

2021 Michigan Annual Conference Trustees Report | Jim LeBaron June 4, 2021

The conference Board of Trustees (“BoT”) continues with a membership comprised of a consolidated group of former Detroit Annual Conference and West Michigan Annual Conference trustees. This is important as we still address issues arising from the distinct manner in which each conference handled both processes and disposition. Additionally, we have benefited from a combination of experience and very effective contributing members.

We have a growing inventory of held-properties (from closed churches) and their attendant oversight responsibilities that presented a substantial challenge to the board. Here is a high-level summary of activities and focus.

WORK REVIEW:

Vice chair George Lewis continues the refinement of developed policies and procedures (“P&P”) for all conference owned offices and parsonages. This includes a regular professional inspection for each residency-transition of our parsonages.

Worked extensively on property tax issues for UMC parsonage(s)...in which the untaxed status was preserved through the appeals process with the State of Michigan.

11 properties were sold (and one being donated) in past year:

- Atterberry (Heritage District) Parsonage
- Mapleton UMC
- Owosso-Burton UMC
- Arbela UMC
- Mulliken UMC
- Hidden Springs (DCM Parsonage)
- Pleasant Lake UMC
- Freeport UMC
- Salem (former UMC) property
- Ubly UMC (in process of donating)
- Assisted with the Michigan Union the sale of Wayne First UMC to its tenant

5 properties currently listed for sale – a challenging environment for commercial real estate and church properties in particular has arisen from the ‘Covid world’. We know more properties will be added to this inventory due to the economic pressures on the local churches. Efforts are being made to find solutions other than closure which will help with the dispensation process.

The developed collaboration with cabinet representative DS John Hice of a definitive itemization of roles for conference and district involvement re-closed properties is still being absorbed by the districts.

Working with DCM Paul Perez on conference archive storage options pertaining to physical locations. The concern has grown due to both increased materials from closed churches and limitations of the current facilities. We are currently developing both interim and permanent archive site(s).

Conducted the annual ‘Risk Management’ review with Church Mutual Insurance in a full board meeting. There were no material claim-issues raised and the relationship is solid. Further, our claims:premium ratio will again lead to rebates to our local churches.

MAUMC (the camp board): BoT's work last year involved continued substantial interaction with MAUMC management. There were 3 former camp properties listed with two sold and the BoT provides assistance where helpful.

CAMP REPORT: made by Stuart Smith, chair of the MAUMC Board of Camping, and Executive Director David Berkey. (See separate document)

DOWRY REPORTS:

The Dowry legislation in 2019 established a minimum \$250,000 in missional funds per district. Each district is required to, and has, submitted a report detailing the application of funds. These reports will be included in the AC Journal and various highlight articles will be reflected in upcoming MIConnect issues.

The summary of closed churches requiring AC affirmative action to formally close with motions in accordance with paragraph 2549 of the 2016 Book of Discipline is being submitted by Dean of the Cabinet, Rev. Jerry DeVine. The affirming petitions were distributed to the voting members and returned after adjournment.

LEGACY REPORT AND VOTES ON CLOSURE, presented by the Dean of the Cabinet, the Rev. Dr. Jerome DeVine

We are closing five chartered churches and one new church start in the Michigan Conference this year. Only the chartered churches will require a vote, yet we honor the legacy and sacrifices of each of these ministries.

Arbela UMC: The Arbela United Methodist Church closed November 9, 2020 with a final service of recognition and deconsecration on November 8, 2020. The congregation was organized sometime in the 1800's. The church building was placed in the middle of farm fields and remains on the crossroads farm fields to this day. The original deed of the property was hand-written, dated October 19, 1891. In a rural farming community, the church was likely the religious, social, and even political gathering place of the farming families of Arbela Township. Indeed, the Arbela United Methodist church was for most of its existence the only church in the township. That it was the social gathering place of the people of Arbela Township can be attested to by its over 50 years of putting on an Ice Cream and Homemade Pie Social. All the proceeds raised from these socials were designated to missions. Also of note, one of the last members of the Arbela United Methodist Church is a granddaughter of a pastor who served the church in 1930.

Freeport UMC: The Freeport United Methodist Church closed effective July 1, 2021, with a final service of recognition and deconsecration on June 27, 2021. As early as 1870 Christian worship services began in a local school under a United Brethren pastor in Freeport. By 1876 a Methodist Class Meeting was formed with support from the pastor of the Bowne Center Methodist Church. A small Methodist Church building was erected that same year. By 1882 they became a Methodist Episcopal Church. Then in 1896 the current church building was erected for a growing congregation. The Freeport United Methodist Church has supported a fresh food initiative for the past 20 years serving approximately 100 families monthly, as well as distributing Christmas food baskets and gifts, supporting the Barry Co. Family Promise, Barry Co. Cares (formerly LOVE, Inc.) and Hastings Community Action.

Griffith UMC: Griffith United Methodist Church closed December 31, 2020, with a final service of recognition and deconsecration on December 27, 2020. The congregation was known for its commitment to meeting the needs of the farming community they served, adjacent to the city of Eaton Rapids. Their building housed the Community Closet, meeting needs for food, clothing, and personal items in concert with other local churches. One notable means of outreach was the "Eating Together" program where small groups of 4-5 people would gather with shut-ins to share a meal and offer spiritual support.

Mosaic UM New Church Start: Mosaic United Methodist new church started as a ministry on July 1, 2017. It held a final worship service on December 31, 2020 and the ministry will close effective July 1, 2021. Mosaic was a distinctive expression of the United Methodist Church in Michigan - intentionally building community with those on the margins in creative and groundbreaking ways. Many who had never

had a church home or who were disillusioned by the church found a family of faith and a relationship with Jesus Christ through Mosaic. The people whose lives were touched by Mosaic, while no longer a worshipping congregation in the United Methodist connection, will continue to be present, to serve and to love the community of Traverse City. Because Mosaic was not yet a chartered congregation we will not be voting on closure, yet we do give thanks for the impact of their ministry.

Pleasant Lake UMC: Pleasant Lake United Methodist Church closed September 20, 2020 and the final recognition and deconsecration took place that same day. The congregation served the rural community north of Jackson, Michigan with a friendly caring presence. In addition to faithful worship, they participated in the yearly CROP walk for hunger and contributed to a food pantry. A crafting group met to pray together and stitch hats and mittens to warm the heads and hands of local children. The congregation gave financial support to Youth Haven Ranch, and the John George Home, and an independent living facility in Jackson.

Wayne First UMC: Wayne First United Methodist Church closed effective January 31, 2021. A final service of worship and deconsecration was held on December 27, 2020. The first Methodist sermon was preached in Wayne, Michigan in a private home in 1826 followed by the first Sunday school in 1830. The congregation was organized in 1832. From 1832-1850 the new congregation worshipped in barns, private homes, and the local school. The Methodists and Congregationalists worshipped together from 1850-1862 in the Community Church building, which was the original part of the present Congregational Church. The cornerstone was laid for the First Methodist Church building in 1862. With major support and leadership from the Women's Home Missionary Society (organized in 1880), the congregation experienced a steady growth in membership and missionary outreach. The congregation expanded its missional outreach into the late 1990s when membership decline became significant and the church moved to a part-time pastor. Wayne: First UMC will be remembered as a church that made the world a better place for 189 years. To God be the glory.

Mr. Chairperson to the 2021 Michigan Annual Conference Corporate Session, in accordance with paragraph 2549 of the 2016 Book of Discipline, the Cabinet moves that these five churches be closed as of the following dates:

1. Arbela UMC – November 9, 2020
2. Freeport UMC – July 1, 2021
3. Griffith UMC - December 31, 2020
4. Pleasant Lake UMC - September 20, 2020
5. Wayne First UMC - January 31, 2021

Result of the votes on closure.

CHURCHES DESIGNATED FOR WITHDRAWAL:

Our discipline provides a disaffiliation process for any congregation finding their theological conscience is not in accordance with discipline language regarding same sex unions and ordination. There was one church completing the Withdrawal Agreement terms and will submit appropriate funds in accordance with paragraph 2553 of the amended 2016 Book of Discipline. The affirming petition will be distributed to the voting members and returned after adjournment. Following the vote, I adjourn this Corporate Session.

- Duffield UMC – June 30, 2021

Result of disaffiliation vote.