631.0405.**

## Home Words Bound ... ‘Three simple truths’



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

I remember the very first time, nearly 25 years ago in Denver, Colorado when I was in a worship service as the preacher beckoned, “God is Good... and the congregation replied, “All the time.” Preacher, “All the time...” Congregation, “God is Good!”

It was the now-retired Bishop Woodie White. He went on to describe a personal story of sitting down next to his aging mother, the circumstances were not “good.” “How are you, Mom?” Woodie had asked. She immediately went to this catechism of her faith. ***God is good all the time and all the time God is good.***

I recently finished a book written by Adolf Hansen entitled, *“Three Simple Truths.”* He writes about *how* this first truth about the character of God is rooted in Psalm 100:5: ***God is good, God’s faithfulness endures forever and God’s faithfulness to all generations.*** Many times, our circumstances

are not so good. But that never changes **the character of God** and it quickly brings us to the second truth Rev. Hansen outlines.

***God works for good in everything.*** Such a belief about the **activity of God** is grounded in the scripture passage from Romans 8:28: “God works for good in everything with those who love God, who are called according to God’s purpose.” Never is it promised that “everything is good.” We are clearly aware of plenty that is destructive, painful, unjust, and not good. This truth simply reminds us that as disciples who love God and respond to the call of God in our lives, God has the capacity to work in and through that moment for the “good answer,” which only God alone may initially see.

The third truth is simply an **invitation by God: *Trust in the Lord, no matter what.*** Proverbs 3:5 teaches about this invitation. “Trust in the Lord, with all your heart and do not trust your own understanding.” There are moments when the invitation is difficult to accept. We think we know the best answer, the best path, the best payback, the best next step. Sometimes the most courageous faith step to be taken is to wait. Not lean on our own understanding but allow the light of God’s grace and wisdom to shine upon the moment and reveal, in God’s time, the “best next good step” which God truly desires for us.

As we enter 2020 there will be any number of challenges that await us, experiences that are not good on the surface or in the potential implications, and moments that we may be inclined to simply trust our own judgment and instinctive reaction. I invite us all to remain connected to God daily in prayer and the study of scripture as these three truths and many others are revealed to us. Then as the Holy Spirit guides us, let us live and witness to others of the transformative power these truths have in our lives and can have for all who call upon the name of Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

~ “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.

# Michigan delegation endorses Kennetha Bigham-Tsai

**KAY DEMOSS**

Senior Content Editor

In a video-conference held on January 11, the Michigan Delegation to the General and Jurisdictional conferences interviewed and endorsed Kennetha Bigham-Tsai as an episcopal candidate for the North Central Jurisdiction. “Based on our vision and our shared values, we see Kennetha as being ideal in leading United Methodists into the future,” said Laura Witkowski, who co-chairs the delegation with Bigham-Tsai. “Kennetha is a visionary and a bridge-builder, a hope-filled leader.” Witkowski continued, “She is committed to the full inclusion of LBGTQ persons

in the life of the church, is passionate about racial justice, and envisions a more innovative, contextual, and adaptive United Methodist Church.”

Since January 2018, Bigham-Tsai has held denominational leadership as the Chief Connectional Ministries Officer of The United Methodist Connectional Table. Prior to that, she served as the Superintendent of The Lansing District and pastored two West Michigan congregations: Kalamazoo: Milwood UMC and University UMC in East Lansing (Associate). She was elected as a clergy delegate to General Conferences in 2012, 2016 (alternate), and 2020.

“Kennetha’s experience with the worldwide church, exceptional leadership capacity, deep faith, and spiritual maturity uniquely position her for the office of bishop for such a time as this,” Witkowski stated. The delegation believes her high-level view of the global church fits her to deal with what the denomination is facing post-General Conference 2020.

“If elected, I will encourage experimentation and innovation and work to nurture new leaders,” Bigham-Tsai said. “I also will teach, preach and live a theology of grace, seeking reconciliation in relationships, and caring as Christ did ‘for the least of these.’”

Witkowski described the delegation’s vision this way: “It is our hope, through listening, to lead the Michigan Conference into becoming a more just and inclusive body. We challenge ourselves to continue the reconciling work of Jesus Christ and to live into the catholic spirit of John Wesley.” Core values held by the delegation as a strong foundation for their life and work are: holding all in sacred worth, compassion, honesty, and realism. Delegates have committed to act as servant leaders for the tasks at hand in 2020 and into the future.

Michigan UMs have told the delegation they want a bishop who:

- is spiritually grounded with deep faith and rich devotional life;
- has a deep understanding of a Wesleyan theology of grace and able to translate theological concepts in ways that are relevant and relatable;
- can cast vision and work with lay and clergy leadership

to bring about innovation and change in the most challenging times;

- leads with a non-anxious presence;
- has a broad spiritual and theological approach;
- exhibits honesty, dependability, and strong discipleship.

Kennetha Bigham-Tsai says this about making herself available for episcopal leadership at this time. “I am honored to have been endorsed for the episcopacy by the Michigan delegation. I am offering myself because I care deeply about our worldwide connection and feel called to help lead our church through change. For me, that means bringing an open and prayerful spirit, a creative mind, and a pastor’s heart to the challenges ahead.”

Kennetha has been married for 25 years. She and her husband Kee live in East Lansing and have two sons. Keeton is an engineering student at WMI and is a leader at the Kalamazoo Wesley Foundation. Kamden is in middle school and active in band, youth group, and sports.

The North Central Jurisdictional Conference will meet in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, July 15-18, 2020. The main work of the Jurisdictional Conference is the election of bishops.

At the present time, it is known that two NCJ bishops intend to retire.

However, because of declining membership of churches across the NCJ, the NCJ College of Bishops and Jurisdictional Episcopacy Committee have recommended that only one bishop be elected when delegates gather in Ft. Wayne in July.



## Denominational leaders offer plan for separation

**SAM HODGES**  
UM News

Jan. 3, 2020 — A diverse, 16-member group of United Methodist bishops and other leaders has offered a proposal that would preserve The United Methodist Church while allowing traditionalist-minded congregations to form a new denomination. The separating group would get \$25 million in United Methodist funds and would keep its local church properties.

Details are in a 9-page “Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation,” released January 3.

The proposal – reached with the help of famed mediator Kenneth Feinberg – requires approval by the 2020 General Conference. Drafting of legislation is still underway for the legislative assembly, which is the only body that speaks for the 13 million global denomination.

But given the broad, influential coalition involved – including bishops from around the global connection and advocacy group leaders often sharply at odds – the potential seems strong that the separation proposal can end or at least greatly reduce the denomination’s

decades-long struggle over how accepting to be of homosexuality.

New York Conference Bishop Thomas Bickerton, part of the group, said the contentious 2019 special called General Conference in St. Louis underscored intensifying divisions and the need for an amicable separation.

“It became clear that the line in the sand had turned into a canyon,” Bickerton said. “The impasse is such that we have come to the realization that we just can’t stay that way any longer.

“This protocol provides a pathway that acknowledges our differences, respects everyone in the process and graciously allows us to continue to live out the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, albeit in different expressions.”

The traditionalist Wesley Covenant Association already has taken steps toward forming a new denomination, such as drafting a book of policies and doctrines. Bickerton and the Rev. Keith Boyette, WCA president, said the negotiating team assumes that the new church would emerge out of the WCA.

Boyette was part of the group reaching the proposal. He said traditionalists have long felt that divisions in The United Methodist were irreparable and that an amicable separation was the best way forward. “I believe this is a fair and equitable solution that puts decades of conflict behind us and gives us a hopeful future,” he said.

Also negotiating and signing onto the agreement was Jan Lawrence, executive director of Reconciling Ministries Network, which has long sought to remove restrictions against LGBTQ participation in the denomination.

“As a United Methodist who is LGBTQ, my priority at the table was to make sure we addressed the full participation of LGBTQ people in the life of the church, making sure the answer was not ‘ask us again in 2024,’ she said. “The language needs to be removed now. I am pleased that there is an opportunity here for that to happen in 2020.”

The new proposal would allow other United Methodist churches to form their own denominations while foreseeing ecumenical agreements and cooperation on some fronts.

Representatives of traditionalist, centrist and progressive advocacy groups joined with a handful of bishops from the U.S., Africa, Europe, and the Philippines to reach the agreement. They promised to support it and no other.

“We humbly offer to the delegates of the 2020 General Conference the work which we have accomplished in the hopes that it will help heal the harms and conflicts within the body of Christ and free us to be more effective witnesses to God’s Kingdom,” said Bishop John Yambasu of Sierra Leone, who last summer began the private talks that led to the proposal.

The group had the help of Feinberg, who oversaw the victims’ compensation funds after 9/11 and the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. Feinberg donated his time, as did other lawyers who helped the group.

Feinberg called it “an honor and a privilege” to be part of the negotiations.



**Bishop David Bard, Michigan Area, has offered his thoughts on the Protocol.**  
Go to [news.michiganumc.org](http://news.michiganumc.org) and search on, “Bishop releases statement on separation plan.” Bard said, “I have long argued the need for the creation of new space within The United Methodist Church, different space, and this protocol agreement offers this.” ~ mic photo/Mark Doyal

## News in Brief

### MEET ADRIAN COLLEGE'S NEW CHAPLAIN



For the Rev. April Gutierrez, coming to Adrian College as the new Campus Chaplain and Director of Spiritual Life has the feeling of coming home. April grew up in Adrian and graduated from Siena Heights University. She said, "When I saw the posting, I just knew it was right for me." President Jeffery Docking said,

"Rev. Gutierrez rose to the top of a very competitive field of candidates. She was the unanimous choice of our student interviewers who found her to be wonderfully approachable, very articulate, and highly aware of the spiritual, academic, and social challenges facing this generation of undergraduates. Many of us in the administration were impressed by April's highly informed theology, ecumenical approach to campus ministry, and desire to create a more compassionate and loving world. She brings a wealth of experience and talent and is a great fit for Adrian College..."

### UMCOR HAS A NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The United Methodist Committee on Relief will enter its ninth decade led by a new executive director who brings a strong background in international disaster response, public health, and child welfare. Lara S. Martin comes to UMCOR, effective February 3, from a top post at the Center for Humanitarian Emergencies of Emory University. "Throughout her career,

Lara has taken part in responses to disaster and health emergencies in many countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Middle East," said Bishop Thomas Bickerton, UMCOR's president. "She brings to this appointment significant administrative and fund-raising experience and knowledge of theology and, as a United Methodist, structures of the church."

### UNITED METHODIST WOMEN STAY THE COURSE



Addressing the uncertain future of The UMC, UMW National Executive Harriett Olson said: "Our commitment is to be a place where all the women who affirm the Purpose and want to work together in mission can belong. With this in view, the United Methodist Women Board of Directors has already made changes to our bylaws to ensure that women committed to this mission could continue to belong, regardless of whether they or their church or their Conference separates from the United

Methodist Church. As United Methodist Church examines next steps, United Methodist Women will continue to be a place where the needs of women and children are front and center."



### UMCOR ASSISTS AFTER PUERTO RICO QUAKES

*The Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Ponce, Puerto Rico, suffered extensive damage in a series of earthquakes that have rattled the area since Dec. 28. Gifts to Advance #901670 will support relief efforts by UMCOR and its partner REHACE.* ~ photo courtesy of the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico.

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

still enmeshed in racism. Inequality tears at the fabric of our society. We are not doing what needs to be done to care for the earth. Too many struggle with addiction. Relationships that are meant to be life-giving are frayed. People feel disconnected from God.

In the church itself, we face challenging decisions about buildings and budgets and leadership, and the changes in the denomination will not magically solve such realities. After the next General Conference, the work of the church will only be beginning anew.

Such ministry work entails soul work, the inner work of having our lives shaped in the spirit of Jesus. One of the things that all us Methodists share is Wesley's emphasis on the Christian life as formation in love.

I trust we all remain committed to this soul work. Ministry work and soul work will be accompanied by grief

work. In this new year, it is likely that The United Methodist Church will be changed significantly, and there will be grief with that.

As we look to the future, how we do ministry in the Michigan Conference will continue to undergo change, and there will be grief with that.

I am committed to walking together with you as you do the important work of grieving. It is not all the work we have to do, but it is part of the work we need to do.

*When the song of the angels is stilled ... the work of Christmas begins.*

Before and after proposals are made, before and after legislation is written, before and after votes are counted, the work of the church is always beginning – ministry work, soul work, and grief work, work best done in a spirit of care, kindness, courage, compassion, wisdom, and love.

## Happy New Year, babies!!

**KAY DEMOSS**

Senior Content Editor

At Valley Church in Allendale, the New Year Baby is more than a metaphor for the turn of the calendar page. Babies' First Christmas, celebrated during worship on December 8, was an opportunity for the congregation to rejoice with young families in their midst. Says Pastor Matt Bistayi, "Christmas is about a baby being born. It's about new life. So, we gave a special Christmas ornament to the 14 babies born in 2019." He notes that seven more babies are on the way. "We prayed over the families and had a blessing."

Nothing short of a miracle during an era when four out of ten Millennials say, "None," when asked about their religious affiliation. And what's happening at Valley Church is no Abraham-and-Sarah, geriatric parenting situation. For this is a congregation blessed with 20-somethings. In fact, 60% of those active at Valley Church are under 45 years of age.

Valley Church was started in 2010 with the leadership of Matt Bisatyi. Now, nine years later, Matt says, "We have a lot of young families excited about being part of what God is doing here. They are growing their families and want to be part of God's family to do that."

So, what's the secret formula that is attracting young people to Valley Church? The answer is both simple and profound. "It's about who we are," asserts Pastor Bistayi. "Valley is open, authentic, a real community. We are a safe place for these families to be connected. Families attract families."

He adds that there is a strong kids ministry in addition to that environment for families to be themselves. "We love kids and families at Valley."

"The congregation is totally pumped to see new life right in front of their eyes. They are super supportive and rally behind these young couples," Matt reports. "When a baby is in church for the first time, everybody wants to hold the baby, and that's awesome!" There's also a "Go Group" for brand new parents that provides additional supportive community, learning, and fellowship.

One thing that is not responsible for Valley being in a family way is their facilities. In fact, Valley meets in rented space and that limits how they can accommodate all the congregation's needs. "Where are we going to put them all?! Is our biggest challenge right now," exclaimed Bistayi. In the short-term, Valley leaders are shifting spaces and resources, moving kids to different areas in order to make the nursery larger. Not easy when they are also expanding ministry with older children, as well.

In the long-term, leaders are "two years into a visioning campaign, getting serious about the future and a home space of our own." Bistayi estimates that the congregation is two to four years out from building better and safer space to meet the needs of growing families and a growing church. "We are hoping and praying to go where God is sending us," he says.

How would he respond to someone who says, "I wish we had all those babies!!" Bistayi's response is three-



**Pastor Matt Bistayi and Valley Church celebrated Babies First Christmas during Advent 2019. Families received a special Christmas ornament to mark the occasion.** ~ photo courtesy Matt Bistayi

fold. First, "Just be who you are. For us that means loving people and being the kind of church that says it's okay to have fun about your faith." Second, "Be aware that this blessing poses a serious challenge regarding space, especially for a young church full of young families with young budgets." And finally, "Consider becoming an angel investor who believes in what's happening out here in Allendale and is willing to walk alongside us."

Since its beginning in 2010, Valley Church has been, "Helping Others live For God, for People, for a Change." A small nucleus of folks has grown to 200 active participants with an average worship attendance of 170,

including those 14 babies. As The Michigan Conference faces into a new decade, Valley Church is a source of encouragement, a lively example of what can happen when the focus is centered on love.

Why do young adults mark "None"? Research suggests several reasons, including their perception that organized religion is not relevant and often divisive. Perhaps that's why young people are attracted to this statement on the homepage of Valley Church: "There are an endless number of things that divide us in the world, and we're convinced that God and the church shouldn't be one of them."