

# FEARLESS

MICHIGAN ANNUAL CONFERENCE

*Embracing*  
A NEW FUTURE

## Historical Report Volume 1

**2024 Annual Session**  
May 30 - June 1  
Grand Traverse Resort  
Acme MI



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## MICHIGAN ANNUAL CONFERENCE AGENCIES, BOARDS, COMMITTEES, COMMISSIONS

### AFRICAN AMERICAN MINISTRIES

The Committee on African American Ministries has been exposing people to opportunities in various ministries throughout the conference and supporting those who desire to attend conferences, training events, and various activities. We not only provide financial support, but we also ensure that the African American clergy and laity are kept informed of the special events, trainings, and activities that will benefit them.

In addition, we have been notifying our constituents of opportunities for spiritual growth, formation, and development, leadership training, retreats, children, and youth activities, including summer camp (Urban Youth Camp).

#### **Top three major accomplishments in 2023:**

1. COAAM provided grants that included:
  - Two for Freedom Schools
  - Tablets for Urban Youth Camp participants
  - Two church emergency grants
  - Ten technology grants to churches and clergy
  - Two Welcoming Environment grants
  - Fifteen grants for individuals to attend conferences, coaching, training, and other events.
2. United Methodist Black Clergy of Michigan held a three-day clergy retreat and provided special speakers at several of the monthly meetings on a variety of topics.
3. The Michigan Area Black Methodist for Church Renewal Caucus relaunched a revitalization and growth program and holds monthly meetings. Seven members attended the National BMCR Conference in Pittsburgh, and many who attended the North Central Jurisdiction training event in Springfield, IL, earning the Dr. Carolyn E. Johnson Attendance Trophy for second time. It also offered a Gospel Hip-Hop celebration for younger people inspired by a local Gospel Hip-Hop Artist.

#### **Our 2024 Annual Conference theme is “Fearless - Embracing a New Future.” What new things are dawning in your agency’s work?**

COAAM plans to expand our connections with Black United Methodist initiatives in other states and jurisdictions including national BMCR, United Methodist Black Clergy Women, Sacred Sisters (NCJ Black clergy women’s organization), and Strengthening the Black Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These connections will assist us in seeing what others are doing to embrace the new future of the United Methodist Church and to stay connected with each other.

We are also working with the Lay Servant/Lay Minister Ministry to assist in getting more people of color engaged in the various levels of the Lay Servant Ministry, including Certified Lay Ministers as

well as working with the Conference Nominations ministry to recruit more leaders of color to be a part of the conference leadership ministries.

The Michigan Area BMCR plans to extend its reach and re-engage with the black churches in Michigan.

UMBCM will be having an exciting retreat for Black Clergy in May featuring Rev. Dr. Safiyah Fosua who will be speaking on “Revitalization and Visioning of Black Clergy.” It will also be assisting black clergy who are appointed or assigned to cross-cultural/cross-racial appointments. The black clergy need support from the conference and the churches to whom they are appointed to find a way of understanding each other and working together.

Things have changed, and we plan to be a major part of the change.

## **ARCHIVES AND HISTORY**

### **MICHIGAN AREA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH HISTORICAL SOCIETY - 2023**

The Michigan Area United Methodist Church Historical Society (MAUMCHS) has been incorporated since 1958. The name was changed from Michigan Methodist Historical Society in 1975.

The Society has as their purpose the following:

To compile, edit, publish, and distribute histories of Michigan United Methodism, its predecessor denominations, and any other historical works that may later demand attention; to solicit, acquire, and administer funds to accomplish such purposes and any other acts as may be deemed necessary to carry out such purposes; and promote, support, and nurture the conference archives.

Other purposes may include organizing area-wide celebrations of historical events and convocations which may involve participation beyond the board of directors; digitization and distribution of historical materials; awarding certificates of recognition to local churches that are celebrating important milestones, awarding distinguished service awards to individuals and groups within Michigan; recognizing and promoting United Methodist historic sites in the state; helping conference, district, and local church historians and archivists through workshops and information sharing; and such other activities as are consistent with the by-laws of the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church.

We relate to the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church. We are now a Society member of the Historical Society of Michigan.

The officers are Diana Spitnale Miller - President, Sharon Scott - Secretary, and Della Wilder - Treasurer. Due to the Covid Pandemic, the officers are following other agency protocol and staying in place until the middle of 2024.

Board Meetings were held in 2023 on March 9, May 11, and November 8 by ZOOM. Each time the Conference Commission on Archives and History met by Zoom the same day. We share a number of members and were repeating business items. The archivists, who do such good work to manage

our Archives and keep us up to date, are Elizabeth Palmer at Albion College and Rebecca McNitt who works with materials primarily based at Adrian College. They both are working with materials that are deposited at Clark Corners in Lansing MI.

Budget cuts are making it more difficult to fund our archivists and their work. MAUMCHS has become a 501.c.3 organization so that we can take donations toward the Archives budget. We then can make grants to their budget.

After several years of successful Roots and Branches Historical Convocations in the spring, we did not have one in 2022 and 2023.

Since 2017, we have been presenting certificates to churches, recognizing longevity for 100, 125, 150, 175, or 200 years and some special requests. In 2023, we sent certificates to two churches 200 years old, one church 190 years, two churches 150 years, two churches 140 years, one church 125 years, and two churches 100 years. We are continuing to work on our list of churches and their years of beginning. Our lists of certificates given are published on our website.

<https://michiganumchistoricalssociety.wordpress.com/> If we have missed an anniversary for your church, let us know. Contact information is available on the website under Board of Directors.

Our group welcomes historians of churches, those interested in church history and preserving it, clergy and lay, to join the Society. Membership includes receiving news about the Society activities and free registration to our sponsored events. A membership brochure is available on our website.

Diana Spitnale Miller, President

### **Asian-American Ministries (COAAM)**

Q. How did the work of your agency impact Michigan United Methodists, our local Churches, and/or local communities across Michigan and/or around the world?

- Opening opportunities of gathering, fellowshiping, and learning event that will be beneficial to COAAM members and church. Some were open to also different committees and agencies in Michigan AC - i.e. Learning Event 2022 with Rev. Dr. Soomee Kim from GBHEM.
- Provided English Improvement classes through zoom and also gave grants for English Improvement programs/classes to encourage continual growth with Language skill.

Q. What were your agency's top three major accomplishments in 2023?

- COAAM fellowship dinner at Michigan Annual Conference, May 2, 2023 Friday - Gathering of Asian American pastors and leaders, sharing ministry and life stories.
- 2023 COAAM Leadership event, Sept. 18, 2023. Sessions focused on coaching, family systems, conflict with Naomi Garcia and on cross-racial cross-cultural appointments.
- General Commission on Religion and Race conference "Facing the Future", Nov. 14-16, 3 Asian American clergy (including 2 COAAM officers) attending GCORR conference that focused on Cross-Racial Cross-Cultural clergy and churches. These Asian American clergy's views were included in a MI Connect Michigan Conference article in January 2024.
- Learning Event in plan for April 15, 2024 (detailed info. See the next question)

Q. Our 2024 Annual Conference theme is “Fearless - Embracing a New Future.” In what ways is your agency/ministry moving forward with Christ, seeing and hearing the people around you, affirming and engaging as a new community?

- 2024 COAAM leadership event (April 15, 2024) is focusing and designed on listening and learning from our Asian American clergy who will share their wisdom and experience in Cross-Racial Cross-Cultural appointments and ministry. We are planning to invite the District Superintendent liaison, and the Bishop's clergy assistant to join us, if they are able, listen to COAAM clergy's joys, challenges, and concerns, and open up mutual dialogue.

We look forward to how the Lord will lead and guide us all in Christ Jesus in 2024!

Thank you!

In Christ,

COAAM Leadership: Rev. Anna Moon (Chair), Rev. YooJin Kim (Vice), Rev. Jennifer Jue (Secretary), Rev. Sunhwa Hopgood (Treasurer), Rev. Nathan Nguyen, & Rev. And Lee

## COMMUNICATIONS

Michigan Conference Communications had an incredible year in 2023, telling the story of mission and ministry to local churches in Michigan and around the world. The team, consisting of Kristen Gillette, James Deaton, Valerie Mossman-Celestin, Adrienne Trupiano, and Mark Doyal, worked with a dedicated group of vendors, stringers, and volunteers to deliver messages through various mediums such as electronic, printed, streamed, and videotaped formats.

Their efforts reached every Michigan United Methodist local church community, providing support, education, and essential information. The team's work impacted tens of thousands of people each week, spanning over 50 countries worldwide. Despite facing challenges like a 20% budget and staff reduction and the disaffiliation of 16% of local churches, Conference Communications achieved significant accomplishments in 2023. Here are a few examples:

Conference Communications helped the Readers to Leaders Campaign hit the \$300,000 mark in gifts from local churches. In February, Mark traveled to Liberia for 10 days to capture the stories of Michigan's impact on children and adults through educational scholarships. His photography campaign one first place in the United Methodist Association of Communicators Awards.

In February a lone gunman tragically took the lives of three Michigan State University students. That horrific act and helping our members find God amidst the pain, was the work of James Deaton whose stories also were recognized for exceptional achievements in writing at the UMAC Awards. His follow up stories on Advocacy Day, the team's organization of online promotions for Advocacy Day brought over 350 United Methodists to the State Capitol to rally for common sense gun laws. That event succeeded with new legislation signed into law and the news coverage brought the justice work of the Michigan Conference to a state-wide audience.

The December online campaigns connected approximately 13,000 persons with local United Methodist Churches during Advent. "Spend Christmas at our House" were successful social media campaigns on Facebook, Instagram, and Google. Over 850,000 persons saw the campaign and

clicked through to connect with worship services at local United Methodist Churches. This is third and most successful year of the campaign.

Other highlights include the launch of the new “For your Benefit” newsletter, multiple “Lunch and Learn” webinars that shared the power of young adult ministry, justice, and seed planting ministries, dozens of articles and videos on innovative mission, and the production of two annual conference sessions. Michigan Conference Communications Ministry continues to serve the conference and local churches by providing pathways of communication and connection across the state. We feel blessed by this ministry.

Submitted by Mark Doyal, Director of Communications.

### **CONNECTIONAL MINISTRIES AND CONGREGATIONAL VIBRANCY**

The CM Team, comprising Laura Witkowski, Kathy Pittenger, Lisa Batten, and Naomi García, serves as the program staff tasked with gaining clarity on the team’s role within the new organizational structure. Our starting point was from initial communication the staff received in January 2023:

“The Connectional Ministries and Congregational Vibrancy staff will be restructured into a single Program Staff Team with the goal of shifting from the current “specialist/expert” based model to a team-based model. The Program Staff Team will design, implement, and evaluate a limited number of common initiatives aligned with the Conference’s Strategic Directions & Priorities and to meet goals and outcomes set in consultation with the Conference Leadership Council and Conference Directors. The team will include: a Program Staff Lead, Three (3) Program Staff Members, and an Executive Assistant.”

Our collective efforts are grounded in the belief’s that each team member serves as a steward of God’s mission for the Church, that our foundation is in Jesus Christ, and that we are guided by the movement of the Holy Spirit. We are implementing a team-based model, wherein the Team Lead is integrated and embedded into the team’s work and dynamics. We intend to cultivate a strong ministry team where each member provides leadership. In this model, the Team Lead assumes the responsibility of ensuring the team's smooth functioning. This involves maintaining focus, facilitating processes, and ensuring open and effective communication channels. The overarching goal is to establish a cohesive unit where every team member actively contributes to leadership, in an environment of collaboration, celebration, and shared responsibility.

The CM Team is dedicated to reaching clarity, understanding, and alignment with the team's goals. Our approach hinges on trust, recognizing and valuing each team member's gifts, expertise, and perspective. We believe in our collective ability to navigate challenges with humility and devise the most effective strategies for achieving our goals collaboratively.

When anyone has a specific inquiry regarding responsibilities or needs guidance on whom to approach for a particular matter, feel free to contact any member of the team—Laura, Kathy, Lisa, and Naomi, or reach out to all team members collectively. We will work together to identify, implement, and respond with the next steps to assist others effectively.



### **Description of Work**

Starting in the spring of 2023, Laura, Kathy, Lisa, and Naomi, began meeting with the objective of gaining clarity on the team's role in this new structure. Our collective efforts have been geared towards developing conference-wide offerings that align with the overarching strategic priorities and goals of the Conference Leadership Council. Our commitment to the life and mission of Jesus is reflected in the three comprehensive initiatives of **Innovation & Incubation, Communities of Belonging, Faith Formation**, all rooted in our foundational **relationship with God**.

The intention is to create initiatives that generate momentum to meet the priorities of the Conference Leadership Council and resonate with our United Methodist congregations and leaders, nurturing spiritual growth and belonging.

### **Innovation & Incubation**

CLC priority: Developing Leaders, Financial Sustainability, Sharing God's Love

*Look! I'm doing a new thing; now it sprouts up; don't you recognize it? I'm making a way in the desert, paths in the wilderness. Isaiah 43:19 (CEB)*

This initiative of the Michigan Conference is where leaders bring their ministry ideas to fruition. The overarching Innovation & Incubation initiative offers support in the form of regular one-on-one and/or group coaching, as well as content-rich cohort gatherings and peer resourcing, allowing leaders the opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences with peers. Their ideas and energy will drive their progress, with consistent support from coaches, peers, and events to keep the motivation high to launch a new missional ministry. Innovation & Incubation is the overarching initiative that may include the following: Seed to Harvest (facilitating a process from 'seed' to 'harvest,' new ideas, new ministries, local church innovations), Transition Coaching and Coaching Innovators, Support long term strategic planning and development of objectives, goals and actions steps of Boards/Committees/Divisions, Grant Management & Grant Writing Training and Cohorts.

### **Communities of Belonging**

CLC priority: Building the Beloved Community, Developing Leaders, Sharing God's Love

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 (NRSV Updated Edition)*

Diversity + Equity + Inclusion = Belonging. Communities of belonging empower members to feel accepted, respected, and interconnected, promoting a sense of unity and shared identity that transcends individual differences. This includes a breadth of diversity in all areas of ministry.

--Diversity is the wide range of perspectives, backgrounds, and characteristics from a variety of human experiences.

--Equity ensures that everyone has equal opportunities and resources to thrive.

--Inclusion actively invites and respects the unique contributions of each member, strengthening the bonds that unite the community and reinforcing that everyone has a place and is valued.

Communities of Belonging is the overarching initiative that may include the following: Working with and supporting individuals, congregations, committees whose identities have been historically marginalized, Support long term strategic planning and development of objectives, goals and action steps of Boards/Committees/Divisions, Cross Racial/Cross Cultural Appointments Support (Working with the Appointive Cabinet to create a comprehensive plan), Intercultural Development Inventory and Plan, Collaborating and working with the Anti-Bias/Anti-Racism Working Group, Campus Ministries, Cohorts, and Protection Policy.

### **Faith Formation**

CLC priority: Sharing God's Love, Developing Leaders

*...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. Ephesians 4:12-13 (NRSV Updated Edition)*

Faith formation is a lifelong process of nurturing and deepening one's relationship with God through the study of Scripture, Christian practices (i.e. prayer), worship, and the Christian community. It empowers individuals to embody their faith in service, love, and transformative action in the world. The work in the faith formation area will create flexible, relevant, and responsive spaces for deepening faith. Faith Formation is the overarching initiative that may include the following: Lifelong Faith Formation Development, Cohorts related to Faith Formation, Lifelong Faith Website, Collaboration across Conferences and Ecumenically, YA Discernment and YA Intern Summer Opportunities, and Collaborative Vision & Values Work and Local Church Leadership Support.

### **Implementation and Tools**

A holistic approach to fostering the three initiatives will be implemented using a comprehensive set of tools and components. Here is a breakdown of the tools and components:

- **Anti-Bias/Anti-Racism Work** – In the Michigan Conference the named priority is 'building the beloved community.' This work is intentional inclusion and addressing and dismantling systemic racism and oppression. This involves educational programs, open dialogues, kind truth-telling and hearing, and initiatives that promote inclusivity, equality, and justice. By actively engaging in anti-bias and anti-racism work, we strive to create an environment that welcomes and embraces diversity with equity and just avenues of belonging.
- **Cohorts** – These smaller groups provide a structured framework for individuals to learn, connect, share experiences, challenge, and support one another. These ongoing gatherings nurture a sense of belonging and accountability, creating spaces where individuals can delve deeper into their faith, share their personal journeys, and collectively work towards community and personal growth.
- **Coaching** – Coaches provide just-in-time support by asking questions and challenging the one being coached to set and reach their goals. Using deep listening, coaches ask questions to trigger deeper contemplation, providing a sounding board that allows the coachee to think more deeply and profoundly than they would without coaching. Coaching begins with a hoped-for outcome. Unlike counseling, mentoring,

teaching, or consulting, coaching challenges the one being coached to think differently to discover new perspectives. These perspectives, in turn, invite and empower movement toward action.

- **Leadership Development** – The Michigan Conference prioritizes developing ministry leaders through building relationships and deepening the competencies and well-being of its leaders. The purpose of our leadership development is to strengthen leaders' current gifts and talents and provide them with new skills for leading where God calls, in diverse contexts, communities, and ministries.
- **Mission & Justice** – The mission and justice component centers around actively engaging in social justice initiatives and mission-oriented work within the three overarching initiatives. The goal is to use a mission and justice lens, ensuring that individuals and communities holding historically marginalized, forgotten, or overlooked identities are centered, rather than being an afterthought or not considered at all.

Each of these above tools plays a unique and interconnected role in the overall framework, ensuring a dynamic approach to Innovation & Incubation, Communities of Belonging, and Faith Formation. Through these intentional strategies, the goal is to create an environment that not only nurtures personal faith and spiritual growth but also cultivates a collective sense of purpose and belonging.

### **Specific Contacts**

1. Anti-Bias/Anti-Racism (ABAR) Curriculum Content and ABAR Working Group – Lisa Batten
2. Intercultural Development Inventory – Naomi García
3. Protection Policy – Kathy Pittenger
4. Team Lead – Laura Witkowski

## **CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL**

The CLC spent much of 2023 clarifying its identity. Reflecting on its past purpose we enjoyed visioning about the role the CLC will play in all that is coming alive in the Michigan Annual Conference. In recent years, the CLC has been a space for reporting the goals and accomplishments of the Boards and Agencies in addition to staff reports and conversations about conference finances. With the staffing and budgetary changes of 2022, we recognized that we need to remain in alignment with who we have been while also thinking more deeply about our connections with conference leaders, staff, the Cabinet and the Council on Finance and Administration. We are especially grateful to those who have served the CLC and will be leaving our team: Rev. Joel Fitzgerald and Rev. Eric Mulanda. In addition, we are happy to welcome lay member Sherman Louis to our team this year.

Working closely with Bishop Bard, Jennie Browne (Clergy Assistant to the Bishop/Director of Connectional Ministries), Laura Witkowski (Lead) Connectional Ministry Team, CFA, and the Cabinet we continue to be vigilant stewards of the Michigan Conference's vision and strategy. Remaining true to the work done in 2020 by the Bishop's Strategy Task Force we are focused on holding the ministries of our conference accountable to the following four strategic directions:

1. Sharing God's Love with Others: Renewed Passion for Personal Faith Formation & Sharing
2. Building the Beloved Community: Intentional Equity and the Dismantling of Systemic Racism
3. Development of Leaders: Equipped to Lead the Conference in its New Priorities
4. Financial Sustainability: Through the Redirection of Financial Resources

We trust that building transparent, collaborative partnerships with our Conference Staff is crucial to the growth and transformation of The United Methodist Church in Michigan. Supporting and affirming their work, alongside that of our Boards and Agencies, is crucial to continually equipping our pastors and lay-persons to serve as they are called. For this reason, the Conference Staff will join the CLC for three of their five annual meetings this year.

In 2023 the CLC offered grant funding to three ministry initiatives that reflect our strategic directions:

1. Immigration Law and Justice Network-MI (Formerly JFON-MI) utilized the funding to improve the efficiency of their intake process, which allowed for a better allocation of staff and a more accurate way to track call data from potential clients.
2. Sacred Ink, a project of The Wesley Foundation at the University of Michigan, utilized the grant to help bring their ideas to life. Alongside additional funding, the CLC grant made it possible for them to hire two student freelance photographers.
3. The Michigan Conference Communications Team received a grant to fund the Christmas Eve Service Campaign. This method of online advertising connected searchers with local United Methodist Church Christmas Eve worship services. The campaign was successful, leading to a 69% increase in web traffic during the days between 12/17 – 12/24.

Trusting in the movement and power of the Holy Spirit, the CLC looks forward with hope to all that is before us as we continue to do our best to support and encourage our conference leaders.

Devon Herrell, President of Conference Leadership Council

### **DIRECTOR OF CONNECTIONAL MINISTRIES**

As part of the restructuring of Conference staff that occurred over the course of 2023, the roles of **Clergy Assistant to the Bishop** and **Director of Connectional Ministry (DCM)** were combined beginning July 1, 2023. Former DCM Rev. Paul Perez began a new appointment as Clergy Leader of Detroit: Central UMC and I, relying on God's grace, took on many of the responsibilities that Paul had so ably handled. This combined role is made possible only by the distribution of several roles & tasks previously held by the DCM to others, both staff and non-staff.

I begin this report, then, by offering deep gratitude to those whose plates have also gotten fuller: Bishop Bard plays an active role with the **Anti-Bias/Anti-Racism Task Force**, which is currently restructuring its membership and reviewing its goals.

Laura Witkowski leads the **Connectional Ministries (CM) Team** which also includes Lisa Batten, Naomi Garcia, and Kathy Pittenger. They have done significant work to redefine their own roles

after last year's staff reductions. Please see their report for a greater understanding of their new team-based approach.

Many board and agency members and leaders now find themselves handling responsibilities that used to be cared for by staff members. From writing budget proposals to strategic planning, their tasks and roles have changed. CM Team members and District Superintendents are working diligently to help as they are able, but this is not an easy or comfortable transition. My prayer is that the result will be that our conference ministries, programs, and outreach efforts become more focused and effective as they are directly led by more of our very capable laity and clergy. This is truly a culture change, which is never easy or fast, but which can be holy, Spirit-led work.

Led by Chairperson Rev. Devon Herrell, the **Conference Leadership Council (CLC)** has cultivated a closer connection to the CM Team and leaders of Conference boards and agencies. The CLC Budget Subcommittee (Cora Glass, Mary Gladstone-Highland, Jerry DeVine) and I worked with CFO Angie Anger and the Budget Subcommittee of the Council on Finance & Administration (CFA) to propose a balanced **2025 Annual Conference budget** of approximately \$8.5 million. The CFA approved that proposal, and the Annual Conference will be voting on it at the 2024 session. The relatively new Zero-Based Budget process that is used to build proposals is tied to the CLC's four strategic priorities; my hope is that we will continue to tweak that process so that it promotes a greater understanding of those strategic priorities by those who develop budget proposals.

As a reminder, the four strategic priorities set by our Conference Leadership Council in 2020 are:

- Developing Leaders – equipping leaders in relation to the conference's new priorities.
- Sharing God's Love – renewed passion for personal faith formation and sharing for congregational vibrancy.
- Building Beloved Community – intentional equity and the dismantling of systemic racism.
- Financial Sustainability – redirecting our resources.

I'm honored to work with many other leaders and groups as DCM:

- An excellent **Nominations Committee**, led by Rev. Dr. Tara Gay, that prioritizes diversity in its many forms as they seek to identify and deploy the best leaders for Conference groups.
- A creative new partnership between the Board of Global Ministries, the Board of Congregational Life, and the Cabinet as we look for the best way to understand, support, and learn from our **mission congregations**.
- An ad hoc group led by Board of Trustees co-chair Matt DeLong to plan for **office consolidation** as the Finance & Administration and Benefits & Pensions departments move their offices to the 1011 Northcrest Conference Center. This will result in significant savings in the Conference budget in 2025.
- Our **Disaster Response** interim co-coordinators, Revs. Bob Miller and Kayla Roosa, and the Executive Director of our affiliated non-profit **After The Storm**, Nancy Money, as together we ensure Conference preparedness to respond to natural disasters and the long-term needs that follow them.

There are many times when I'm not sure which "hat" I'm wearing: the DCM's or the Clergy Assistant's. The answer in those situations is probably both! The difference between the two is that the Clergy Assistant role is primarily internally focused, while much of the DCM's work is externally focused. The DCM role has reacquainted me with the outward-reaching ministries of the church – the hallmark of United Methodism.

It's a unique privilege to occupy this combined role and witness the dedicated work of so many talented and deeply faithful United Methodists. While we often feel burdened by the demands of this time and the uncertainties of our future, I firmly believe that God is using this moment to call us to a new way of being and doing. God calls us *and* provides us with all that we need to live into that call. We don't always recognize the signs or trust our abilities, but together, with each other and with God, we are able. We will be transformed by it. Thanks be to God!

Rev. Dr. Jennifer Browne

### **Committee on the Episcopacy**

The Committee on the Episcopacy is directed to support the assigned bishop to their area. It provides guidance to the bishop and direct staff so they can effectively live into their ministry through self-care, family support and professional assistance.

The year 2023 has offered many ways the episcopacy has been impacted.

- Supporting Bishop Bard who was coming off of a shared responsibility of covering the Minnesota Conference with the Michigan Conference, during a temporary need from the North Central Jurisdiction Committee on Episcopacy. Bishop Bard led this assignment with amazing efficiency. Our committee supported him and Julie as they navigated this call.
- Bishop Bard was reassigned to the Michigan Area in July and our committee worked with the NCJ COE to enable this process. We celebrated having the Bards back with us in ministry together.
- Supporting Bishop Bard as he and his staff navigated the disaffiliation process here in Michigan. This was a very taxing time both emotionally and systematically. Bishop Bard led with grace and compassion through it all. Our charge as a committee was to encourage care for his personal and professional needs.

As we look to the future, the Michigan Area, and the entire denomination, will be looking at new opportunities to shape the future of the church. We will look at; new models of episcopacy assignments, possible regionalization of the US church and ways the denomination can expand its' ministry with a needy world.

We commit to shepherding our episcopal leader through these opportunities and challenges.

Nichea VerVeer Guy  
Chair: Michigan Committee on Episcopacy

### **Commission On Equitable Compensation**

2023 was a challenging year for Equitable Compensation, and we met the challenge. Cuts in the Conference Budget hit us all. Equitable Compensation received grant requests from twenty-eight churches exceeding our budget by over \$150,000. The challenge was to use our funds the best way we could. This meant that many churches received less than they requested and left some churches not receiving anything. In spite of the challenges and difficult decisions that needed to be made, we look forward to a bright future as The Michigan Conference discovers the new things that God is doing in our midst.

Rev. Dr. Mona Joslyn, Chair

### **COUNCIL ON FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

The Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) continues to work diligently on managing the finances of the Conference. In the face of continued financial difficulties in many of our local churches and the impact of disaffiliation and closures, CFA, our Conference CFO and the Treasury & Benefits staff continue to streamline processes, identify cost-saving efficiencies, and implement stronger fiscal controls.

Ministry Shares payments, by percentage, appeared to increase in 2023, buoyed by the impact of disaffiliation payments. Of the apportioned \$10,343,419 in Ministry Shares, \$7,521,551.98, or 72%, was paid. This total includes Ministry Share payments from the 119 disaffiliating congregations, so a reduced amount of receipts is anticipated going forward. We anticipate additional reductions in 2024 and beyond.

We must continue to acknowledge that there are local churches who consistently underperform in Ministry Shares remittances. Also, there are clergy who say they want their churches to pay their full Ministry Shares but the churches they serve exhibit patterns of underpayment over extended periods of time. These actions are inconsistent with The Book of Discipline. Paragraph 812 of the Discipline states that the payment of the World Service Apportionment is the first benevolent responsibility of the church. Paragraph 340.2.c(2)(e) of the Discipline charges elders and licensed pastors with leading their congregations in the full and faithful payment of all apportioned funds. While we do not currently have a recommendation regarding this underperformance, we do recognize that this needs to be addressed to promote accountability among the churches and clergy of the conference. Addressing this continues to be a challenge to CFA going forward. The Treasury and Benefits staff also accomplished many tasks in 2023. In addition to the day-to-day workload of the offices, the staff continues to manage the processes around local church closings and disaffiliations, both of which increased this past year.

Three of the Treasury & Benefit teams' major accomplishments for 2023 were:

- Transition to Sage Intacct accounting system and Bill.com including training for staff, board and agency leaders, and vendors
- Completion of 2022 fiscal year audit
- Hiring of new Director of Benefits and Human Resources following Don Emmert's retirement.

In 2024, the Treasury department will finalize regular and implement a regular reporting schedule for staff and agencies using the new Sage Intacct, complete update of Designated and Temporary Restricted Funds and continue their work with Benefits update and refine financial policies and procedures.

### **BOARD OF GLOBAL MINISTRIES**

The Board of Global Ministries is grateful to steward the vision and work of the Michigan Annual Conference as we express the total mission of the church in the context of a global setting. We do this by nurturing mission and ministry relationships across the Conference; through storytelling that celebrates the impact and witness the Church has in the world; and by anchoring all of our mission and ministry work in the strong name of Jesus Christ.

In 2023, we celebrate the following activities and accomplishments:

- The launch of “Starting and Sustaining,” an occasional event for individuals and churches from across the Annual Conference to come together for stories and networking related to launching and maintaining projects, programs, and ministries dedicated to mission.
- MIConnect continued to highlight stories of missional impact carried out by BGM-supported ministries across the Conference.
- Over \$300,000 was raised to support the Readers to Leaders Campaign, which highlighted two EngageMI projects: K-12 scholarships for Liberian schoolchildren and the Michigan Children Defense Fund Freedom Schools program.
- \$171,436 raised for mission and ministry through EngageMI
- 3,205 total gifts worth \$1,218,472 were given to GBGM projects, including General Advance Projects, Missionary Support, and UMCOR, among others.

The Board of Global Ministries invites all who are passionate about nurturing mission and ministry to join us in the work of nurturing relationships, storytelling, and spiritual grounding the Conference’s global ministry and mission support. While interested folks may join the Board by submitting their interest to the Nominations Committee and being elected by the entire Conference, we are always on the lookout for interested volunteers to join us in our various projects. These include supporting the administration and evaluation of EngageMI projects; supporting Mission and Ministry Fair activities and the Prayer Labyrinth at Annual Conference; and occasional events during the year, like “Starting and Sustaining.” Please contact us at [CBGM-Chair@michiganumc.org](mailto:CBGM-Chair@michiganumc.org).

I am grateful for the 2 years I’ve served the Board as Chairperson. After the 2024 AC session, I will step off the executive committee, as Chair-elect Rev. Dillon Burns assumes leadership of the Board. Dillon is a patient, grace-filled, and dynamic leader who has both vision and passion for the work of global ministries – here in Michigan and around the world. The Board – and the church – are blessed to have him.

Finally, the Board wishes to celebrate and acknowledge Rev. Alice Fleming Townley who served the church on conference staff for several years and was the Board’s liaison and chief supporter, encourager, cheerleader, and animator. Alice has been a dear friend and gifted administrator, supporting me as Chair and the entire Executive Committee. We miss her dearly, we honor her



service to us and the church, and we give God thanks for her devotion to God and her heart for mission and service.

Rev. Alex Plum Chairperson

### **CONFERENCE SECRETARY OF GLOBAL MINISTRIES**

The Conference Board of Global Ministries embraced a new future of connectional and relational ministry by welcoming six itinerating missionaries to Michigan Conference in 2023—the largest number since pre-pandemic times.

In May, Joy Eva Bohol, a native of the Philippines serving in Switzerland, visited several Michigan congregations to share about her work with young people in the World Council of Churches. She also shared about her upcoming role as the UMCOR Migration Specialist for Europe.

In June, T. and J.J. Park, missionaries South Korea and the United States, visited both the 2023 Michigan Annual Conference and southeast Michigan area churches. The Parks shared about their congregational development and Christian education work in Southeast Asia.

In September and October, Temba Nkomozepe took a one-and-a-half-month tour across Michigan to share about his agricultural and educational ministries at Mujila Falls Agricultural Center in Zambia. Dr. Nkomozepe, whose home country is Zimbabwe, was also present at the Starting and Sustaining ministry event, hosted by the Conference Board of Global Ministries in Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

In October, Umba Ilunga and Ngoy Mulanga Kalangwa, rounded out the year of visits, sharing about their congregational development and women's empowerment ministries in Tanzania. The Kalangwas are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Both longtime supporters and new partner churches across the conference collaborated to host these itinerating missionaries. We celebrate the hospitality of our Michigan United Methodist Church and are grateful for the ways that our connectional web has been strengthened for future visits.

We also celebrate that, at each of these visits, stories of God's transformation and mercy were shared and all were invited into deeper connection in ministry. This spirit of partnership, connection, and enthusiasm for our ministry of love-together has surely set a strong foundation for a new, fearless future. We look forward to many new opportunities for connection in 2024!

Audra Hudson Stone, CSGM

### **ENGAGE MICHIGAN**

**EngageMI!** is the mission engagement program for the Michigan Conference. EngageMI challenges Michigan Conference congregations to comprehensive missional learning, giving, and action with the goal of encouraging congregations to shift from transactional "ministry to" models to relational "ministry with" vulnerable people and communities. The EngageMI! program consists of three focus areas: Learn, Give, Act. Congregations who meet the requirements in all three areas will be

recognized as “EngageMI! Congregations.” You can find more information about the program online at [www.michiganumc.org/engage-mi](http://www.michiganumc.org/engage-mi).

### **2023 ENGAGEM! Congregations**

All the following churches submitted reports. Those in bold completed all the steps to become a 2023 EngageMI! Congregation.

**Central Bay District – Coleman Faith, Farwell, Midland: First, Riverdale: Lincoln Road, Saginaw: First, Sanford, Turk Lake.**

**East Winds District- Burton: Open Door, Clio, Fenton, Flint: Bethel, Flint: Court Street, Fostoria, Gaines, Grand Blanc, Howarth, Laingsburg, Lexington, Marysville, Mayville, Mt. Morris, Otisville, Owendale, Paint Creek, Pigeon: First, Plymouth :First, Port Hope, Port Huron: First, Romeo, Sandusky, Shaftsburg: Faith Community, Thetford Center, Vassar: First, Watrousville.**

**Greater Detroit District- Bellville, Birmingham First, Carleton, Dearborn: Good Shepherd, Detroit: Cass Community, Farmington Hills: Orchard, Grosse Pointe, Livonia: St. Matthew, Monroe: St Paul, Northville, S. Rockwood, Troy: Big Beaver, Walled Lake, West Bloomfield, Wyandotte: First**

**Greater Southwest District- Battle Creek Chapel Hill, Centreville, Coldwater, Coloma, Colon, Fennville, Gobles, Kalamazoo: Westwood, Lake Odessa: Central, Nashville, Niles: New Journey, Portage: Chapel Hill, Scotts.**

**Heritage District- Bancroft, Brighton, Delta Mills, Eaton Rapids, Gunnisonville, Jackson: First, Hillsdale: First, Holt, Howell , Jackson: First, Lansing: Grace, Mason: First, Milford, North Lake, Oak Grove, Plymouth: First, Saline: First, South Lyons.**

**Northern Skies – Escanaba: First, Gladstone: Memorial, Hancock: First, Iron Mountain: Trinity, Lake City, Munising, Oscoda, West Branch.**

**Western Waters- Cadillac: South Community, Grand Rapids: St. Paul, Grandville, Grawn, Lowell: First, Ludington: United, Marion, Old Mission Peninsula, Rockford, White Cloud.**

All the churches told God-filled stories of ministry. I wish that everyone could read all the amazing stories of ministry that I read in these reports. Despite still recovering from the pandemic and dealing with the pain of disaffiliating congregations, the United Methodists in Michigan are still doing God’s work, locally and globally. All to the Glory of God!

Laurie Kaufman de la Garza, EngageMI Coordinator

### **VOLUNTEERS IN MISSION**

The 2023 Michigan Volunteer In Mission (VIM) Report is seeing recovery with increasing Domestic Mission Teams reporting, while International Teams are at a minimum. The Michigan UMC VIM Program serves Domestic and International Ministries endorsed by UMC Partner Churches and non-governmental agencies in cooperation with local hosts. Volunteers work as teams or individuals to provide work and support as requested by mission hosts while building relationships. Mission Teams should have a trained VIM Leader register with North Central Jurisdiction and

provide insurance for all participants. We carefully monitor the safety levels of an area which determine if a team should travel/work in a location.

Michigan offers three Domestic Mission Sites: Newberry Michigan/God's Country Cooperative Parish (rural poverty), Randy Hildebrandt, Missionary; Cass Community (inner city Detroit), Sue Pethoud, Church and Community Relations Liaison; and Motown Mission, Carl Gladstone, Director. All sites are open to teams from around the US and request calendaring in advance of team participation. Sites are visited on an annual basis and Mission Team participation numbers are shared across the Jurisdiction.

North Central Jurisdictional Teams 2023, figures taken from teams requesting insurance (Michigan sent eleven teams purchasing insurance/registering). Our numbers are down from last year in terms of registering, but about the same if the direct registrations for domestic missions are counted. For example, seventeen MI Teams worked at Midwest Distribution Center (IL), but did not register as a VIM Team. Groups work in the categories of construction, health care, and disaster recovery.

One Youth Team from Michigan participated in the Y2023 Jurisdictional Event (Florida) and we anticipate several attending the Des Moines (IA) June 2024 NCJ sponsored event.

Early Response, Connecting Neighbors and VIM Training are available as needed by MI Conference VIM Trainers. Michigan VIM offers a \$150 scholarship and reimbursement for VIM insurance for first time Michigan Conference Mission Participants. Teams must have a trained VIM Team Leader and apply through the scholarship process with the MI VIM Coordinator. Information is also on the conference web or by contacting Jody Pratt MI VIM, [prattgji09@gmail.com](mailto:prattgji09@gmail.com).

Donations to the MI VIM First Time International Missioner Scholarship Fund can be made to:

Michigan Conference Center, Att'n Treasury, Rich Pittenger, Line 4413, 1011 Northcrest Rd, Lansing, MI, 48906. Scholarship funding is also listed as part of the ENGAGE Program.

Building relationships, experience, and living out our mission journey is the call Christ placed in our lives. Blessings on your life as you consider a mission journey. Check the North Central Jurisdiction site listing the opportunities available around the world or the Michigan Conference or contact MI VIM Coordinator Jody Pratt: [prattgji09@gamil.com](mailto:prattgji09@gamil.com).

Jody A. Pratt, Michigan VIM Coordinator

### **HISPANIC AND LATINO MINISTRIES**

The Michigan Conference Hispanic and Latino Ministries is supported by the Michigan Conference, the National Plan for Hispanic and Latino Ministries, and by other grants the committee has received. The vision of Hispanic/Latino Ministries in the Michigan Conference is to be a vibrant connection of disciples of Jesus Christ transforming our church and our communities by intentionally training leaders to be engaged in the creation of faith communities who are responsive, inclusive, multicultural, multigenerational, and proactively practicing social justice.

The committee focuses on distributing the grant funds it receives among congregations and organizations in the Michigan area that engage in the life and conditions of the Hispanic and Latino

community. Our efforts and resources have been supporting Centro Familiar Cristiano, La Nueva Esperanza, ministry with the Spanish-speaking community in Lawrence, Immigration, Law & Justice Michigan, workshops and training for responsive, inclusive, multicultural, multigenerational, and proactive leaders.

### **HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

The Human Resources (HR) Committee remains focused on working to support the Michigan Conference through HR policy development and interpretation; and advising and facilitating appropriate HR practices. We work to develop and offer the structure for successful employment practices throughout the conference. During the 2022-2023 conference year the committee met via Zoom four times to review policy issues and provide interpretations and guidance on conference HR policies.

In 2022 – 2023, the committee approved several changes to the HR policy in an effort to clarify and streamline practices including adding language about the maximum length of sick leave once paid sick leave is exhausted and merging the vacation and personal day banks into one bank. We continue to monitor, in conjunction with conference staff, HR conference policies for those that need to be added and updated.

Members of the committee worked with conference directors during the downsizing of staff in 2023. This included seeking an outplacement firm to provide services for employees who were leaving, developing a template for severance pay offers, among other activities. Members of the committee assisted conference staff in filling vacancies through serving on interview teams, writing job descriptions, offering advice on employment status (contractor, salaried and hourly status, etc.), and counseling on performance improvement and other HR issues. This year, we also worked with the Board of Pension and Health Benefits to welcome a new Director of Conference Benefits/Coordinator of Human Resources to replace the retiring director.

We strive to keep conference HR policies and practices in line with state and federal laws and regulations. In addition, we seek to research best practices in Human Resources management and offer suggestions to the staff in that area.

**Rev. Ellen Zienert, Chair, Conference HR Committee**

### **BOARD OF JUSTICE**

“Justice, justice shall you pursue,” say the writers of the Hebrew Scriptures (Deuteronomy 16:20a). Justice, let it roll down like waters (Amos 5:24), let it be the core of who we are (Micah 6:8), let it be seen (Zechariah 7:9) in the ways we treat one another and all creation.. Midst all the headlines and systemic ills that confront us, your Conference Board of Justice serves as a prophetic voice, standing in the gap between the way things are and what they could become. Through education, awareness, and advocacy, your Conference Board of Justice seeks to offer positive visions and

actions for our congregations and communities in the pursuit of justice (See each division report below).

The Rev. George Covintree is the outgoing chairperson of the Board of Justice (BoJ). Dale Milford (Division of Religion and Race) and Pat Bostic (Division on the Status and Role of Women) currently serve as co-chairs of board. The Rev. Alice Townley now serves as our Justice and Advocacy Consultant. Each of our four divisions has its own chairperson/convener and has sought to broaden their membership beyond those serving on the BoJ. Two of our division chairs serve on the Bishop's Anti-Bias Anti-Racism Working Group: Ernestine Campbell (Religion & Race) and the Rev. Albert Rush (Church & Society).

Four task forces/working groups have been established by the board within the Division of Church and Society: Advocacy Day, chaired by the Rev. Michelle King; the Gun Safety Working Group co-chaired by the Revs. Ian Boley and Tim Woycik; the Task Force Promoting Justice in the Middle East, chaired by Randie Clawson; and the Eco-Justice Task Force co-chaired by the Rev. Audra Hudson Stone and Jacob Stone.

\*The Board continues to work to strengthen its divisions and build networks with community and faith-based organizations in the pursuit of justice. Planning is underway for a board training, identity, and call event in the Fall when our newly elected chair and board members are in place.

\*The BoJ continues to provide regular articles for MiConnect and sponsor Conference-wide Lunch and Learn sessions on Advocacy How To's ; Accessibility Resources for Churches; and Mental Health Care.

\*Annual Conference adopted a resolution brought by the board and its Task Force Promoting Justice in the Middle East calling for justice for Palestinians in Isreal, Gaza and the West Bank, providing steps and resources to raise the awareness of our congregations to this issue.

\*Your board continues to promote the **Peace With Justice Sunday** Special Offering (50% of which stays in our Conference). Due to key staff reductions and reorganization at the Conference level, the BoJ decided to use these funds for part-time consultant support for Advocacy Day and to work with us in the Conference office.

\*Funds were allocated from our operating budget to cover the costs overruns from last year's Advocacy Day and support for Advocacy Day this year.

\*Support continued for JFON, now Immigration Law & Justice Michigan.

\*Grants were approved from the Brubaker-Thompson Peace Fund for three pastors from our conference to travel to the Holy Lands (the war in Gaza has put a hold on current travel).

This past year our focus has been on advocacy. Charged by Annual Conference in 2022, your BoJ set about to create an Advocacy Day in Lansing to address the issue of gun violence in Michigan. What the press and legislators called the “Methodist Miracle”, as 350 United Methodists and friends descended on the State Capitol, became “Evangelism Day” as faith was put into action and perceptions of the church and Christian witness widened. Three common-sense gun safety bills were passed (two that very day). All were signed into law by the Governor and now they are in effect. Thanks go out to all who made Advocacy Day an amazing experience for all involved. The pursuit of justice continues.

In the past our efforts have been more awareness raising and educating folks on an issue with state-wide gatherings like *Keep Making Peace*. While still vital to who we are, your board has decided to continue to develop and sponsor Advocacy Day as a yearly event for the Conference. This year’s issue will be mental health and the legislation needed to improve access to mental health care for all Michigan residents. Advocacy Day, March 13, 2024 and the training events and planning leading up to that day, have been our major focus as we end the Conference year and begin a new one.

In closing, I would like to lift up one of our Board members who died this past Fall, the Rev. Eric Stone. Eric was a champion for peace. He was a true JEDI, an advocate for justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. His humor and wisdom, his irreverence and heart (he named us the Justice League) are greatly missed. You’d make “good trouble” working with Eric Stone. Présenté, Eric Stone. Présenté!

And as this is my last Historical Report as chairperson of the Board of Justice, I’d like to say thank you to the Board members and staff persons I have worked with over the years and all who had confidence in me that together we could build a Conference-wide Board of Justice. When I began as chair, we were not yet one conference. Other than the outline set out in the Conference rules for the make up of a Board of Justice, you could say much of what we have accomplished resembles building an airplane while in mid flight. Covid didn’t help nor the divisions within the church as a whole. But we continued to grow and are growing still. Our task continues to be that of a prophetic voice for the church, creating awareness to the social issues of our time, educating and informing ourselves and our congregations of the cry for justice wherever it is raised, and providing avenues for action and social witness and to do it all, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, once said, with a “heart full of grace and a soul generated by love.” The pursuit of justice continues.

Along with myself, three other members terms have ended this Annual Conference: the Rev. Cory Simon (C&S); Sarah Hercula and the Rev. Jenaba Waggy (SROW). Clarice McKenzie (C&S) has also asked to step down from the Board after many faithful years of service. To the four of you, your passion and presence, your support and leadership were much appreciated and treasured. Well done! Thank you!

George Covintree, Chairperson, Board of Justice

### **CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

As part of the Board of Justice (BoJ) of the Michigan Conference the Division of Church and Society has divided its efforts into four task forces/work areas.

The 2024 Advocacy Day Steering committee which will coordinate the gathering of Michigan Area Methodist and Friends on March 13, 2024, to Advocate for the passing of three Mental Health Care legislative priorities. Our first priority is to ensure that all insurance policies cover Mental health & Physical health and same level. Secondly, we will be advocating for an increase of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics providing availability of affordable care in many rural in low-income areas. In addition, we are requesting an overall increase in state funding for all areas of Mental Health Care.

The Michigan United Methodist (MIUMC) Gun Safety Coalition will continue the work of promoting Gun Safety laws and education after the successful adoption of the 2023 Advocacy Day legislative priorities of Safe Storage law, Extreme Risk Protection Orders law and Protections for Domestic Violence Survivors law. The Rev. Ian Boley and Rev. Tim Woycik have agreed to continue the Rev. Heather McDougall-Walsh who has been appointed to a new position in the New York Conference. At the 2023 Michigan Annual Conference we voted to establish the Task Force Promoting Justice in the Middle East. In addition, the Michigan Conference Board of Justice (BOJ) voted to establish an Environmental Justice Taskforce. Those taskforces are working to educate and advocate for these pressing social Justice issues in our society. You can view both those reports in the following pages. At the 2023 Michigan Annual Conference we voted to establish the Task Force Promoting Justice in the Middle East. In addition, the Michigan Conference Board of Justice (BOJ) voted to establish an Environmental Justice Taskforce. Those taskforces are working to educate and advocate for these pressing social Justice issues in our society. You can view both those reports in the following pages.

Finally, I continue to represent the BOJ division of Church and Society on the Michigan Conference Anti-Bias/Anti-Racism (ABAR) working group.

Rev. Albert L. Rush  
Convener of MIUMC Division of Church and Society

### **ANTI-GUN VIOLENCE**

The Anti-Gun Violence Coalition is still gathering to fight the good fight in regard to supporting sensible gun legislation that will keep us as safe as can be in these violent times in which we live. In light of the fact that Heather Walsh has taken on a new position and has left our coalition, we have received Rev. Ian Boley and Rev. Tim Woycik as our new co-chairs of the coalition. Our first order of business has been to determine if this group will continue to function. The consensus was that we will continue to meet together to gather information and to keep abreast of legislation that will effectively speak to the issue of gun violence in our state and in our country. It was a powerful moment last March to attend Advocacy Day in Lansing and meet with our legislators and encourage them to work for background checks, safe storage of firearms, and legislation that addresses the issue of “red flag” laws. The Methodist Miracle created a ripple effect that brought about legislation that is now law.

We will be keeping this coalition aware of the Advocacy Day this March that will speak to the issue of Mental Health Care and access to it. Ian Boley will continue to work with the Board of Justice and Tim Woycik will connect with End Gun Violence Michigan as well as the Traverse City chapter of Moms Demand Action.

We look forward to doing this holy work along with you.

Shalom,  
Timothy S. Woycik

### **DISABILITY CONCERNS**

The Division on Disability Concerns has been supporting the 2024 Advocacy Day focused on increasing access to mental health care. Our division knows that mental illness affects everyone in one way or another, which makes it a fitting topic for Advocacy Day. We are sharing resources, connecting with local churches and mental health organizations, and spreading the word. We have also been discussing ways to support churches who want to become more accessible or start a disability ministry.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE**

This year, the Michigan Conference Board of Justice celebrated a bold step into the future by affirming the formation of an Environmental Justice Taskforce. This step followed our attendance at the World Council of Church’s Eco School for Europe and North America this November—a program dedicated to developing young adult leadership amidst climate crisis.

While this taskforce is new, it is our intent to lead the conference toward fearless action around the mounting crises of environmental injustice in our region and beyond. We look forward to several scheduled educational programs with Michigan United Methodist communities this spring, where we will offer strategies for faithful witness and response in the face of uncertainty and harm. We



pray that our conference's vision for a bold, fearless future will include an urgent commitment to justice and healing for all of God's creation.

Jacob Stone and Audra Hudson Stone, co-convenors of the Environment Justice Taskforce

### **JUSTICE IN THE MIDDLE EAST TASK FORCE**

This Task Force was established in January 2023, as part of the Division of Church and Society within the Board of Justice. Randie Carlson, a member of Brighton First UMC is the convener.

Starting with five members, the Task Force Promoting Justice in the Middle East has grown to include 140 individuals in what best can be called an information loop. Looking ahead, our goal is to have a contact person in each local UM congregation in the Conference.

The first part of the year our focus was to see that the resolution passed at our 2023 Annual Conference was implemented. The terrorist attacks of October 7th. and the ongoing war against Hamas in Gaza by the Israeli government and the ensuing violence across the Middle East has heightened the urgency of justice for both Palestinians and Israelis. The issue is complex. The Task Force seeks to provide resources and action steps for local congregations that will raise awareness of the history, cultures, faith journeys and justice issues that confront the people of the Middle East. A PowerPoint history of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, created by one of our Task Force members, is available to raise awareness and spark conversations in our churches.

As part of our ongoing work to educate and inform, the Task Force will present two resolutions for the 2024 Annual Conference.

Submitted by Randie Clawson, Chair  
Task Force Promoting Justice in the Middle East

### **RELIGION AND RACE**

The Division of Religion and Race has set goals for the year and scheduled meetings to meet quarterly. The Division participated in a successful Advocacy Day hosted by Central United Methodist Church in Lansing Michigan in March of 2023. The Division participated in a Learning event for the NCJ-CORR held in Springfield, IL. The Division, along with the BOJ, has committed to doing a retreat in the Fall of 2024.

We continue to seek ways to pursue and make a difference in cross culture/cross racial issues throughout our conference as we dialogue and invest in training and advocacy.

In Christ

*Tina Campbell, Convener*  
*Board of Justice - Division on Religion and Race*

**COMMISSION ON THE STATUS AND ROLE OF WOMEN  
(COSROW)**

The purpose of the United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW), provides guiding principles, including “love,” “justice,” “kindness,” “accountability,” “integrity,” “respect,” and “dignity.”

Some of the events from General COSROW are “Embrace the Challenge,” “Empowering Women at General Conference,” “Living on the Edge,” “Healthy Boundaries,” and “Women in Ministry Spiritual Retreat.” On the agenda is the Parental Leave Policy.

Our local team lost some members, including the Rev. Eric Stone, whose voice and spirit will be greatly missed. We are excited to welcome some new members. Our plan is to schedule a series of “Coffee Chats” to discuss COSROW topics. We are happy and excited to be a part of Advocacy Day events.

We pray for full inclusion and participation of Women in Ministry.

Patricia Bostic

**BOARD OF LAITY**

The Board of Laity’s purpose is to

- build awareness of the role of the laity in ministry;
- provide support and direction for the ministry of the laity at all levels of the church;
- provide training for lay members to annual conference;
- and provide organization and support for the development of local church lay leadership.

We seek to equip and develop bold and effective lay leadership across the Michigan Conference.

The Board of Laity once again held two virtual Laity Orientation sessions for Lay Members to Annual Conference to share key information, direct participants to conference materials/websites, form connections, and answer questions prior to annual conference. These online sessions were led by members of the Board of Laity in collaboration with members of the Commission on Annual Conference Session and provided laity with the tools needed to serve as effective, informed lay members to annual conference.

The BOL was pleased to welcome Kimberly R. Daniel, co-author of *A Way Out of No Way: An Approach to Christian Innovation* to lead the 2023 Laity Perspective Event at the Michigan Annual Conference. During the Laity Perspective and following at an informal and engaging fireside chat, Kimberly invited laity and clergy to seek opportunities in unfavorable situations to create “a way out of no way” and align our purpose in making a positive impact in our communities.

The 2023 Board of Laity Training and Resource Grants (up to \$500) were offered for the third annual year to equip leadership, provide continued education, and offer resources for faith formation for laity. Ten applications were received with five grant recipients being selected and funds allocated by the end of the calendar year. The BOL is excited about the innovative and diverse ministries supported by these mini grants. We look forward to receiving summary updates this spring to tell the story of the ways these new ministries are moving forward with Christ to affirm and engage new communities. The Board of Laity is praying for these 2023 BOL Training and Resource Grant

recipients as their ministries emerge: Milwood UMC (ABAR training), Wesley Foundation at CMU (2 attendees at the World Council of Churches 2023 Eco-School), Brightmoor UMC (“Art Therapy and the Word” healing ministry), and First UMC of Ypsilanti (UWF intergenerational book study).

Additional ministry efforts within the BOL include the identification and selection of lay equalization members to annual conference, a conference wide CLM program coordinated by Sharon Appling, and emerging work with members of the Board of Ordained Ministry around healthy transitions for clergy and congregations at times of changes in appointment.

We heartily welcome the service of new members of the Board of Laity who have joined us in 2023: Richard Gorham as the Heritage District Lay Leader and Wendy Clark as the Western Waters District Lay Leader. With the start of 2024, Colleen Croxall joins the BOL as the oncoming Conference Director of Lay Servant Ministries. The BOL is also grateful for the faithful ministries of the members who have completed their terms on the BOL but who we trust will continue to answer God’s call: John Hart, Bonnie Potter, Jody Pratt, and Laura Witkowski. They have blessed us and the conference with years of faithful service through sharing their gifts, dedicating their time, and actively living out their faith as laity in ministry, spreading God’s love with all.

The Board of Laity celebrates the ministry of the laity and eagerly looks ahead to the new ways we can move forward with Christ to equip, enable, empower, and invite lay persons in the Michigan Conference to make disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world.

Annette Erbes  
Conference Lay Leader and Chair of the Board of Laity

### **BOARD OF ORDAINED MINISTRY**

Your Michigan Conference Board of Ordained Ministry has a very full year of launching and supporting professional ministry. The work year for BOM begins with a 24-hour retreat at Grand Traverse Resort just before the business and worship of Annual Conference begins! This is a time for on-boarding new BOM members, reviewing policies and procedures of the Board, and meeting as Interview Teams and Committees to be ready for a new year of work.

At Clergy Session the Board recommended three Provisional Elders, and eight Full Elders. All of these were confirmed by Clergy Session. The work of Clergy Session was again streamlined by making use of a consent calendar for more “proforma” items in the Clergy Session Business of Annual Conference. The BOM carried the work and recommendation of the District Committees on Ministry to the Clergy Session. We celebrated all those who completed Course of Study or graduated Licensing School and serve the congregations of Michigan so very well as Licensed Local Pastors. Likewise, we acknowledge the ministry needs met by District Superintendent Appointments (DSAs).

In the evening, after Clergy Session, we celebrated the 33-some retirees who have served so faithfully for so many years. Tim Zeigler, a member of the BOM, MC’ed a fun night of music, poetry, video testimonies of lives and ministries well-lived. Thanks to Jenaba Waggy, Jeremy Peters, Dillon

Burns and Sari Brown, who all offered their gifts of poetry and music. A reception with desserts and drinks followed the event.

Membership on the Board of Ordained Ministry is in four-year terms, with a two-term run being common and a three-term run being possible with the approval of the Bishop. In 2023-24, we celebrated the ministries of, and said farewell, to Sandra Douglas Bibliomo, Thom Davenport, Lisa Gray-Lion, Carol Hodges, Scott Lindenberg, and Amy Terhune.

The Board of Ordained Ministry continues to be about working with individuals who feel the call of God in their lives, to discern whether that call is, indeed, within The United Methodist Church at this particular time. We understand that this is a sacred trust given to us by the Michigan Conference through Bishop David A. Bard. The work we are about would not be possible without our intentional bathing of that work in prayer and deep trust in the work of the Holy Spirit. On behalf of the BOM, I thank you for the trust you place in us.

Barry Petrucci, Chair

### **ORDER OF DEACONS**

Deacons are called and ordained to word, service, compassion and justice and are charged with connecting the Church and the world and quite often, I am asked to explain exactly what that means. There isn't one answer. The ministry of the deacon is different for every single deacon. One would need to follow every deacon in the Conference around for a week to see just what that means.

In the Michigan Conference, there currently are 29 ordained deacons, 4 commissioned deacons, 27 retired deacons and 7 certified deacon candidates. Some are appointed to churches where they are Christian educators leading adults, children and youth in the deepening of their faith or musicians that coordinate the music for and prepare others to share their talent in worship. Some concentrate their time in the area of pastoral care and do home and hospital visits. Others, many others, lead in service in the world through nonprofits, social work, teaching or other service careers.

We typically gather in the winter and again at Annual Conference to share our stories and best practices in our areas of expertise. After three years of canceling, trying to meet on Zoom and ultimately canceling again, in 2023 we met in Brighton for our annual Deacon's Day with the Bishop (minus the bishop who had Covid) and again at Annual Conference.

As we continue to seek those called to the Order of Deacon, I am encouraged. During the last two years, I have had more calls from individuals, pastors and district superintendents both looking for clarification on the role of a deacon and how to get started in the process, than I have had in all other years combined. In addition, pastors and SPRC chairs are calling to ask if a position they have open might be right for a deacon. Though this is a good thing, it reminds me that we, as deacons, are a mystery.

Not enough laity, or clergy for that matter, really understand the call of a deacon and how deacons can follow that call in so many ways. We'd like to change that. Invite a deacon to visit your congregation. Ask one of us to preach, to assist with Communion or to speak with a group about

how we are answering God's call. Many of us would jump at the chance to share what we do and why we do it.

Sue Pethoud, Chair

## **PENSION AND HEALTH BENEFITS (CBOPHB)**

### **I. MICHIGAN CONFERENCE BENEFITS**

The Michigan Conference is blessed in its ability to provide a strong and valuable ministry of caring through its benefits programs.

#### ***Benefits Billings (BB)***

Benefits Billings (BB) are billed monthly to every local church to fund current conference retirement and welfare plan liabilities as well as all ministries through the Conference Board of Pension & Health Benefits/Benefits Office (CBOPHB). The amount of the Benefits Billing is calculated using a fixed percentage of each church's clergy compensation. The percentage is determined on an annual basis and adjusted to reflect appointments of half time or less, retiree appointments, or District Superintendent Assignments. The monthly BB amount will be based on a flat rate for a local church with no appointment or assignment.

Starting July 1, 2024 the CBOPHB will add a minimum amount for BB so that regardless of appointment and compensation, no church will pay less than \$40 per month in BB.

Additionally, starting January 1, 2024 the Conference Benefits Office began carrying forward prior balances on BB invoices. Previously, at the end of the year, every account was zeroed out. It wasn't that these amounts didn't need to be collected and the CBOPHB did continue to track them, but they never showed up on a church's invoice again. This gave a false sense that churches were not behind in BB payments. It was decided to include these past due amounts starting in 2024 so that churches could see where they actually are on a monthly basis. Only past due amounts from 2023 and moving forward are being reported, but the Conference Benefits Office believe this is an important step in mitigating the ongoing losses that the CBOPHB experiences when churches do not fully pay their BB.

#### ***Health Care***

The CBOPHB reaffirms its commitment to providing a comprehensive, sustainable group health care plan for actives and retirees while constantly assessing the financial realities required by all. Health insurance expenses are billed monthly.

Our decision in 2023 to move from a BCBS self-insured plan to a fully insured group Humana PPO (retirees under age 65) and Humana Medicare Advantage plan (age 65+) has had the intended results: net savings for the plan, lower premiums for 97% of retirees, and a majority of our retirees experiencing lower out-of-pocket costs in 2023.

### **II. PRIOR YEAR BENEFITS-RELATED BALANCES**

Billings generated by the CBOPHB are directly associated with current liabilities for clergy/employee benefits or deferred compensation. Any payments not reimbursed to the CBOPHB by the local church or other agencies, by default, are absorbed by the CBOPHB and ultimately the Annual Conference for the expenses incurred. Therefore, permanent records of outstanding

balances for retirement plan contributions, welfare plan premiums and health care expenses are kept on file by the CBOPHB with the intention to recover the balances in the future.

Historically, BB receipts have been remitted at a high level, usually well above 90%. The 2023 rate of receipt was no different with a 95% rate of collection. That left an approximate unpaid balance of \$159,432. The CBOPHB is grateful for the continued priority that most churches make BB and health insurance premiums.

The following list includes the balances on record as of January 1, 2024 for both BB and health insurance premiums. Please know that these are to the best of our knowledge. If you believe there is an error in this list, please contact The Conference Benefits Office. Previous versions of this report have broken out these balances by District. The Conference Benefits Office believes that it's easier to simply provide an alphabetical listing of all churches in the Conference and has made that change this year.

If left unaddressed, these balances must become part of a local church's financial plan when a local church considers building expansion, merger, separation, or closure. Please contact the Conference Benefits Office to discuss payment options for prior year amounts.

<b>Conf. No.</b>	<b>Church</b>	<b>Benefits Billings</b>	<b>Health</b>	<b>Total</b>
38001	Adrian: First	\$3,010	\$0	\$3,010
39001	Algonac: Trinity	\$479	\$0	\$479
31001	Algonquin	\$532	\$0	\$532
38003	Allen	\$215	\$0	\$215
34003	Amble	\$295	\$0	\$295
38006	Ann Arbor: Korean	\$97,397	\$0	\$97,397
37003	Arden	\$988	\$0	\$988
33004	Auburn	\$1,292	\$0	\$1,292
37006	Bangor: Simpson	\$2,833	\$25,328	\$28,161
34004	Barryton: Faith	\$1,880	\$0	\$1,880
37010	Battle Creek: Christ	\$244	\$22,032	\$22,276
37012	Battle Creek: First	\$2,868	\$1,003	\$3,871
37016	Battle Creek: Washington Hts	\$1,500	\$2,688	\$4,188
33006	Bay Port	\$463	\$0	\$463
34007	Big Rapids: First	\$1,988	\$0	\$1,988
33009	Birch Run	\$5,596	\$7,461	\$13,057
33010	Blanchard-Pine River	\$3,908	\$0	\$3,908
34009	Bowne Center	\$554	\$0	\$554
32012	Boyne City	\$3,211	\$19,508	\$22,719
34010	Bradley: Indian Mission	\$12,191	\$0	\$12,191
35008	Breckenridge	\$1,640	\$0	\$1,640
37021	Bridgman: Faith	\$2,460	\$0	\$2,460

37026	Burr Oak	\$900	\$0	\$900
36009	Burton: Christ	\$12,297	\$0	\$12,297
34012	Byron Center	\$281	\$0	\$281
34013	Caledonia	\$6,423	\$0	\$6,423
38014	Calhoun County: Homer	\$187	\$0	\$187
31005	Calumet	\$141	\$84	\$225
33014	Cass City	\$941	\$1,744	\$2,685
32017	Central Lake	\$1,683	\$0	\$1,683
36013	Central Lakeport	\$150	\$0	\$150
32019	Charlevoix: Greensky Hill	\$12,750	\$13,302	\$26,052
32020	Chase: Barton	\$448	\$0	\$448
39006	Clawson	\$2,400	\$0	\$2,400
37034	Constantine	\$250	\$0	\$250
33018	Coomer	\$183	\$0	\$183
34017	Coopersville	\$7,987	\$0	\$7,987
35015	Corunna	\$20,899	\$0	\$20,899
31007	Crystal Falls: Christ	\$12,519	\$1,415	\$13,934
38024	Deerfield	\$4,764	\$0	\$4,764
39010	Detroit: Calvary	\$45,207	\$0	\$45,207
39011	Detroit: Cass Community	\$45,862	\$0	\$45,862
39012	Detroit: Central	\$2,208	\$0	\$2,208
39013	Detroit: Centro Familiar Cristiano	\$21,893	\$83,121	\$105,014
39014	Detroit: Conant Avenue	\$22,859	\$0	\$22,859
39015	Detroit: Ford Memorial	\$4,534	\$0	\$4,534
39021	Detroit: Grace Community	\$26,612	\$18,968	\$45,580
39018	Detroit: Peoples	\$44,024	\$48,706	\$92,730
39019	Detroit: Resurrection	\$17,453	\$0	\$17,453
39022	Detroit: St. Paul	\$32,023	\$20,380	\$52,403
34020	Dorr: Crosswind Community	\$667	\$0	\$667
38028	Dundee	\$5,963	\$0	\$5,963
35023	Elsie	\$2,094	\$0	\$2,094
38029	Erie	\$5,415	\$0	\$5,415
31012	Ewen	\$342	\$0	\$342
33024	Farwell	\$1,100	\$0	\$1,100
37039	Fennville	\$0	\$10,050	\$10,050
39030	Ferndale: First	\$971	\$8,551	\$9,522
36027	Flint: Asbury	\$58,803	\$0	\$58,803
36029	Flint: Bristol	\$2,681	\$0	\$2,681
36031	Flint: Charity	\$33,003	\$0	\$33,003
35025	Fowlerville: First	\$1,342	\$0	\$1,342
35026	Fowlerville: Trinity	\$214	\$0	\$214

32029	Free Soil-Fountain	\$1,073	\$0	\$1,073
38030	Frontier	\$200	\$0	\$200
37041	Galesburg	\$130	\$0	\$130
39034	Garden City	\$4,276	\$0	\$4,276
37047	Gobles	\$1,482	\$0	\$1,482
34033	Grand Rapids: La Nueva Esperanza	\$15,566	\$61,934	\$77,500
34037	Grand Rapids: South	\$498	\$0	\$498
34038	Grand Rapids: Trinity	\$575	\$0	\$575
34039	Grand Rapids: Vietnamese	\$6,362	\$0	\$6,362
32033	Grayling: Michelson Memorial	\$1,375	\$0	\$1,375
35029	Gresham	\$185	\$2,417	\$2,602
31019	Hancock: First	\$654	\$0	\$654
39036	Harper Woods: Redeemer	\$565	\$0	\$565
38034	Hartland	\$950	\$0	\$950
32038	Horton Bay	\$195		\$195
39038	Howarth	\$185	\$10,475	\$10,660
31022	Hulbert: Tahquamenon	\$140	\$0	\$140
38044	Jackson: Trinity	\$3,591	\$0	\$3,591
37055	Kalamazoo: Sunnyside	\$8,753	\$0	\$8,753
37056	Kalamazoo: Westwood	\$1,985	\$0	\$1,985
32044	Kewadin: Indian Mission	\$5,097	\$0	\$5,097
32045	Kingsley	\$544	\$0	\$544
37058	Lacota	\$650	\$0	\$650
32046	Lake Ann	\$8,810	\$0	\$8,810
37059	Lawrence	\$5,624	\$1,830	\$7,454
36054	Leonard	\$1,381	\$0	\$1,381
32049	Leroy	\$283	\$0	\$283
36056	Linden	\$625	\$0	\$625
39039	Livonia: Clarenceville	\$1,575	\$0	\$1,575
38052	London	\$1,344	\$0	\$1,344
34054	Lowell: First	\$2,607	\$0	\$2,607
34055	Lowell: Vergennes	\$0	\$3,702	\$3,702
39043	Madison Heights	\$3,742	\$0	\$3,742
39045	Madison Hts: Vietnamese Ministry	\$12,844	\$0	\$12,844
32055	Manton	\$9,016	\$3,642	\$12,658
37061	Marcellus	\$305	\$0	\$305
34057	Marne	\$7,304	\$0	\$7,304
37063	Martin	\$5,872	\$16,833	\$22,705
32058	Mesick	\$2,018	\$10,539	\$12,557
31034	Michigamme: Woodland	\$720	\$0	\$720
32059	Millersburg	\$160	\$0	\$160



33047	Millington	\$1,300	\$0	\$1,300
35055	Millville	\$3,015	\$0	\$3,015
38062	Monroe: Faith (First)	\$0	\$175	\$175
37065	Monterey Center	\$10,563	\$0	\$10,563
38066	Morenci	\$14,128	\$3,176	\$17,304
36064	Mt. Morris: First	\$0	\$38,221	\$38,221
33049	Mt. Pleasant: Chippewa Indian	\$1,320	\$0	\$1,320
33050	Mt. Pleasant: Countryside	\$2,330	\$0	\$2,330
33052	Mt. Pleasant: Trinity	\$2,944	\$0	\$2,944
39047	Mt. Vernon	\$951	\$0	\$951
34064	Muskegon: Crestwood	\$1,655	\$0	\$1,655
38067	Napoleon	\$274	\$0	\$274
34067	Newaygo	\$9,334	\$3,125	\$12,459
37069	Niles: Portage Prairie	\$19,360	\$0	\$19,360
34068	North Muskegon: Community	\$588	\$0	\$588
38071	North Parma	\$575	\$0	\$575
32062	Norwood	\$1,926	\$0	\$1,926
38073	Novi	\$8,579	\$0	\$8,579
32064	Onaway	\$608	\$0	\$608
33054	Oscoda	\$562	\$0	\$562
35066	Owosso: Trinity	\$432	\$0	\$432
37077	Paw Paw	\$5,266	\$39,506	\$44,772
34072	Pentwater: Centenary	\$286	\$0	\$286
38076	Pinckney: Arise	\$32,649	\$0	\$32,649
33060	Pinnebog	\$2,920	\$0	\$2,920
39051	Pontiac: Grace & Peace Community	\$2,060	\$17,439	\$19,499
39052	Pontiac: St. John	\$1,400	\$0	\$1,400
38079	Pope	\$160	\$0	\$160
36072	Port Hope	\$1,575	\$0	\$1,575
37081	Portage: Chapel Hill	\$5,695	\$0	\$5,695
39053	Redford: Aldersgate	\$2,949	\$0	\$2,949
36078	Richmond: First	\$6,342	\$0	\$6,342
39055	Riverview	\$0	\$710	\$710
35073	Robbins	\$466	\$0	\$466
31046	Rockland: St Paul	\$372	\$0	\$372
39059	Roseville: Trinity	\$1,067	\$0	\$1,067
38083	Salem Grove	\$2,160	\$175	\$2,335
34077	Salem: Indian Mission	\$18,170	\$3,135	\$21,305
37085	Schoolcraft	\$0	\$6,700	\$6,700
37087	Scotts	\$171	\$0	\$171
34079	Shelby	\$8,064	\$37,565	\$45,629

35075	Shepardsville	\$2,542	\$0	\$2,542
37091	South Haven: First	\$613	\$0	\$613
39061	Southfield: Hope	\$10,360	\$0	\$10,360
32072	Spratt	\$175	\$0	\$175
38090	Springville	\$1,155	\$0	\$1,155
33076	Standish: Community	\$11,260	\$0	\$11,260
35080	Sunfield	\$1,669	\$0	\$1,669
36089	Thomas	\$545	\$0	\$545
32073	Traverse Bay	\$1,165	\$0	\$1,165
33080	Vassar: First	\$1,748	\$0	\$1,748
35081	Vernon	\$8,021	\$0	\$8,021
37102	Vicksburg	\$1,447	\$0	\$1,447
31052	Wakefield	\$158	\$0	\$158
39070	Washington	\$810	\$0	\$810
39072	Waterford: Four Towns	\$16,917	\$0	\$16,917
39073	Waterford: Trinity	\$250	\$4,262	\$4,512
34088	Wayland	\$1,043	\$0	\$1,043
38096	Wellsville	\$1,640	\$0	\$1,640
36094	West Vienna	\$518	\$0	\$518
39076	Westland: St. James	\$33,158	\$0	\$33,158
37103	White Pigeon	\$250	\$0	\$250
33086	Wilber	\$551	\$0	\$551
36096	Yale	\$1,680	\$0	\$1,680
38102	Ypsilanti: St. Matthew's	\$275	\$0	\$275

**Closed Churches**

37007	Battle Creek: Baseline	\$525	\$0	\$525
32018	Charlevoix	\$235	\$0	\$235
39017	Detroit: Mt. Hope	\$33,603	\$0	\$33,603
36023	Duffield	\$0	\$15	\$15
36033	Flint: Faith	\$36,705	\$0	\$36,705
34032	Grand Rapids: Genesis	\$0	\$350	\$350
38103	Jackson: Community	\$650	\$0	\$650
37054	Kalamazoo: Northwest	\$575	\$0	\$575
34050	Kent City: Chapel Hill	\$0	\$9,975	\$9,975
38051	Litchfield	\$871	\$3,940	\$4,811
38053	Lulu	\$3,087	\$0	\$3,087
9550	Melvindale: New Hope	\$2,557	\$12,501	\$15,058
37073	Oshtemo: Lifespring	\$7,709	\$15,179	\$22,888
38077	Pleasant Lake	\$517	\$0	\$517
36075	Port Huron: Washington Avenue	\$4,241	\$0	\$4,241

39054	Redford: New Beginnings	\$334	\$0	\$334
33066	Saginaw: Ames	\$2,108	\$0	\$2,108
33070	Saginaw: State Street	\$2,773	\$4,325	\$7,098
32070	Sears	\$1,938	\$0	\$1,938
6096	Shelby Twp: New Hope	\$2,949	\$0	\$2,949
32075	Traverse City: Mosaic	\$1,041	\$13,218	\$14,259
34085	Twin Lake	\$7,185	\$0	\$7,185
38098	Whitmore Lake: Wesley	\$6,467	\$0	\$6,467
<b>Conference Totals</b>		<b>\$1,099,047</b>	<b>\$602,758</b>	<b>\$1,701,805</b>

### **III. STEPS TO RETIREMENT**

The following information should be examined by anyone contemplating retirement within the next ten years.

1. Review the 2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, ¶1357, pertaining to retirement.
2. Attend a pre-retirement seminar within 10 years of retirement.
3. Confirm your service record with Wespath Benefits & Investments to assure that it is accurate. This is especially important with respect to pre-1982 service and the post-2006 Clergy Retirement Security Program (CRSP) Plans since these benefits are calculated based upon years of service. Often it takes significant time to correct a special situation or service record error.
4. Confirm your Social Security record to be certain that all payments have been properly credited. The Social Security Administration is not required to correct errors over 3 years old.
5. Notify in writing the following persons by January 1 for the following year's July retirement season:
  - A. Resident Bishop
  - B. Your District Superintendent
  - C. Rev. Joel Walther, Director of Conference Benefits & Coordinator of Human Resources
  - D. Rev. Mark Erbes, Chairperson of Committee on Conference Relations of the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM)
6. Once your intention to retire is confirmed in writing by the Office of the Bishop, the Benefits Office notifies Wespath Benefits & Investments and materials are sent directly to the participant from Wespath detailing retirement plan payment options. A pension projection is available anytime through the Wespath at 800-851-2201 or [www.wespath.org](http://www.wespath.org) (Benefits Access).
7. Review and update all beneficiary designations on your Retirement and Welfare Accounts at Wespath Benefits & Investments.
8. **Health Insurance**
  - A. Review the conference eligibility and cost sharing requirements for health care coverage in retirement. It is the subscriber's responsibility to understand the specific rules relating to eligibility for coverage in retirement prior to the subscriber's retirement date.
  - B. If you are retiring at age 65 or older, you are eligible for Medicare. You (and your spouse if Medicare eligible) must enroll in Medicare Part A and Part B effective the date of your

- retirement to qualify for the Conference Retiree Group Coverage. If you opted out of Social Security, you must arrange to purchase Medicare Benefits in order to be eligible for coverage under the Conference Retiree Group Coverage. Send photocopies of Medicare cards for you and your spouse to the Conference Benefits Office as soon as they become available. This is essential in order to coordinate health care coverage and avoid lengthy delays and/or denials of medical claims.
- C. If you are retiring earlier than age 65, you (and your spouse) must enroll in Medicare Part A and Part B when reaching age 65 in order to continue health coverage through the conference. Send photocopies of Medicare cards for you and your spouse to the Conference Benefits Office as soon as they become available. This is essential in order to coordinate health care coverage and avoid lengthy delays and/or denials of medical claims.

#### **IV. CONFERENCE HEALTH CARE POLICIES**

**Introduction:** This section describes the provisions and requirements of the Michigan Conference group health care plans. All available benefits are at all times subject to and may be limited, denied, or terminated based on applicable underwriting provisions, contract terms, eligibility rules, and premium payment requirements. All required submissions, underwriting, and payments must be remitted in a timely manner. ***It is the subscriber's responsibility to understand the specific rules relating to eligibility for coverage both while active and in retirement. Questions may be directed to the Conference Benefits Office or submitted in writing to the Conference Board of Pension & Health Benefits. Do not rely on verbal responses to questions raised in informational meetings or provided by representatives other than the Board of Pension & Health Benefits.***

#### **ACTIVE GROUP HEALTH CARE PLAN**

**Enrollment/Effective Date of Coverage:** Health Care eligibility begins the first day of a new appointment/hire, change in appointment/employment status, or a life-qualifying event (i.e. loss of other health coverage), provided all required submissions, underwriting, and payments have been remitted in a timely manner. All available benefits are at all times subject to and may be limited, denied, or terminated based on applicable underwriting provisions, contract terms, eligibility rules, and premium payment requirements. It is the responsibility of the subscriber to submit enrollment forms within the required timeframe. ***If the enrollment process is not completed within 30 days of eligibility, the subscriber must wait until the next open enrollment period.***

**Eligible Subscribers:** Active Plan eligible classes include the following:  
(Full-time for health coverage eligibility is defined as regularly working at least 30 hours per week)

1. Full-time Clergy (Ordained Clergy and Local Pastors) under Episcopal appointment with the Michigan Conference as the responsible agency for providing benefits.
2. Full-time Lay Employees of the Michigan Conference and its approved, related agencies.
3. Full-time Lay Employees of a local church (including District Superintendent Assignments) until the employee turns age 65 provided the local church lay employee policy offers health care to all eligible full-time lay employees. All conference eligibility requirements must be observed. The local church is the responsible agency for all lay

employee health insurance premiums. Premium-sharing schedules may be determined by local church employee policies, but must meet employee affordability requirements as defined by the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

4. Clergy and Conference/Related Agency Lay Employees on Medical Leave receiving disability benefits, provided the subscriber was enrolled in the Michigan Conference Group Active Health Care Plan at the time they were granted Medical leave.
  - a. The subscriber must enroll in Medicare Part A and Part B at the date of first eligibility.
  - b. The subscriber is responsible for submitting a copy of the subscriber's Medicare card to the Conference Benefits Office at the time of Medicare enrollment to assure the proper coordination of benefits.
5. Dependents of deceased Clergy and Conference/Related Agency Lay Employee subscribers provided the dependents were enrolled in the group active health care plan at the time of the subscriber's death.
  - a. Dependents of a retired subscriber will continue health coverage under the same eligibility and funding provisions as the subscriber.
  - b. A surviving spouse that remarries will continue to receive the health care benefit. However, the new spouse is not eligible for coverage.
6. Enrolled dependents of deceased Local Church employee subscribers as allowable by the health care plan if continued coverage is a provision of the local church employee policy, and if the local church maintains responsibility for the health insurance premiums.

***Eligible Dependents:***

1. Spouse.
2. Children and Legal Dependents under age 26.
3. Qualifying Adult Children with disabilities. (Per insurance regulations, Adult Children with disabilities may not continue on the conference plan after the subscriber is deceased.)

***Changes in Eligibility:*** All changes in appointment, employee, or family status that affect eligibility in health coverage must be submitted within 30 days of the date the change occurs, otherwise loss, lapses, or gaps in coverage may occur. Subscribers are responsible for providing family status changes (including marriages, births, adoptions, legal guardianships) in writing to the Conference Benefits Office. A delay in notification could mean a delay or denial of coverage until the next open enrollment period.

***Working Aged 65:*** Active Clergy under eligible Michigan Conference Appointment and Conference Lay Employees in Conference/Related Agency employment retain eligibility status in the conference active group health care plan.

1. The conference active group plan continues to be the subscriber's primary coverage.
2. Subscribers and dependents must enroll in Medicare Part A at the time they turn age 65, but are not required to enroll in Medicare Part B until the effective date of the subscriber's retirement.
3. The subscriber is responsible for submitting a copy of the subscriber/dependent Medicare card to the Conference Benefits Officer at the time of Medicare enrollment to assure the proper coordination of benefits.

**Funding of Active Health Care Policies:**

1. Active Clergy and Conference/Related Agency Employees: Health insurance premiums are shared by the salary-paying unit (Michigan Conference, Conference Related Agency, or Local Church) and the subscriber according to the contribution schedule as established by the Conference Board of Pension & Health Benefits action.
2. Disabled Clergy and Conference/Related Agency Employees: Health insurance premiums are paid by the Michigan Conference to the extent established by CBOPHB action.
3. Dependents of deceased Clergy and Conference/Related Agency Lay Employee subscribers: Health insurance premiums are paid by the Michigan Conference to the extent established by CBOPHB action.

**Termination:**

1. A subscriber may voluntarily terminate a subscriber's health insurance policy by submitting a request in writing to the Conference Benefits Office.
2. Health insurance policies are terminated the date of a subscriber's termination from an eligible Clergy Appointment or Conference/Related Agency employment.
  - a. Coverage for terminated employees cannot be extended since COBRA coverage is not offered through the Michigan Conference.
  - b. Under special provisions of the CBOPHB, a policy will be extended for up to one year for a clergyperson appointed to an eligible leave of absence status. Eligible leaves of absence include Medical Leave and Sabbatical Leave only.
3. Health Insurance policies for a local church employee are terminated effective:
  - a. The termination date of local church employment. Coverage cannot be extended since COBRA coverage is not offered through the Michigan Conference.
  - b. The first of the month in which the subscriber turns age 65.
4. Health Insurance policies will be terminated for non-payment of premiums according to the following schedule:
  - a. Policy may be terminated at six months in arrears.
  - b. In a delinquency situation involving a clergyperson appointed to a local church, a repayment plan must be submitted to and approved by the Executive Committee of The Board of Pension & Health Benefits to extend coverage past the six-month period.
  - c. A terminated policy may be reinstated within 30 days of termination if the outstanding balance has been remitted in full.

**Waiver of Coverage:**

1. **Mandatory Enrollment:** The active group health care plan is generally a mandatory plan for all eligible appointed clergy. Appointed clergy may waive coverage if they have alternate health care coverage given any of the following situations:
  - a. Spouse's plan
  - b. Military plan
  - c. Former employer plan
  - d. Medicaid plan
2. Enrollment of eligible dependents is optional as determined by the subscriber.

3. Eligible Clergy and Conference/Related Agency Lay Employees that waive conference health care coverage must have a Waiver of Coverage form on file in the Michigan Conference Benefits Office.
4. Persons waiving coverage have the opportunity to enroll themselves and eligible dependents in the conference health care plan annually during open enrollment or at the time of a life-qualifying event.

### **RETIREE GROUP HEALTH CARE PLAN**

#### ***Introduction:***

This section describes the provisions and requirements of the Michigan Conference retiree group health care plan. All available benefits are at all times subject to and may be limited, denied, or terminated based on applicable underwriting provisions, contract terms, eligibility rules, and premium payment requirements. All required submissions, underwriting, and payments must be remitted in a timely manner. ***It is the subscriber's responsibility to understand the specific rules relating to eligibility for coverage in retirement prior to the subscriber's retirement date. Questions may be directed to the Conference Benefits Office or submitted in writing to the Board of Pension & Health Benefits. Do not rely on verbal responses to questions raised in informational meetings or provided by representatives other than the Board of Pension & Health Benefits.***

It is crucial that clergy who have served appointments during their career in Extension Ministries or another Annual Conference are knowledgeable regarding years of service credit, coverage, and cost sharing in order to effectively plan for retirement.

#### ***Eligibility and Cost Sharing:***

1. Grand-parented populations have been established for clergy members/conference employees of the former Detroit and West Michigan Conferences for all current retirees and all active participants who are eligible to retire by January 1, 2024. "Eligible to Retire" refers to the definitions as defined by the 2016 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church.
2. Grand-parented populations will follow the provisions of their respective former conference that were in place December 31, 2018 in determining post-retirement eligibility and cost sharing. Individuals may contact the Conference Benefits Office to confirm eligibility and specific cost sharing at the time of retirement.
3. Post-retirement health care eligibility and cost sharing for participants not included in either grand-parented population are determined per the health care policy as established by the CBOPHB.

#### ***Termination:***

1. A subscriber may terminate their health insurance policy during retirement at any time. However, the termination is non-revocable and a subscriber cannot re-enroll at a future date.
  2. The health insurance policy of a retired ordained minister whose clergy membership is terminated with the Michigan Conference for any reason will be terminated the effective date of the termination of the subscriber's clergy membership.
  3. Health insurance policies will be terminated for non-payment of premiums according to the following schedule:  
Policy may be terminated at six months in arrears.

- a. A terminated policy may be reinstated within 30 days of termination if the outstanding balance has been remitted in full.
- b. Since termination of a retiree policy is permanent following the 30 day window for reinstatement, subscribers in a delinquency situation are strongly encouraged to initiate communication with the Executive Committee of The Board of Pension & Health Benefits to negotiate a realistic repayment schedule prior to the date of termination.

The Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits (CBOPHB) is authorized by the Michigan Annual Conference to negotiate, compromise, submit to arbitration, or retain legal counsel regarding any claims for benefits that may arise under the Michigan Conference Benefits Plans. This includes the current Michigan Conference Group Health Care Plan, the Michigan Conference Lay Employee Retirement and Welfare plans, the United Methodist Clergy Retirement and Welfare Plans, as well as other plans instituted in the future. The CBOPHB will be considered the final appeal and have final authority to decide any issue in the event of a dispute or disagreement by a participant.

Presented by The Michigan Conference Board of Pension & Health Benefits  
Rev. Amy E. Mayo-Moyle, President

Rev. Joel L. Walther, Director of Conference Benefits & Coordinator of Human Resources

### **BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

The conference Board of Trustees (“BoT”) enjoys the active participation of six clergy and six laity trustees, plus a voting clergy liaison from the Cabinet. Our responsibilities include four main focus areas: Conference Properties, Closing Churches, General Administration and Disaffiliations. We meet quarterly in person and/or virtually making participation more complete and inclusive and often less expensive. As our focus areas indicate the responsibilities and issues are significant, including such matters as conference assets, legal concerns such as BSA settlement, church disaffiliations, financial stress and property concerns of congregations and difficult decisions to bring a church’s ministry to a close.

When churches close, the BoT must provide oversight of those properties until such time as they are sold or re-engaged in alternative ministries. The aftermath of the COVID pandemic and the impact of disaffiliations continues to impact local churches.

#### **Work review:**

The Board elected Carolin Spragg and Matt DeLong to serve as co-chairs of the BoT. Vice Chair Rob Long and Matt DeLong share in the oversight of the conference owned offices. We have convened a Task Force on Office Space Consolidation to evaluate space requirements and costs with many now working from home and other work being outsourced.

George Lewis provided oversight for conference parsonages, together with Matt DeLong, Rob Long, and David Apol, they completed work needed to prepare parsonages for sale and for occupancy. A new parsonage was purchased for the East Winds District.

The Closed Churches Team, led by Deb Federau along with David Apol, facilitated the sale of the following churches or parsonages:

- Charlevoix UMC & parsonage - 11-1-23 & 8-30-23
- Dimondale parsonage – 6-16-23



- Dimondale UMC – 1-3-24
- Lakeville Lot – 6-8-23
- Leonard UMC – 1-19-23
- Midwest District parsonage – 10-6-23
- Minden City UMC - 8-7-23
- Mohawk Ahmeek UMC – 11-22-23
- Sears UMC - 6-21-23

The following properties are listed for sale (or donation) as of February 14 and we know more properties will be added to this inventory as economic and cultural pressures continue to impact local churches. We celebrate that in some situations mergers and other creative solutions occur, and we continue to seek other alternatives than closure.

- Bentley UMC
- Murano Drive Benefits Officer Parsonage (sale to close March 6<sup>th</sup>)
- Rodney UMC
- Silverwood UMC
- Ugly UMC (donation in process)

We are aware of several other potential closings that may occur prior to Annual Conference 2024 and will be reported at that time.

Rob Long and Brad Bartelmay continue to work with Archives and History to develop a plan and location for caring for archival materials. With church closings on the rise, the need for space increases. We continue to explore digitizing much of the material as a more effective way to maintain records, though like physical space, digitizing has significant costs. Costs for space and digitization remains a challenge as budget cuts become necessary.

The BoT conducted the annual ‘Risk Management’ review with Church Mutual Insurance in a full board meeting. There were once again no material claim-issues raised and the relationship continues to be solid. Our claims were high enough this year that we did not receive dividends. We became aware that there are several safety/warning systems that can be put in place to avert significant damage and insurance claims. These programs and equipment are available to churches insured by Church Mutual at no cost (or significantly reduced cost). **The Board of Trustees strongly recommends that churches contact Church Mutual/respond to Church Mutual’s offers for these products at your earliest opportunity.**

The BoT Disaffiliation work has been capably led by Brad Bartelmay. Serving as special assistant to the Bishop for this work since July 1, 2023, Brad consulted with each church after they made the decision to disaffiliate. As in the past, the BoT carried responsibility for determining the equity component for release of property and assets from the trust clause. Waivers of the equity component were awarded to those who had paid their ministry shares for the past three years at 100% and who applied for the waiver. Brad prepared the following report of disaffiliation numbers. *Disaffiliation by the Numbers as of February 13, 2024:*

- *From 2019 through 2022, eight churches disaffiliated from the Michigan Annual Conference.*
- *Sixty churches applied to disaffiliate on June 30, 2023; fifty-eight churches successfully disaffiliated from the Michigan Annual Conference.*
- *Sixty-two churches (sixty new churches plus the two churches which did not meet the requirements for June 30, 2023 disaffiliation) applied to disaffiliate on December 31, 2023.*

*Sixty-one of these churches successfully disaffiliated from the Michigan Annual Conference.*

- ***In total, one hundred and twenty churches voted to disaffiliate at special Church Conferences throughout 2023. One hundred and nineteen churches successfully met the requirements established by the Conference Trustees and disaffiliated.***
- *The Michigan Conference started 2023 with 721 churches and ended with 593 churches. One hundred and nineteen churches disaffiliated; the other nine reductions were due to closings and/or mergers. In 2023 the number of churches in the conference shrank by 16.5% due to disaffiliation (17.8% in total).*
- *Of the churches which disaffiliated in 2023:*
  - *23% voted unanimously to do so.*
  - *Only 13 churches disaffiliated by a vote of less than 80% of those attending their special Church Conferences.*
- ***One hundred and twenty-seven Michigan Annual Conference churches have disaffiliated since 2019. This is 16.2% of the total number of churches in the conference (784) at the start of 2019.*** *According to the General Council on Finance and Administration, over the same period, the North Central Jurisdiction disaffiliation rate was 23.1% and 25.6% for the General Church in the United States.*
- *Since 2019, disaffiliation has accounted for a 16.1% decline in professing members in the Michigan Annual Conference. According to the General Council on Finance and Administration, over the same period, the North Central Jurisdiction disaffiliation rate was 18.9% and 23.9% for the General Church in the United States.*
- *Since 2019, disaffiliation has accounted for a 9.0% decline in worship attendance in the Michigan Annual Conference. According to the General Council on Finance and Administration, over the same period, the North Central Jurisdiction disaffiliation rate was 10.7% and 10.9% for the General Church in the United States.*

The total number of churches which have disaffiliated between 2020 and 2023 is 127. Paragraph 2553 provisions ended December 31, 2023, thus no further disaffiliation work is happening at this time.

#### Actions Required at Annual Conference

Summary of closed churches (known at this report date) requiring AC affirmative action to formally close with motions in accordance with ¶12549 of the *2016 Book of Discipline* are to be submitted by the Rev. Marjorie Crawford. The affirming petitions re closure were distributed to the voting members of each congregation and returned after adjournment of the respective church conferences.

- Charlevoix – Final Worship: October 1, 2023 Closing Date: December 31, 2023  
(approved at November 30, 2023 Special Session)
- Leonard UMC – Final Worship: November 26, 2023 Closing Date: November 30, 2023
- Rodney UMC - Final Devotional Time: Jan. 29, 2023 Closing Date: March 1, 2024

Carolyn Spragg, Co-Chair of Michigan Conference Board of Trustees  
Matt DeLong, Co-Chair of Michigan Conference Board of Trustees

## UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH

Once again in 2023 the Michigan Conference United Women in Faith (UW Faith) continued to put our faith, hope, and love into action in our churches, communities, districts, conference and throughout the world. We boldly stepped into our new name and logo, embracing the changes that open us to new members and new ways of being in mission improving the lives of women, children, and youth.

In 2023 our local units continued to engage in mission with their local communities, serving funeral dinners, making pasties, holding rummage sales and Christmas bazaars, packing free lunches and weekend backpacks, sewing diapers (lots and lots of diapers!) and other items for Midwest Mission, and many other mission activities. Hands-on mission continues to be at the heart of our local unit ministry.

Although our local units and churches faced many challenges in 2023, we exceeded our Pledge by Mission by 45%, sending in over \$208,000 in Mission Giving to support the national and international mission of UW Faith. Additionally, \$20,000 of supplemental gifts were given for Call to Prayer & Self-Denial, Legacy Fund, and other designated programs.

Through 2023 our Charter for Racial Justice Committee continued our mini-grant program, making \$300 grants to two units/churches to pursue racial justice activities. The Mary Ruth Circle at Michelson Memorial UMC worked with their local library to select and purchase children's books that celebrate diversity, acceptance and understanding as they educate on racial justice. South Haven First UMC engaged in a racial justice book study using [Faithful Anti-Racism: Moving Past Talk to Systemic Change](#) by Christina Edmondson and Chad Brennan. We are extending these grants through 2024 to continue facilitating racial justice activities in our local churches and communities.

In July 2023 we hosted eighty-five adults and fifteen children/youth at Mt. Pleasant First UMC for a multi-day Mission event. This year's study was "Living the Kingdom: Exploring the Lord's Prayer as a Spiritual Practice for Social Transformation." Our adult study was led by Audra Hudson Stone, our youth by Rev. Tiffany Newsom and our children by Ronda Libbett. We engaged in study, fellowship, and fun. It was a transformative educational experience for all who attended and continues to be our gift to the church!

In October 2023 we celebrated the commissioning of our new Deaconess and Home Missioner – Michelle & Bill White - by Bishop David Bard at the Leland Community UMC, the home base for their 5loaves2fish ministry.

Our Conference Annual Celebration was held October 28 at Holt UMC with 150 in attendance. We were blessed to have Bishop David Bard provide our keynote address – "Something Old, Something New." As we gathered to celebrate our past, we also generated great enthusiasm to embrace our future. Driven by God's love and united in sisterhood, we will continue to work to improve the lives of women, children, and youth. We are sisterhood, faith, action and in 2024 we will boldly invite even more women to join us in our mission. Thanks be to God!

Julia Paradine-Rice

Michigan Conference United Women in Faith, President

## YOUNG PEOPLES MINISTRIES

Our agency provides funding and support for young adult ministries across the Michigan Conference. This summer we supported a number of young adult internships in local churches and on campuses, which gave young people space for discernment and gave local churches a connection to young adults. We also were able to award mini-grants to a number of churches in the Conference, to help them fund their work with youth and young adults. We have also continued our support of campus ministries in the Conference.

Our Board continues to provide avenues and opportunities for young adult ministry in The United Methodist Church in Michigan. Through our help young adults have gone to the World Council of Churches Eco-School training, one of our campus ministries was able to take a trip to the Iona Community in Scotland, young adults are able to go to Exploration and further their discernment to ordained ministry, and so much more.

The Board of Young People's Ministry, along with Lisa Batten, Associate Director for Connectional Ministries, underwent a series of listening sessions with young adults and campus ministers, in order to paint a picture of what Young Adult Ministry needs to look like in the future. What we discovered in these listening sessions was that young adults in the Michigan Conference are seeking connectional, inclusive, authentic spaces where they can grow in love of God and love of neighbor. They want the church to be more relevant in the world, caring about the things they care about. They want space for discernment. They want community. We are proud of these listening sessions, because they are helping us begin and implement reimagined ministries for young adults. For instance, in 2024 we are launching a new summer internship experience, Connexion, that is much more grassroots and local than the Mission Intern experience was. Instead of having young adults apply to a Conference wide program and be placed, we are asking local churches, nonprofits, and campus ministries to identify young adults in their communities who would be interested in a summer internship, and are equipping them with resources needed to aid leadership development, discernment, and spiritual growth.

We also awarded multiple mini-grants to different local churches across the Conference, ranging from \$500-\$1500. This was an idea born out of the fact that we had some extra money in our budget we wanted to use. We had resources, we wanted to use them. So, we created mini-grants that were for rural churches, churches whose congregations are predominantly non-white, churches with non-white pastors, and churches in historically marginalized communities. We had 18 churches apply for the grants, and were able to fulfill every grant request. We were also able to build mini-grants into our 2024 budget, so we can continue this ministry of funding and support.

We are proud of our continued support of campus ministries. While this is not unique to any one calendar year, each year we support 8 campus ministries across the Conference. This means there is a United Methodist presence on eight college campuses, engaging with students on those campuses in multiple ways. From glitter blessings on National Coming Out Day to creative musical spaces to food pantries that provide necessary meals for college students struggling to make ends meet, our campus ministries continue to have a deep impact in the lives of students across the state of Michigan. We are also proud that this year we never said no to a funding request. We always found a way to meet the request that was given to us.

**Our 2024 Annual Conference theme is “Fearless - Embracing a New Future.” In what ways is your agency/ministry moving forward with Christ, seeing and hearing the people around you, affirming and engaging as a new community?**

Truly I think our listening sessions speak to our desire to see and hear the people around us. We want to know what our young adults want, so that we can offer them impactful ministries in the future. We have never been a Board that wants to keep the status quo or do the same old thing. Being predominantly made up of young people and those who work with young people, we are constantly embracing the future, with fearless hope. We have to, otherwise we will no longer serve our young people in the ways that they need us to serve them.

Our fearless hope allows us to think creatively about different challenges: The declining church attendance of Millennials and Gen Z, distrust of institutions and organized religion, decreasing finances, uncertainty of the future. We meet these challenges with creativity. What new ministries need to be launched? What creative ways of funding need to be explored? What are our young people telling us is wrong, and how do we advocate for change? How do we encourage and equip our local churches to be just as fearless as our Board? These are questions we constantly ask ourselves in our meetings. And some of the answers are pretty clear. Submit legislation to the Annual Conference to ask for an exploration of another way of funding. Start grassroots internships where a relationship with a young person is a pre-requisite. Try our best to always say yes to a funding request, because we know that monetary support is important when it comes to creative new ministries. We work with an abundance mindset, never fearing the scarcity, because we know God will help us find a way.

We don't see the challenges we face as obstacles which will stop us. We see them as opportunities to figure out a new or different way. A better way, even. Christ's way.

Board of Young People's Ministry.

## **CAMPUS MINISTRIES**

### **CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY (CMU) WESLEY FOUNDATION**

The Wesley Foundation at Central Michigan University (Wesley at CMU) is a historic, United Methodist campus ministry in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. At Wesley at CMU, we value openness and authenticity and commit ourselves to building God's beloved community on earth. Our hope is for all people to know themselves as God's beloved and to go be God's love in the world.

This year, we stepped boldly into our ninety-sixth year of ministry, drawing from our storied history with an eye toward to a fruitful future. In 2023, Wesley at CMU continued its core ministries of creative worship, student-led music ministries, free weekly community meals, service projects, and connective community-building events all while developing new ministry initiatives for young people in Mount Pleasant.

In early spring, a student-initiated “Free Food Shelf” ministry was born in response to growing food insecurity on CMU's campus. Partnerships with local United Methodist congregations, supporters, and donors stocked the shelves and word spread across campus about the resource. By fall, the Free Food Shelf outgrew its original bookcase, doubled in size, and needed restocked weekly. It now

offers necessities beyond food, including laundry detergent, menstrual hygiene products, toothbrushes, and more.

This summer, thanks to a grant from the Board of Young People's Ministries, our ministry also launched the Wesley at CMU Inclusive Music Initiative. This project intends to connect young people with worship music that centers themes of justice and inclusion and Christian musical artists who represent a broader range of identities and experiences in the diverse community of God. As part of this initiative, Wesley at CMU incorporated several new songs into its worship music library and hosted a live concert with singer-songwriter Spencer LaJoye in September. As we step into 2024, we hope to continue this new future of inclusive, connective music with a Student Music Showcase in the spring.

Fall also initiated a new future for our Wesley at CMU small groups. In late August, two new or re-launched small groups were introduced to our student community. The Queer Christian Connection group, focused on fellowship for LGBTQ+ Christians, and the Beloved Circle group, focused on community-building and service, both took shape. By the end of 2023, these small groups, which are both entirely student-led, were hosting meaningful, supportive, and well-attended meetings each week. We celebrate the passion and commitment of these young adult leaders!

As we enter into another year of ministry in 2024, we go boldly, with the courage that God's presence will continue to accompany and transform us. We give thanks for our beloved community at CMU and pray fearlessly for a future that looks more and more like God's kin-dom.

Audra Hudson Stone, Pastor and Director

### **WESLEY HOUSE AT FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY (FSU)**

2023 was a fantastic year of connection and growth for Ferris State Wesley! We continue to sit on our university's board of diversity and inclusion, and from that seat have built great friendships and partnerships making us been more ready than ever to respond to students needs on campus. Our food pantry expanded from our main site which stocks both grocery items and hygiene supplies, to include two satellite pantries, one in our University Center and one in our West Campus Apartment complex. We've also started a new snack program through the tutoring center- because it's hard to learn when you're hungry!

In addition to meeting our students' physical needs, we're also responding to their spiritual needs and creating opportunities for growth. We partnered with our friends at Motor City Wesley to host an excellent fall retreat focused on Art as Activism and Creativity as Hope-Bearing in a broken world. We went to Biloxi, MS on a service and learning trip over Spring Break with our friends from CMU Wesley, where we met a bunch of people working to make their corner of the world more like the kingdom of God. We hosted a bunch of small groups - about everything from daily spiritual disciplines, to listening well, to a verse by verse study of Acts. We host Thursday night dinner and worship, studying everything from unsung heroes of the Bible, to parables, to choosing good friends and being good friends. We've answered countless questions and prayed fervent prayers.

We know this ministry would not be possible without the many people around the state and

country who continue to support us. We love and give thanks for our 18 covenant partner churches. We celebrate our strong connections to both the Northern Waters and Midwest districts and as we've made the transition to the new district lines, we look forward to building relationships in our new Central Bay District. We cherish the time we've spent filling pulpits, attending district conferences, and getting the opportunity to talk about how the gifts shared with us are changing the lives of young adults through the ministry of the Wesley House. Our ministry looks different every day, and we know it will continue to change, but we know that Wesley will always be witnessing to the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit to showing up with us and within us. We give thanks daily for the faithful people and churches who pray over, believe in, cheer for, and invest deeply in the gifts, talents, faith, and futures of young adults.

We can't wait to see what God will do in 2024!

Rev. Kim Bos,  
Campus Pastor and Executive Director

### **WESLEY FOUNDATION OF KALAMAZOO**

The Wesley Foundation of Kalamazoo, or Wesley at WMU as it's known on campus, celebrated its 100th anniversary. Begun as a Sunday evening soup meal called "student friendly" out of Kalamazoo First UMC, Wesley of Kalamazoo has continued to serve students and campus since 1923. In 2023, partnerships on campus led to collaboration in offering ashes to go, a weekly Lenten community lunch, mental health information and support for students.

Wesley of Kalamazoo continues to address food insecurity, by partnering with Broncos Kitchen to serve hundreds of students each week. The ministry is in its twelfth year of housing for students in the Wesley Intentional Living Community. The ministry continues to discern the future of ministry on campus, post pandemic and amidst a denominational split. Partnerships with the Voices of WMU Gospel Choir, the Office of LGBTQIA Student Services, and the Seita Scholar Program bridge the church to campus life.

As Wesley seeks to be in ministry with Generation Z the board and staff continue to seek ways in which a space can be created that is safe enough for students to be brave. A place or students to express their hopes, connect with others and be fed physically and spirituality. Wesley's values are forming community, exploring faith, and seeking justice. Each year brings challenges for living into these values and yet, as one of the board members says "God can!". Here's to another 100 year of ministry with campus!

### **MOTOR CITY WESLEY**

Motor City Wesley continues in the 80+ year tradition of Detroit area campus ministry. Now present on multiple campuses (Wayne State, Henry Ford College, Oakland University, University of Michigan - Dearborn), we engage hundreds of young adults every month in worship, small groups,

service projects, and discipleship practices. Our goal is to help college students form communities, share creative witness, and launch conspiracies of goodness for the blessing of the whole world. Our work serves as a collaborative infrastructure supporting young adults on campuses and in local churches. Conspire with us at [www.motorcitywesley.org](http://www.motorcitywesley.org)

Motown Mission celebrates its 20th Anniversary of welcoming young people to Detroit to serve alongside residents here in God's restorative work. Dozens of churches send hundreds of young volunteers to create thousands of dollars worth of impact in Detroit every year. Our project partners are blessed by this work, while students are blessed by deep theological reflection on our Wesleyan understanding of mission and service. Serve with at [motownmission.org](http://motownmission.org)

### **NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY WESLEY**

Greetings from the shores of Lake Superior! NMU Wesley is a collective community of students and ministry leaders. We strive to walk alongside one another in faith and in life as we grow and develop. We ask questions and seek answers, we welcome all to be with us just as they are, and we support one another through the highs and the lows of college life. Our motto is "Love Everyone" and we seek to embody this through intentional expansive community that allows young adults to explore and live out their faith in everyday actions and words. We are grateful for the support of DHECM, Marquette Hope, and individual donors that allow NMU Wesley to thrive.

In the 2023 Spring semester, we took a service trip over spring break to Sanibel Island to assist with Hurricane Ian Recovery efforts. We spent our time restoring a large courtyard garden within a retirement community, assisting with the food pantry on Sanibel, and cleaning up at Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge. We also partnered with St. Michael's and All the Angels Episcopal Church on Sanibel and helped host a community evening of art centered on the hope Sanibel residents have around recovering from the devastation.

After the 2023 semester wrapped up, a group of 13 headed over to Iona Abbey in Scotland for a week-long spiritual pilgrimage. This was an incredible life changing experience for all who went. We lived in community with 50 other people from around the world, working, worshiping, walking, making memories, and building faith through the lens of Celtic Christianity. The simple rhythms of abbey life and the gorgeous wild natural landscape of the island lent themselves to fast forming deep connections between the students and the abbey community. One student, after reflecting on their first 24 hours on Iona said "Even the stones breathe here. Everything is alive." Watch the highlight video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFMfF8yryo4>

NMU Wesley has enjoyed partnering and collaborating with the Lutheran (ELCA) and Episcopal Campus Ministries at NMU. To simplify what we call this collaborative effort, we have renamed our community Sacred Space Campus Ministry starting in the fall of 2023. We run all of our events together and share the space that Marquette Hope United Methodist Multi-Site Faith Community provides us. This space is also where CommonGrounds Coffee House is located. CommonGrounds is our extension ministry in partnership with the Lutheran Campus Ministry where we offer a space to hang out, study, and relax with free coffee, free wi-fi, free snacks and occasionally pups to love on.



Our staple programs include Sunday *Dinner and Devotions* - a homecooked meal with a student or ministry leader run devotion time; Thursday evening gatherings for *Word and Worship* – a simple worship time with scripture and conversation. *Theology on Tap* – gathering at a local brewery for theological conversations on various topics or scripture; *Time with Brene (Brown) or Bob (Goff)* – book studies and discussions about the content; *Outdoor Adventures* – hikes with pups on the miles and miles of trails surrounding Northern; And student led pop-up events like movie nights, game nights, breakfast, craft projects, and more.

If you have a young adult who is considering attending NMU or is already attending NMU, we would love to get connected with them and welcome them to the NMU Wesley community. Our bi-annual newsletter is a great way to hear more about what we are up to. Reach out to Rev. Erica Thomas, NMU Wesley Campus Ministry Director at [wesley@mqthope.com](mailto:wesley@mqthope.com) or 805-710-4752 or head to [www.mqthope.com/NMUWesley](http://www.mqthope.com/NMUWesley)

### **UNITED CAMPUS CHRISTIAN FOUNDATION UCCF**

After our first official year as United Campus Christian Fellowship (UCCF - [uccfmi.org](http://uccfmi.org)), we continue to maintain our partnerships with the PCUSA, UMC, and ELCA. However, this year, the Episcopal Church was added to our denominational partners. This multi-campus, multi-denominational campus ministry serves students, faculty and staff at Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids Community College, and Kendall College of Art and Design. This unique style of collaborative campus ministry has allowed us to grow, and we now engage with 40-60 students every week.

This year, our student events have focused on physical and spiritual feeding. Every week, we host “Open Table.” Lunch is offered for our two commuter, downtown campuses, and dinner is offered for GVSU. Per the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Center, one in 3 college students across the country experience food insecurity. Our church partners help us combat this reality by providing meals for students, faculty, and staff. For their spiritual feeding, at each meal, we offer worship. We also host Bible study, the Listening Post, we provide devotional resources, and one on one meetings. Our institutions identify the care for the students' spiritual well-being as a weakness for them. We help each campus meet this need in a positive and inclusive way.

UCCF continues to be the only LGBTQIA+ affirming campus ministry on our three campuses, and the only campus ministry for two of them. Our commitment to fostering interfaith understanding and cooperation is another distinctive mark of our ministry.

Our 2024 Annual Conference theme is “Fearless - Embracing a New Future.” United Campus Christian Fellowship has embraced the future for us, which is ecumenical, collaborative, and radically inclusive. Our students continue to speak with us about religious trauma, healing and

how to “get back” to regularly attending church. There is a chance for newness of life in these spaces. Students have not written off being part of religious communities. They simply don’t know where they are welcome. This is where we can meet them with the love of Christ in a way that does not shame them, nor ask them to hide who they are.

Pastor Kate Van Valkenburg - Director

### **UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN WESLEY FOUNDATION**

Greetings to you from your Wesley Foundation at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor! We seek to be a spiritual home by providing a welcoming and nurturing environment on the university campus and in the digital world. Through worship, fellowship, study, and service we seek to build an open and diverse Christian community.

Our weekly programs include worship, Bible studies, small group studies, service opportunities, and fellowship. We celebrate that we have the technology and facilities available to us to meet the needs of students in our community as well as those engaging from a digital space. Indeed, the world is our parish!

We have partnered with The Nearness and the Michigan United Methodist Foundation to provide an online small group opportunity for young adults entitled “Holy Friendship.” This 8-week experience is modeled after the Wesley’s small group which began on the campus of Oxford. This project reaches out to university students, young alumni, and young adults throughout the region.

We continue to forge partnerships with area local churches to help meet the growing needs of our community. Through student interns, service projects, collaborative study opportunities, worship experiences, and social justice efforts, our students and local church leaders have had the opportunity to learn from one another and to combine our resources for effective ministry.

We are focused on ways to help students discern God’s call in their life. We seek to help students to better understand their gifts and graces and how to implement them in faithful ways in their communities.

We also launched Sacred Ink, an art installation featuring portraits and stories of young adults with tattoos that have sacred meaning to them. We are planning a tour to share it with local churches, small galleries, and nearby theological seminaries.

I am excited to see the many ways that God is working in the lives of these young people and look forward to seeing them help proclaim the nearness of the realm of God. Let us continue to lift them up in prayer and strive to work together to support them as they seek out their calling in life and faith. We thank you for your prayerful support!

~ Rev. Tim Kobler, Chaplain

## DIVISION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND CAMPUS MINISTRY

The Division of Higher Education and Campus Ministry (DHECM) is a part of the Board of Young People's Ministries (BYPM) and is charged with advocating for campus ministry work throughout the Michigan Conference connectional structure to secure primary financial resources and to provide accountability and evaluation for our UM campus ministries.

At the time of the writing of this report, our current members include the following: Rev. Jeff Williams (Chair), Lauren Canary, Rev. Katie Fahey, Gordon Grigg, Dr. Sarah Hercula, Rev. Mary Ivanov, Rick Miller, and Rev. Brian Steele.

In the United Methodist Church, campus ministries are extension ministries of the Church, as outlined in *The Book of Discipline* (2016, Part IV, ¶ 120): "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches and **extension ministries of the Church** provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs" (emphasis added). As such, campus ministries are among the Michigan Conference's and the United Methodist Church's most significant disciple-making communities. Intentional UM campus faith communities make bold and effective young adult leaders and disciples for the Church and the world by promoting the healthy spiritual and social development of young adults on campus.

The DHECM supports and has a relationship with the following eight Michigan United Methodist campus ministries:

- [Wesley@CMU](#) (Central Michigan University)
- [Big Rapids Wesley House](#) (Ferris State University)
- [United Campus Christian Fellowship](#) (Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids Community College, and Kendall College of Art and Design)
- [MSU Wesley Foundation](#) (Michigan State University)
- [NMU Wesley](#) (Northern Michigan University)
- [Wesley Foundation at the University of Michigan](#) (University of Michigan)
- [Motor City Wesley](#) (Wayne State University)
- [Wesley Foundation of Kalamazoo](#) (Western Michigan University)

Each campus ministry's individual report is also in this volume of the *Conference Journal*. Additionally, Adrian College and Albion College are our two UM-related colleges in Michigan.

The following links are our current social media and key informational outlets (in addition to the individual campus ministries' social media and websites, linked above):

- Michigan UM campus ministry on Facebook: [UMC on Campus - Michigan](#)
- Michigan UM campus ministries' collective website: [#withWesleyMIUMC](#)
- [GBHEM loans and scholarships](#)
- [Michigan Conference campus ministry website](#)
- [DHECM direct giving website](#)

We appreciate the partnership we have with local churches to extend the ministry of the Church to our students. With the support of local churches, the United Methodist Church prepares and

equips campus spiritual communities of support and encouragement for them to follow God's leading during this important stage of their lives.

Specifically, local churches report information about their incoming college and university students as part of the annual Church Conference process. These reports directly contribute to a database that our campus pastors use to make personal contact with students new to campus, offering them a new spiritual and social home. As of the date of the writing of this report, 43 churches have shared 166 students attending 52 different colleges and universities.

We encourage all congregations—and especially congregations with college and university students—to celebrate [United Methodist Student Day](#), which raises funds to support loans and scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students.

The Francis Asbury Award is an annual recognition given by the DHECM. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) describes the award as follows: "the award recognizes individuals who have made a significant contribution to fostering the church's ministries in higher education at the local, district, or annual conference level of the church. The award is named for Bishop Asbury and is based on his admonition to the people called Methodist to erect a school in the vicinity of every church."

Rev. Carl Gladstone received the 2023 Francis Asbury Award. Carl has served in a variety of capacities in campus ministry over the years: student, chaplain, campus minister, board member of local boards, and in ministry through the General Board of Discipleship. Carl was instrumental in re-establishing campus ministries in the Detroit area through Motor City Wesley and also serves on the Board of the United Methodist Campus Ministers' Association. Carl is creative and collaborative in his work in campus ministry; for example, he helped students record an album and has helped Michigan-area campus ministers collaboratively fundraise to support campus ministries in Michigan, in addition to helping DHECM to rethink how dying congregations can support campus ministries through stewardship.

Some of DHECM's key accomplishments in 2023, in addition to our ongoing connections to the local church, include establishing a revamped post-pandemic site assessment process, establishing the Seize-the-Moment grant opportunity, and revamping our Annual Conference golf outing fundraiser, each discussed further below.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, campus ministry site assessments (particularly in-person visits) were placed on hold, as the directors coped with the circumstances on their respective campuses. DHECM subsequently developed a new site assessment process—allowing for an in-person or online process, as best fit each campus ministry's needs—and during the 2022–23 academic year, seven out of our eight campus ministries engaged in a formal site assessment process. To conduct these assessments, each ministry's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were collaboratively assessed among DHECM members, local board members, and directors, allowing each director to form a set of targeted goals for the upcoming academic year.

As a part of our budgeting process in 2023, we developed a new opportunity for campus ministries that we have called "Seize-the-Moment" grants. These grants will allow directors or campus student leaders to apply for a small grant from DHECM that will allow them to take advantage of an

opportunity or to engage in or hold an event or fundraiser for which they did not originally budget. Having created the grant application, we expect to fund our first Seize-the-Moment grants in 2024.

Each year, DHECM holds a golf outing fundraiser during the Michigan Annual Conference. In 2023, we revamped this opportunity, allowing each campus ministry to “sponsor” a hole in the tournament, engaging with golfers about their ministry as they played through and handing out ministry-specific “swag.” This proved to be a fun new connectional opportunity for our campus ministries and conference attendees.

DHECM and the campus ministries we support truly embody the 2024 Annual Conference theme—“Fearless – Embracing a New Future”—as we support and encourage young adults on Michigan campuses. Students who engage in UM Michigan campus ministries are often those who are not included or who do not feel safe in other religious spaces on campus, such as students in the LGBTQIA+ community, students of color, first generation students, and students who have a history of trauma attached to the church. Our campus pastors fearlessly engage with these students during this important, transformational time in their lives, showing the love of God and offering the inclusion and acceptance students desperately need. This is sacred work.

Perhaps the most fearless task in which DHECM has engaged during 2023 was creating our 2025 budget proposal, in which we boldly increased the amount of funding we are seeking for each of our campus ministries. We prayerfully developed our new budget in line with an overwhelming chorus from our campus ministers that they are stretched too thin, spending a significant amount of time trying to raise enough funds to personally survive while also seeking funds for programming, often while working multiple jobs and wearing too many hats. This creates a deficit of time—one of the most important resources needed for ministry. With more funding, campus ministers would have more time to focus on the vital work of ministry to which they are passionately committed.

Furthermore, our campus ministries require conference funding because the “congregations” that make up campus ministries (i.e. students) are not in a position to give monetarily to their ministry home, given the ever-rising costs of tuition and living expenses for college students. Moreover, campus ministries are a state-wide effort, as students attend college from different locations across the state and, with the help of campus ministries, return to locations across the state as developed faith leaders.

Without the faith and leadership development that campus ministries provide, our conference will lose a key funnel for future participants, members, lay leaders, and clergy. Funding the salaries of our campus ministers will allow our campus ministers to do the work necessary to keep our conference as a vital agent of the work of Jesus Christ in the world.

Rev. Jeff Williams, Michigan DHECM Chair

Dr. Sarah Hercula, Michigan DHECM Recording Secretary

## **DISTRICTS OF THE MICHIGAN ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

### **CENTRAL BAY DISTRICT**

2023 has been a year of transition. The primary transition took place July 1 as the conference transitioned from 9 to 7 districts and the Central Bay District experienced new boundaries that saw some churches become parts of other districts while churches formerly a part of other districts became a part of our district. At the same time the discord in the denomination resulted in 10 churches disaffiliating from the January to June Central Bay District, while 13 churches voted to disaffiliate from the July to December Central Bay District. Regardless of how churches stepped aside from the Central Bay District, we released them with a sense of sadness but with a blessing of hope and renewal for the benefit of the Kingdom of God. We welcomed with open arms new to us churches with great hope for their fulfillment of the mission given them.

In early February, our Care (Clergy, Spouse, and Family Support) Team sponsored a Clergy Retreat at the Bay Shore Camp and Retreat Center. The theme was “Enough” and focused encouraging the pastors that God has given them all the resources they need for the task they have been given and that they can know they are Enough in Christ. It was a great time of reflection, inspiration, and retreating allowing those who attended to return with a sense of rest and care.

With the new beginnings that came with new district boundaries, we organized into Connexon Zones, groups of pastors and churches in regional areas within the district with the specific purpose of working together, supporting one another, and resourcing each other to better be the church of Jesus. Already these Connexon Zones are discerning how to do church in new and exciting ways.

With rather drastic cuts in personnel at the conference level, we believed it necessary to retain the staffing at the district level to better resource our pastors and churches. It is the mission of Central Bay District to “Partner with You to Bring People to Jesus.” This takes place through the resourcing and diligent work of Teri Rice, our Executive Assistant, Tina Karnath, our Director of Children’s Ministry and assistant administrator, Jennifer Lane, our Director of Youth Ministries, and Vicki Bork, our Treasurer and website manager. We have a wonderful, dedicated district staff.

Plans are in the works for a district-wide seminar in the fall of 2024 entitled “Reaching Out in Love” focused on starting, sustaining, partnering, and transitioning local church outreach ministries while building relationships and sharing the Love of God.

With God as our guide and stay, we look with great anticipation to what lies before us as, together, we make disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world.

DS John G Kasper

### **EAST WINDS DISTRICT**

As the people of the East Winds District gathered last November for our Conference, we realized that this was and continues to be a season of change. The District celebrated the leadership of Rev. John Hice, who retired after serving as the District Superintendent of the Cross Roads and East Winds Districts. During our Conference, we welcomed the new district Superintendent, Rev. Dr. Margie R. Crawford, who was also our Keynote Speaker.

The theme of our District Conference was Puzzling Through. It was and is an invitation to consider how each person and each faith community can continue to answer the call our Lord has placed upon each of our lives. We seek to answer the question: “What more can we do?”, for God’s children. We acknowledge that we will be a different District as this year unfolds. And yet, we are still invested in the mission and ministry of our local churches, mission zones, Districts and Conference.

Through ministry shares we have continued to support missions such as the South Flint Soup Kitchen, The Blue Water Free Store and Ministry Center, Campus Ministry at UM-Flint, Family Promise of Genesee County as well as provide startup funds for Intervarsity Christian Fellowship Chapters at community colleges in Flint and Port Huron, and helped to cover the cost of a mission trip to Latvia. We have supported projects in Haiti and Liberia.

We continue to be honored and humbled to be in ministry with one another. We are amazed at the resourcefulness of the people of God. The past several years we have walked through difficult times together and we will continue to do so. We, as your Leadership Team, look forward to providing support and resources for your continued success.

Our laity are present and serving in our communities. We are reaching out to one another and working to show others we care by sending cards, calling, and texting. Laity help with clothes closets, thrift shops, food pantries, soup kitchens, free lunches, and dinners. We continue to pack our Samaritan’s Purse shoeboxes. We are connecting with our communities with corn hole tournaments, softball games, roller skating, and movie nights. We have given out backpacks with school supplies and food for the weekend. With the use of technology, we continue to offer online worship. We are still “Zooming” for meetings, Bible studies, and book clubs. We are seeing growing membership with younger adults in some of our congregations. We also want to thank Bonnie Potter for her commitment as our District Co-Lay Leader, as her term of office ended December, 2023.

Rev. Dr. Margie R. Crawford  
East Winds District Superintendent

Carol Kandell,  
East Winds District Leadership Chairperson

Cynthia Rossman,  
East Winds District Lay Leader

### **GREATER DETROIT DISTRICT**

If 2022 marked the year of “firsts” since the pandemic, then 2023 marked the year of ministry back to fullness. The churches of the Greater Detroit District have been busy engaging with their communities and transforming the world for Christ. Our district has been busy leading, assisting, and equipping our churches.

Our first district gathering for 2023 was the Martin Luther King Jr. service January 8 at Dearborn First UMC. Rev. Dr. Jill Zundel gave the message, five students received scholarships and the Drum Major for Justice Award was awarded to Ms. Brenda Street and Rev. Dr. Julius Del Pino.

February and March brought workshops to equip leaders of our district. These were both in-person and virtual. Many thanks to the churches who hosted and to our district tech team who worked to bring the workshops to anyone who was unable to attend in person.

Normally in the fall, Hands with Detroit, our district service day, moved to April in 2023. Fifty plus volunteers representing over twenty-three churches spent a beautiful day being the hands and feet of Christ while serving the Cass Community. Susanna Webber, our Director of Justice and Mission Engagement and Rev. Sue Pethoud, Deacon, organized the day with lots of mission tasks for all. Later in June at the Cass Community Social Service 2023 Annual Dinner, the Greater Detroit District was named, "Church of the Year" based on work done during the 2023 Hands with Detroit day.

The Greater Detroit District really "showed up" at Annual Conference as The French UMC received the 2023 One Matters Award, Rev. Carl Gladstone, Deacon received the 2023 Francis Asbury Award, and the Hope United Methodist Church Gospel Choir sang during the Sunday morning worship service. Also, in June, District Superintendent Rev. Dr. Totty held a virtual coffee hour to get acquainted with District Leaders and Ministries.

The Urban Methodist Youth Camp hosted forty campers at the Michindoh Retreat center near Hillsdale, Michigan July 30 - August 4, 2023 with the theme "I will dance" from Jeremiah 31:3-4. The urban Methodist youth camp hosts campers from 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade each year. We are grateful to Pastor Jonathan Combs, Rev. Audrey Mangum, and many other volunteers for this wonderful camp experience for district youth.

As the Conference map changed to seven districts, so did our map. In August we welcomed fifteen new churches from Monroe to Northville. This brings our total churches to eighty-one. We celebrated and welcomed our new churches with a "Who Are the People in your Neighborhood" themed worship at Wyandotte UMC.

A Technology in Action workshop at Dearborn First UMC in September was an interactive discussion and demonstration of technology in use at Dearborn. Participants went away with much information to take back to their churches. We rounded out the fall with our District Conference on November 17 at Downriver UMC and a Christmas Breakfast on December 16 for District Clergy and their spouses, District Staff, Lay Leaders, and the Superintendency Committee at Nardin Park UMC.

Fifty women of the Detroit Women of Faith (previously United Methodist Women) attended our annual prayer breakfast on February 10 at Centro Familiar Crsitiano Church. Our speaker was Rev. Beatrice Alghali from North Lake UMC in Chelsea. In response to our theme "An Urgent Mission", 12 attendees were given envelopes of money and instructed to engage in mission and report back on April 1. Finally, we remembered all Women of Faith who had died since the last prayer breakfast. On October 14, 2023 approximately 70 women met at Ferndale First UMC for our Annual Meeting. Rather than have a speaker we engaged in projects that would benefit women, children and youth in the district. We enjoyed a play written by Betty Kalvoda of First United Methodist Church of Troy on the pushing out of black girls from school and afterward we wrote letters to legislators advocating to end this practice.



The Greater Detroit District is looking for a few good men to rebuild and reenergize our United Methodist Men group in 2024. If you are interested in supporting or inviting others to attend, please contact Don Archambeau at Aldersgate United Methodist Church.

The GDD Commission on the Laity Committee in 2023 worked diligently to extend to all churches in the district an invitation to send new additional members to the Michigan Annual Conference 2023 through the Michigan Conference Equalization process. We were pleased to get many new members. The Commission was able to attend over seventy-five Church Conferences at the invitation of the District Superintendent, Rev. Dr. Darryl Totty, to build on 'Who are the People in Our Neighborhood'. As a part of the District Planning team, Board of Directors, media team and other committees, they worked to support all district goals. Plans are underway for an exciting 2024, in making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Whew, we are a busy district! As busy as our district is, our churches are even more so. Many of our church's missions and ministries can be found on our Greater Detroit District Facebook page or our greaterdetroitumc Instagram. Find us, Like or Follow us, and keep up with all the activities, news, and events of the Greater Detroit District.

As the Greater Detroit District reflects on the year 2023, it is not without gratitude for our District Superintendent, Rev. Dr. Darryl Totty, Executive Assistant, Dwanda Hayton, District Clerk, Shirlee Beasley, Media Specialist Adrienne Trupiano-Stepaniak, Director of Justice and Mission Engagement, Susanna Webber, our Lay Leaders, Ruby Anderson and Ken Dowell, as well as the Leadership Team, who welcomed 5 new members this year, Frank Driscoll, Rev. Nicholas Bonsky, Rev. John Pajak, Rev. Steve Perrine, and Rev. Sue Pethoud. These leaders move our district forward. Thank You! We look forward to an even more wonderful 2024!

Rev. Alicea Williams, Deacon

Ruby Anderson & Ken Dowell Rev. Dr. Darryl Totty

## **HERITAGE DISTRICT**

In the year 2023 the Heritage District continued to focus on investing in the development of leaders and growing disciples. Connectional Grants were given to churches who requested financial support for mission and ministry projects from technology upgrades to food pantry support. Lay Servant Ministry courses are fully funded. Any member of a Heritage District church can take a lay servant training course free of charge. Our Leadership Team is focused on reinvesting district ministry shares back into the work of the local church to the greatest extent possible.

Fearlessly Embracing a new Future requires a commitment to do things that stretch us; things that are hard to do; things that are uncommon or unusual. Our district funds provide administrative support for a new idea – Oasis Virtual Communities - sponsored by Plymouth First and the New Starts Team. In addition to connecting with those not already part of a church community, Oasis has provided a place for many who've been displaced by disaffiliation to stay connected to spiritual community as they seek a new church home. Oasis offers Monday Morning Prayer hour, Bible Studies, Small Groups – both virtual and in person – and mission opportunities to support a preschool and a retirement community.

Fearlessly Embracing the Future, the district sponsored clergy appointed in cross racial / cross cultural settings to attend General Commission on Religion and Race training in Atlanta called “Facing the Future.” There they enjoyed peer to peer support and were equipped with tools to help them in their ministry journey.

Like all districts, the Heritage district has increased in number and geography. We celebrate the urban, the rural, and everything in between; the new and the long-established places where people continue to give witness to the presence of Christ among us. Many congregations are asking hard questions and doing good work of listening to their community with one ear and the Lord with the other as they envision new ways to connect and build relationships so that the fear of the unknown will be reduced as we embrace the future amid our present opportunity.

It is my great privilege to serve this district as Superintendent.

Gratefully,

Rev. LuAnn Rourke

### **NORTHERN SKIES DISTRICT**

The expanded Northern Skies District welcomed 34 new congregations in 2023. It was a year of getting to know one another and learning to function in new ways over a great expanse of beautiful northern Michigan geography. Under the broad horizons of the Northern Skies, we continue our work of bringing together people, churches, and ministries. This work includes key partners such as God’s Country Community Ministry, Camp Michigamme, the Lake Louise Christian Community, NMU Wesley Campus Ministry, Lay Servant training, and United Women in Faith. We are stronger together.

Under the unwavering and competent leadership of District Superintendent Rev. Scott Harmon and Executive Assistant Diana Byar, we are doing ministry in creative ways as congregations assess their needs and resources. We are learning together as we turn our focus toward the future church. One essential tool has been technology. The district fully embraces the use of new technology to accomplish our mission and goals.

We are learning to function in tandem, holding two district conferences and two clergy retreats: the Northern Region above the Mackinac Straits, and the Southern Region below the Straits.

Although our geography separates us by more than half the landmass of the state of Michigan, we envision a future where we are of one heart and mind, and making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world in northern Michigan.

Rev. Kristi Hintz Chair, Northern Skies District Leadership Team

### **WESTERN WATERS DISTRICT**

The Western Waters District came into existence July 1, 2023 – a merger of the Northern Waters and Midwest Districts. It has been a year of celebrations. In January the Northern Waters District celebrated the 20 years of ministry and the February 1<sup>st</sup> retirement of Executive Assistant Jill Haney. In May the Midwest District celebrated their first and last District Superintendent as Rev. Dr. Margie

Crawford moved to become the DS for the East Winds District. In July DS Jodie Flessner toured the Western Waters churches joining the new district from the former Midwest District. In October we celebrated the Commissioning of Deaconess Michelle White and Home Missioner Bill White (leading the 5 Loaves 2 Fish feeding mission) AND the unique partnership of Wyoming Park UMC with Family Promise in sharing facilities to provide transitional housing.

The Midwest, Northern Waters, and Western Waters Districts continued to provide mission and ministry grants to local churches, campus ministries, Native American Elders Program, Immigration Law and Justice, and camping ministries among others. We continued to resource churches with technology, Single Accountability Structure, and Local Church Assessments (LCA), including training for LCA consultants.

Throughout the year transition teams met and we continue to develop the best structure for supporting the mission and ministry of the emerging Western Waters District. In August the clergy of the district gathered in-person to talk about emerging ministries. This was the first in person district clergy gathering since COVID for former Midwest clergy, former Northern Waters churches gathered in the summer of 2022. In 2022 the Northern Waters District held their last round of HUB Church Conferences (regional / cluster gatherings). Northern Waters also held seven Listening Sessions in 2022 (4 in person and 3 virtual) to discuss disaffiliation concerns. In the fall of 2023, the new Western Waters District held ten HUB Church Conferences from north to south. With individual church conferences beginning and ending these Sunday afternoon gatherings, we spent focused time in between getting to know each other and building on the ministry ideas generated at the clergy gathering.

Jodie Flessner, District Superintendent

## **MICHIGAN CONFERENCE-RELATED AND OTHER AGENCIES AND INSTITUTIONS**

### **AFTER THE STORM**

Disaster Case Management, the activity that After the Storm provides, is a client-centered approach to assisting survivors of natural disaster achieve their long-term recovery goals. Disaster Case Managers meet with clients for assessment and setting goals, help clients in accessing federal, state, and local assistance, coordinate home repair and rebuild projects, and refer to other social services as needed.

Over the past eight years, the Michigan Conference provided Disaster Case Management in communities impacted by flooding across the State of Michigan including Northwest Detroit (2014 and 2019), Midland, Houghton/Hancock, and the Great Lakes Bay Region (GLBR). In each case, the Michigan Conference collaborated with community leaders, non-profit organizations and municipal, county, State and FEMA officials.

As a result of the growing number of disasters in our state, the Disaster Case Manager work grew beyond the capacity of the Conference to manage and administer. After The Storm was established to provide the necessary and focused governance and management required to both continue and scale-up Disaster Case Management work across the State. After the Storm has its own EIN and is separately incorporated in the State of Michigan on a membership basis with the Michigan Conference serving as the sole member.

The State of Michigan applied for (and was awarded) a \$18 million FEMA DCMP Grant for Southeastern Michigan. The State put the project up for bid in early February 2022, and After the Storm received this contract from the State of Michigan. We currently employ 24 staff, and subcontract with two community non-profits (St. Vincent DePaul and Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency) for a total of nearly 80 people working on this project.

As a result of the disaster case management occurring in Metro Detroit, over 1200 cases have been opened. These survivors are still facing mold in their basements, no hot water, and no heat. After the Storm has partnered with DTE and the Detroit Home Repair Fund to help meet some of the needs.

A further result of the disaster case management in Detroit has been that our disaster case managers have been able to refer clients to community resources. This has equated to a value of \$2.5 million in value for those who are hurting.

After the Storm also continues to do outreach and education. We have spoken in multiple churches and community meetings to share the importance of the work we do as well as help build capacity for communities in blue skies.

## **CAMPING AND OUTDOOR MINISTRIES**

### **GRACE OUTSIDE**

**including Wesley Woods Camp & Retreat Center, Lake Michigan Family Campground (formerly Lake Michigan Camp & Retreat) and Lake Huron Retreat Center**

With the goal of growing, not just a sustainable but a vibrant camp and retreat ministry, as well as continuing to serve as the legacy camp and retreat program of the Michigan Conference, we considered the challenges of a changing culture and church. The number of churches and those running programs for children, youth and young adults are on the decline. The number of families who consider themselves “nones” or not participating in organized religion is growing. We sought a new strategy to help increase participation and continue to be the porch through which people can connect with a faith journey and community.

We undertook a 10-month process to consider the brand of Michigan Area United Methodist Camping (MAUMC) to possibly find a new approach. The process involved working with a marketing consultant, extensive market research focused on Millennial parents and Gen X families, focus groups, conversations with board, staff, and volunteer participants and lots of prayer.

We uncovered the reality that most parents share the values we provide in our programming. They seek experiences for their children and themselves, which take them to safe places, away from technology, out in nature, learning new things, developing friendships and community. We also learned there is yearning, though not well articulated, for things spiritual and a connection to God.

The primary organizational value the board and staff centered on was hospitality for all people. In a world where so many feel unwelcome, unwanted, anxious and lonely, we have a powerful opportunity to extend God’s love for all. The very Methodist concept of “grace” kept showing up in our deliberations as a positive concept most people understand and relate to.

All this hard work and prayer led us to our new brand GRACE OUTSIDE being born! As our website states: “This energizing new brand tells the story today’s families need to hear: experiencing God’s Grace Outside creates love inside. Grace Outside invites you to experience the love of God outside of your everyday life. Sometimes that means leaving your familiar spaces and ways of living, giving you the freedom to discover who you are, what faith means to you, and how to receive God’s love in new and fulfilling ways.” Grace Outside’s initials just happen to be G.O., so .... Let’s GO!

- We received a \$10,000 grant from the United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministry Association to develop the brand’s new website – [www.graceoutside.org](http://www.graceoutside.org) The new brand was introduced with Zoom-based launch parties in November and our quarterly newsletter in December. We are happy to report this has been well-received.

Looking Ahead: The 2020 MAUMC strategic plan recommended employing a full-time year-round program director to help grow programming at all three sites and other places. The board, at its November 2023 retreat, committed to a bold future in designating endowment funds for the hiring of a new Grace Outside Program Director, which took place in February 2024 with the hiring of Allison Vitale.

### **Bay Shore Evangelical Camp of the United Methodist Church**

In spite of the still emerging impacts of Covid-19, our dedicated staff and volunteers made a way for more than 800 children and youth to attend Bay Shore Summer Camp onsite events in 2023. While attendance still remains lower than pre-covid levels, countless people continued to attend our summer camp events and year-round retreats. New ministries are growing, and our Family Camp event is expanding with increased attendance by younger families with children.

2023 was the third summer for our travelling day camp ministry, Bay Shore’s “Day Camp on the Road.” “Day Camp on the Road” provides an opportunity to extend the reach of Bay Shore’s mission, and it helps local churches connect with their community in a new way, but it also helps develop the young adults who lead the program into leaders for their local church. We served nearly 500 day-campers at 11 weeks of Day Camp at 10 churches across the Michigan Conference.

Bay Shore Camp was blessed with an estate gift in 2021 that included 107 acres, a 20 acre lake and a complex of buildings, just 20 minutes from our main location. This second campus has been named, “Faith Quest.” In 2023, we operated several weeks of day camp serving more than 70 children and offered some family play days at the location that were attended by more than 100 children and their families. Improvements to the property infrastructure continued throughout 2023 as we prepare for a growing ministry at that location. We continue to develop and plan for a faith-based outdoor education program as well. We’re calling the outdoor education program, “Creation Quest” and are working to complete our Creation Quest headquarters building.

In keeping with our vision of “no child left behind,” no child was turned away from camp for inability to pay. In fact, individuals and organizations donated more than \$107,000 to help kids go to camp. We are thankful for the countless people who support this ministry with their financial gifts. Aside from those who support our Campership Fund, we give thanks for those who gave nearly \$151,000 to support our general operating budget. These generous gifts allowed us to navigate the continued

financial challenges of the last few years including changing trends, inflation, supply chain issues and staff shortages. We are especially thankful for an endowment that sustains the ministry as well. Bay Shore now has an operating budget of \$1.5 M, 12 year round staff, two campuses, a traveling ministry and many, many faithful volunteers.

### **History and 2023 Recap**

An Evangelical United Brethren Camp at the time of the 1968 merger, Bay Shore established its own 501c3 non-profit when the United Methodist Church decided to close the camp and agreed to transfer it to some faithful constituents. Bay Shore continues as an affiliate ministry of the United Methodist Church by representation on the Bay Shore Board from UMC appointed clergy and laity.

In 2023, Bay Shore Camp's main campus offered 14 summer child and youth camp events over a course of 8 weeks. Weeks of camp include athletic camps, arts camps, and traditional camps. Summer camp attendance remained steady at a little more than 800 children and youth. Attendance is still down below 2019 levels. In its third year, our weeks of traveling day camps experienced growth, serving 490 campers, partnering with 10 churches across the Conference. It's clear there's a future in this collaborative programming with the church.

Our new campus, "Faith Quest," had a modest opening this year, serving 74 kids in our day camp program and more than a hundred during our family friendly, "Play Days."

Family (Assembly) Camp, now in its 112<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, continues to be well attended. Over 500 people participated in some portion of the week's events. Inspiring speakers for the adults, engaging programs for the kids and youth and a wide range of recreational activities, draw people of all ages to this multigenerational event. This continues to be a well-attended event with children and youth outnumbering the adults this year.

Bay Shore serves a wide array of year-round guests. Many attend our programmed retreats including men's retreats, women's retreats, youth retreats, quilt retreats and craft retreats. And others attend events as guests of others who use our facilities to program their own retreats. Our newest retreat facility, the Amby Lodge, a thirteen room, 33 bed lodge with semi-private rooms is our most popular. Rooms are comfortable, typical of a nice hotel and the Lodge has a beautiful great room with kitchen for guest use. Most weekend dates for this Lodge are already committed on an ongoing basis and we continue to try to grow our weekday events and fill in a few open weekends.

The most important events that Bay Shore offers are free! Twice a year, June and October, Bay Shore offers "Free Family Fun Days." Families are invited to attend. Camping is free. All the recreational activities are free. The June event includes all of our popular camp activities including swimming, mini-golf, inflatables, ziplining, lasertag, arrowtag, paintball, archery and barrel train rides. The October event includes popular Fall activities like hayrides and pumpkin painting. Weather dependent, 200-600 people attend these events. These free events are one of the ways we introduce new people to the Bay Shore ministry.

In December, Bay Shore stages a drive-through Living Nativity that serves hundreds of guests annually. This event is also free, offered as a gift to the community. We've found that this "drive-through" event especially serves the elderly and families with very young children and is an engaging way to retell the Christmas story or to teach to children for the very first time. More than

two hundred people attended this event again this year. It was especially fun to have many live animals including sheep with the “shepherds,” various animals at the “stable,” and camels with the “wise ones.” We offer a free “reception” that includes food and beverages, crafts for kids and fellowship for those interested. The family friendly reception is growing in popularity.

### **What’s Next?**

Following 2020, camp ministry is obviously in a period of transition and we’re certain that camp ministry will continue to be impacted for the near future. We’ve already begun to experience changes as the family dynamic has changed. In the coming months and years, Bay Shore plans to roll out new ways to support the local church and the family. Partnering with the local church, traveling day camps will continue to be rolled out to up to 12-16 locations in 2024. Partnering with schools and community, the outdoor education program is being launched. Meeting the changing needs of families is a priority. The new campus already boasts a new Day Camp facility, with even more kids and family programming planned for the future. The main campus will continue to host overnight camps, our historic Family Camp and new family camping opportunities. The mission remains the same:

Jeff Parsons, Executive Director  
Bay Shore Camp and Family Ministries

## **LAKE LOUISE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, CAMP and RETREAT CENTER**

Lake Louise came into being in 1934 through the generosity of the Horner family of Eaton Rapids as a gift “to all the Methodists of Michigan.” The Horners had acquired a large tract of cut-over timberland after the logging era of Michigan was over. As the Great Depression descended upon the country, the Horners approached their pastor, Rev. Stanley Niles, with the idea of giving 5,500 acres away. The idea of a church youth camp began to take shape. Through the action of a group of visionary people, the plan culminated in the creation of the Lake Louise Christian Community, encompassing a youth camp and creating cottage sites around the lake upon which clergy families could build a place of their own. The Lake Louise Christian Community would hold the land in trust for the two Michigan conferences. Christian camping began at Lake Louise in 1935 and until 2020’s Covid Pandemic remained uninterrupted. In 2021 we restarted our camping program and remain committed to offering a place for camp and retreat ministries to occur for generations to come. Approximately half of the original gift was sold to the State of Michigan in 1935 to provide for the development of the site. LLCC still holds title to 2,400 acres of the original gift. The land is managed under the Conservation Forestry Act and the Forest Legacy Conservation Easement, providing for the sustainable harvesting of timber and ensuring the undeveloped character of the land and the lake.

Lake Louise continues as an affiliate ministry of The United Methodist Church by representation on the Lake Louise Board of Trustees from United Methodist clergy and laity. Lake Louise is governed by a 16-member Board of Trustees. By Lake Louise bylaws, trustees generally serve three (3) three-year terms, for a total of nine (9) years.

Lake Louise was excited to welcome 398 campers to one of our residential weeks of camp in 2023. Check out our website at <https://lakelouisecommunity.org/camps/considering-camp/> to see all the camps scheduled for 2024. And check back often to see what we are planning for the future!

We are blessed with generous donors that help support our Scholarship Fund and we are committed to ensuring that those that wish to attend Lake Louise have the opportunity to do so. In 2023 we passed out over \$50,000.00 to help kids attend camp.

We are overjoyed to have clergy, laity, and youth from the Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church and beyond as well as the local community returning to Lake Louise for various retreats. Our year-round facilities received nearly 500 people from over 30 distinct groups in 2023. They come to craft, to plan, to build community, and to renew their spirits. They come as church groups, common interest groups, and individuals seeking connection. Our inaugural Fall Middle School Retreat brought 27 youth and adults from across Michigan to learn and serve together and in the Spring we hosted two clergy gatherings.

In 2023 we continued our efforts of helping the environment and offering a place for renewal while helping with projects. We hosted a Make-A-Difference Day where 25 came to help with planting over 1,000 trees, cleaning a section of Adopt-A-Highway, improving a hiking trail, and working on a community garden. Many individuals stayed for the entire weekend to help with various projects around camp.

Lake Louise continues to pursue a scheduled program of facility improvements supported by major gifts from donors and with help from our volunteers. Lake Louise is proud of its heritage as a gift given to all the Methodists of Michigan. We remain an asset to churches, clergy, ministry professionals, and community groups seeking a place of rest and renewal in a beautiful natural setting. We invite all members of the Michigan Conference to pay us a visit, to join us for a retreat, to send their children to our camps, and to volunteer as a counselor or work camp volunteer. We are blessed to be partnering with you in this ministry.

Neil H. Haney-Executive Director

Rev. Gregory Lawton- Director of Camping  
and Outreach

## SENIOR LIVING

### **Brio Living Services and UMRC-Porter Hills Foundation**

**Introduction:** Brio Living Services, formerly United Methodist Retirement Communities (UMRC) and Porter Hills, has been a leader in caring for older adults since its faithful founding in 1906. We are delighted to share our accomplishments over the past year. Thank you for the prayers and support of the Michigan United Methodist Church Conference as we serve older adults across lower Michigan.

### **How did the work of your agency impact Michigan United Methodists, our local churches, and/or local communities across Michigan and/or around the world?**

Each year, Brio Living Services serves approximately 8,000 older adults across Michigan. Our faith-based, nonprofit organization encompasses not only traditional, market-rate residential communities for older adults, but affordable living and home- and community-based services as well. Brio Living Services serves the most economically diverse population of older adults in the



state. In fact, 20 of our 23 locations and service lines provide care for low-income older adults. Brio Living Services is proud to help older adults at all income levels to live their best lives.

Our home- and community-based services account for 70% of the older adults we serve, helping them live as independently and safely as possible in their own homes and communities. This includes over 1,300 older adults each year through our five PACE, or Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly, sites across the state. PACE serves the psycho-social, medical, and supportive needs of low-income, nursing home-eligible adults, ages 55 and up. Most participants are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid and pay no additional fees for PACE services, which include: comprehensive medical, occupational and physical therapy, pharmacy needs, nutrition and meals, health education, social and recreational activities, and door-to-door transportation. Through intentional growth, we currently serve 50% more participants at our five PACE locations than we did five years ago.

Brio Living Services expanded its wellness programming for older adults across our residential and affordable living communities and renovated the dining room and common spaces at our Porter Hills Village community in Grand Rapids. These have included a learning studio, enhanced library, and movie theatre and recording studio where residents can record their life histories.

As led by our mission of “welcoming all, partnering together, enriching lives,” and our Guiding Belief of Inclusiveness, Brio Living Services has embraced Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training in the past year for its team members, board members, and leadership team. Brio’s active DEI committee includes team members who represent a variety of backgrounds and job types from our 23 locations and service lines. Brio is committed to being a warm, welcoming, and safe place for all to live and work, where each of us can be our true, authentic selves.

### **What were your agency’s top three major accomplishments in 2023?**

Brio Living Services was thrilled to announce that it had earned the **highest possible, 5-star ratings** for its three skilled nursing centers following the latest review from Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). This includes our Kresge Healthcare & Rehabilitation Center at Chelsea Retirement Community and the Health Center at Porter Hills Village and Green House® Homes, located in Grand Rapids. The CMS 5-star rating system is intended as a measure to help people more effectively compare and choose nursing care centers. Ratings are determined after CMS thoroughly examines each center’s health inspections, staffing, and other key quality measures. A 5-star rating signifies excellence and is extremely difficult to achieve. For EACH of our Medicare-rated skilled nursing centers to earn 5 stars is a rare accomplishment and a direct reflection of our team members’ dedication to providing the highest quality care for all those we serve.

As we seek to be an employer of choice, Brio Living Services continues to receive honors as a **Best & Brightest Company to Work For® in West Michigan and in the Nation!** Brio was also among the Top 101 Highest Scoring Winners for the national program. This honor is a direct reflection of our team members who help deliver on our mission each day to improve the lives of older adults. Over the past year, we have seen greater retention and reduced turnover rates among the 1,250 team members we employ at Brio Living Services.

After an extensive national search, we were delighted to announce **Kelli Smith**, CFRE as the UMRC-Porter Hills Foundation's new President and CEO in June 2023. Kelli comes to the Foundation with more than 25 years of philanthropic experience in the areas of healthcare and education.

**Our 2024 Annual Conference theme is “Fearless – Embracing a New Future.” In what ways is your agency/ministry moving forward with Christ, seeing and hearing the people around you, affirming and engaging as a new community?**

This year's Annual Conference theme resonates with us at Brio Living Services and the UMRC-Porter Hills Foundation as well, as we embrace a future that empowers ALL to age well. We even use the word 'fearless' in our Strategic Plan through 2025, which includes:

- **People** – Engaging and empowering older adults and the team members who serve them.
- **Stewardship** – Nurturing relationships and taking care of all resources entrusted to us.
- **Quality** – Striving for excellence in all we do.
- **Culture** – Commitment to providing a caring and welcome environment for all.
- **Innovation and Growth** – *Fearless in seeking opportunities for all to age well.*

Each of these facets guides our efforts for strategic master planning for renovations and construction projects at our flagship campuses, including Chelsea Retirement Community, Porter Hills Village, and Cook Valley Estates. We also continue to seek growth opportunities for our home- and community-based programs and services to meet the growing demand of older adults of a spectrum of income levels. The UMRC-Porter Hills Foundation is a key part of this planning and fundraising to help bring these plans to fruition, thanks to gifts from our generous donors.

At Brio Living Services and the UMRC-Porter Hills Foundation, we continue to value our faith-based traditions that lead us in providing the highest quality care and services possible for the older adults we serve, of all socioeconomic backgrounds. As part of this endeavor, Brio Living Services earned the United Methodist Association's **EAGLE accreditation** in 2016. EAGLE, or Educational Assessment Guidelines Leading toward Excellence, is the only faith-based accrediting body in the world and focuses on ministries of older adults and children. Brio Living Services is one of just eight EAGLE-accredited senior living organizations nationwide and the only one in Michigan. This spring, Brio Living Services is scheduled for our next onsite EAGLE re-accreditation review. This rigorous self-assessment and peer-reviewed accreditation process takes a holistic view of the entire organization and contains built-in methods to help organizations constantly strive for excellence.

The UMRC-Porter Hills Foundation continues to raise funds for these four pillars:

- Benevolent Care Fund
- Team Member Support Services
  - Scholarships
  - Emergency Aid
- Capital Improvements
- Life Enrichment programming for older adults.

The cornerstone of our Foundation is, and always will be, Benevolent Care, ensuring that qualified residents in our Assisted Living and Memory Care centers always have a home where they are loved and cared for like family. In 2022, the Foundation was blessed to receive an anonymous matching

gift of \$5 million toward the General Benevolent Care Endowment Fund supporting our residents at our historic Chelsea Retirement Community. As of December 31, 2023, we have just \$1.1 million to go! Thank you to churches and affiliates in the Michigan UMC Conference whose gifts have helped us toward our goal and which benefit the lives of older adults who have exhausted their savings. We hope our church partners will continue to bless the lives of older adults and help us achieve our \$5 million match.

We are grateful for our faith-based history which continues to guide the future of Brio Living Services. Thank you for your prayers and support in helping us provide loving communities, care, and services for older adults. We look forward to meeting with churches and affiliate groups over the coming year to share the good work you are helping us accomplish on behalf of older adults and their families, as well as our team members. Thank you for your commitment to our mission of service to older adults.

Steve Fetyko  
President & CEO  
Brio Living Services

Kelli Smith, CFRE  
President & CEO  
UMRC-Porter Hills Foundation

### **UNITED METHODIST COMMUNITY ACTION HOUSE**

Community is what UMCH is all about. Since 1902, UMCH has been a community hub of access and support. While our mission has remained constant throughout our history, our programming has evolved over time to meet the most urgent, emerging needs of our community.

Today, we operate a robust program model that helps community members of all ages to thrive. We provide early childhood education for children from birth to 4 years old; engagement and academic support for youth; outreach and support services for older adults; and access to nutritious, locally produced food in our new Fresh Market.

Located in Southeast Grand Rapids in the 49507-zip code, UMCH is committed to serving a diverse population and to offering innovative, culturally relevant services that grow with our community.

UMCH is in the midst of a comprehensive expansion plan to grow the reach and impact of all our programs, allowing us to further our mission by serving more people in our community.

As we reflect on the last year, we would like to highlight the following activities:

Early in the year the year, we reestablished our National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation. Working to achieve this standard allowed us to increase professional development for our child development staff, ensuring we stay in step with area standards of quality programming.

Additionally, we moved from an external contract to bringing Family Engagement services in-house. Having this role has not only enhanced how families are engaged and supported, but it has created opportunities to engage social work interns to assist with the caseload and other important activities.

As part of the growth and expansion of our child development center, we are nearly ready to begin renovation of our dedicated alternative care wing, which will house emergency drop-in care in the morning and 2<sup>nd</sup> shift care in the afternoon and evening.

To better meet the needs of our surrounding community, we have continued building capacity for the Fresh Market at UMCH. We expanded Fresh Market hours and staff in the late spring, making the Market more accessible and robust. The Market now provides expanded hours of 10 am to 7 pm, Tuesday through Friday, with the hopes of adding Saturday hours in the next year.

After a lengthy approval process, we expanded our transportation services to include Non-Emergency Medical Transportation. This positions us to better address a critical need among the population we serve and support partner organizations with transportation needs for their clients.

Throughout the year, staffing has continued to be one of the greatest challenges for childcare programs, not just locally, but nationally. We have recently re-engaged with a partner agency's apprentice program to help us build our pool of qualified childcare staff, which would allow us to continue expanding services to serve more children.

As Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) funded program spots became available near the end of the year, our Child Development Center was able to provide the space to fill this gap in our community.

As we embark upon our major expansion project and innovative plan to ensure more children thrive, more families can work, and more seniors can be healthy in mind, body, and spirit, we are grateful to have the United Methodist Church alongside us.

There is a lot to look forward to—and believe us when we say we're just getting started.

Thank you for being our partners in transformation,

**Eric Williams**  
**Co-Chief Executive Officer**

**Carla Moore**  
**Co-Chief Executive Officer**

### **UNITED METHODIST FOUNDATION OF MICHIGAN**

The United Methodist Foundation of Michigan is dedicated to the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Although our ministry may look different from those serving in local churches, we are committed to supporting and developing financial and leadership skills that will propel the Church into the future.

Your investments experienced another strong year of growth in 2023. The Stock Fund increased by 23.68%, the Bond Fund by 7.15%, and the Balanced Fund by 17.06%. All of these funds support impact investing based on responsible, value-aligned principles. While most church investors choose the Balanced Fund, we remain committed to answering your calls for unique investment opportunities. Thus, we can easily customize an asset allocation between equities and fixed income through a client-driven combination of the Stock and Bond Funds.

Last year, we added a full-time staff position with a special focus on leadership development. Gary Step, Senior Director of Leadership Development, quickly established preaching and leadership cohorts and extensive coaching and consultation services with pastors and laity alike. Our senior staff, including Sherry Parker-Lewis and Jeff Regan, now interact monthly with nearly 25% of full time United Methodist pastors across Michigan.

Our total assets under management also grew in 2023 so we have held our long-term position as the most comprehensive United Methodist foundation in the North Central Jurisdiction. In addition, we maintain lower per capita operating expenses in comparison to many similar foundations.

We continue to offer classes in *Saving Grace: A Guide to Financial Well-Being*. This personal finance curriculum has helped people of faith create healthy relationships with money and possessions. As a source of encouragement, we provide grants to local churches participating in this initiative.

We remained a leading provider of scholarships by granting over \$195,000 in 2023. We are excited to introduce a new, innovative staff position with a special focus on mentoring pastors early in their careers and helping leaders strategize church financial matters.

Our goal of helping faithful people live generous lives drives our work. We recognize the critical role of generosity in ministry and are committed to resourcing you by providing significant financial support and education through church grants, educational scholarships, sustainable investments, gift planning, personal spending plans, loan services, and many other opportunities across our continuum of service.

Thank you for your trust and commitment in us. We are eager to continue coming alongside your ministry and helping you achieve your vision and goals. May God richly bless your ministry in the months ahead.

Rev. Dr. David S. Bell  
President & Executive Director

### **MICHIGAN AREA LOAN FUND**

The Michigan Area Loan Fund, operating since 1969, is a financial ministry available within the United Methodist Foundation of Michigan. In 2023, the loan fund provided \$1.6 million in new loans to churches. Investors in the Michigan Area Loan Fund can earn a stated rate of return and these invested funds serve to provide the financial resources for churches seeking loans. Excess funds not needed for loans are invested. This fund operates under the State of Michigan regulatory authority. An official prospectus can be found online at [www.umfmichigan.org](http://www.umfmichigan.org).

The Loan Fund can offer funding to churches with plans to update and renovate facilities and equipment. Loans are also available for technology upgrades or new ministries launches. Churches may find our loan rates more attractive than rates on their outstanding debt with a local bank. A loan to refinance this debt could improve local church finances. The Loan Fund is one resource among a continuum of Foundation resources designed to help churches develop critical

capital campaign strategies, successful stewardship campaigns, or sustainable, value-aligned investments. All these services, including loan borrowing and investing, are services to assist congregations in achieving their ministry goals.

Karen Thompson, Sr. Director of Loan Services, serves as the point of contact to hear about your ministry plans and to discuss the ways in which loans and promissory notes can be a part of your church's effective financial stewardship. If you have a "What if?" question or are curious to know more about the Loan Fund, please contact Karen at [karen@umfmichigan.org](mailto:karen@umfmichigan.org) or 888-451-1929. You can also learn more about investment offerings, loans, and financial services by visiting our website.

Rev. Dr. David S. Bell, President & Resident Agent  
Karen Thompson, Sr. Director of Loan Services

### UNITED METHODIST UNION OF GREATER DETROIT

Do you remember Margaret Hamilton? I found myself thinking about her recently as I was sitting at some dear friends' cottage in Southport, Maine, looking out their great picture windows at a remnant of Hurricane Lee. The Atlantic Ocean was crashing and spraying water in the air, trees were bending and a few even breaking in the mighty wind, as the surf was roaring around the small island in front of me. Margaret Hamilton's Island! She was an actress, who most of us know best as the Wicked Witch of the West, in the classic MGM movie "The Wizard of Oz." For decades she terrorizes young children from her broomstick but nothing could be further from her personal life. The people of Booth Bay Harbor knew her best as a kind, well liked, gracious kindergarten teacher, who reached out to others with hope and possibilities after all kinds of storms. I can't help but think that Margaret would have made a great Trustee of the United Methodist Union. She would have understood our desire to make a difference in the world. That the Union strives to strengthen, support and revitalize people's lives through the mission and ministry of the churches of the Greater Detroit District. Faith and Faithfulness continue to be the cornerstones of the United Methodist Union as we work together.

Now, on to our Ministries:

#### **New Church Development**

The Union continues to work closely with the Office of Congregational Vibrancy to provide grants for new church starts and those who continue to be extraordinarily challenged by the pandemic.

- ❖ Rev. Dirk Elliott, Director of Congregational Vibrancy and I have worked together to develop a financial plan to help sustain **Graceful Journey Community**, a new church start. The goal of this faith community is to provide ministries and worship opportunities for special needs individuals and families. This unique population has often felt unwelcome in other church settings. They meet at First United Methodist Church in Garden City, on Saturday mornings, free of charge. Their budget is very simple; \$25,000 a year. The Union has extended a three-year grant of \$10,000 per year for a total of \$30,000 to support a music ministry.

#### **Support through Loans**

Another facet of our Ministry involves making loans to churches and other United Methodist Church Ministries.

- ❖ In 2021 the Union extended a loan of \$190,000 to **First United Methodist Church in Farmington** for the replacement of their entire HVAC system. Then the trustees discovered the 100-year-old plaster ceiling was cracking, collapsing and needed to be replaced. Fortunately, endowment money was available for this portion of the project. But like my condo renovation, one repair leads to another. Upon completion of the demolition aspect of the project, the old original knob and tube wiring was exposed and required replacement; this included lighting fixtures, ceiling fans, outlets, switches and the main electric panel/fuse box. It's a wonder the trustee didn't lose their minds!  The Union agreed to extend an additional loan of \$60,000 at the same rate of interest as the first loan.
- ❖ **First United Methodist Church in Ferndale** is a large Gothic style church building on Woodward Avenue. They take great pride in caring for their building and have struggled for several years to keep an old heating system alive. Unfortunately, this last winter, striving to heat their building was a challenge. The trustees have developed a new maintenance plan to replace two boilers, expansion tank and a control panel. The Union extended them a loan of \$145,801.
- ❖ **Grace United Methodist Church in New Baltimore** applied to the Union to restructure its loan. They had a loan balance with the Union of \$275, 426.98. The loan dollars were used for a variety of building issues, most recently new roofs for the church and parsonage. They have an excellent repayment record. Simply, they want to utilize some of their endowment funds to significantly reduce their loan with the Union. They would also like to re-amortize their loan with a ten-year term and continue their current interest rate of 4.25%. The Union does not have a penalty for an early payoff and agreed to this reasonable proposal. It will lower their mortgage payment and assist this congregation with any cash flow issues.
- ❖ Several years ago, the City of Detroit Water Board and the Water & Sewerage Department made significant changes in the cost of water usage and run off. This decision dramatically impacted congregations throughout Detroit who had paved parking lots and water infrastructure issues. In 2022 **Detroit Peoples United Methodist Church** discovered they had a leaking water pipe. Several months passed before it was repaired. The church paid for the repair but did not anticipate the additional cost for the water run-off and sewerage usage. Peoples UMC received an outstanding bill for \$22,219.30! The Union extended a loan to them for this amount to assist them in caring for this financial responsibility.
- ❖ **Detroit Central United Methodist Church** asked the Union to consider making a loan of \$100,000 at 0% interest rate to **After the Storm**. This UM-related non-profit disaster ministry was created by the Michigan Annual Conference in 2022. In our area this disaster relief program will assist Metro-Detroit residents impacted by the June 2021 flooding. *After the Storm Michigan* has received a \$15.2 million FEMA grant. They are now seeking administrative support to provide for cash flow. The Union has extended a \$100,000 promissory note at 0% interest rate. It is pleased to join the Michigan Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and the United Methodist Foundation in supporting this vital ministry.
- ❖ For several decades **Beverly Hills United Methodist Church** has been struggling with numerous building issues. In 2022 they hired a project manager to evaluate their flat roof

and continual water issues in their lower level. Unfortunately, necessary repairs were not addressed. In May 2023, Clayton Savage, a Union Trustee, was hired as their new project manager. After careful review, it was decided to divide the project into three phases. Phase one has now been completed. It involved a complete flat roof replacement and the creation of new duct work on the roof, related to the air conditioning. The Union extended a loan of \$104,760.00 at 4.5% interest rate for phase one.

### Grants for Ministry

The Union continues to work hard to respond to emergency needs and reinvests its resources in churches and special projects. Our support makes a difference in the ministries that happen in the Greater Detroit District.

- ❖ **Utica United Methodist Church** has a wonderful history of reaching out to their community. For more than a decade they have been developing and implementing a Christian education summer program that assists and engages students and their families. The Union extended a summer program grant to them to support this vital ministry.
- ❖ For many years, the Union has supported a summer program at **Conant Avenue United Methodist Church**. For the second year, Conant has brought the Children's Defense Fund Freedom School to their community. This has been a very successful outreach experience and makes a real difference in the lives of many children. The goal of a Freedom School is to increase literacy and enhance the ability of a child to have a positive learning experience in the educational process. The church adds an intentional Christian emphasis in an afternoon camp-style program.
- ❖ The Union has a long history of investing in ministry to the immigrant community. Since 2012, we have extended an annual grant of \$5,000 to **Dearborn First United Methodist Church** as part of their ministry as the **Metro Detroit Office of Immigration Law & Justice** (formerly JFON - Justice for Our Neighbors). The Union has extended a three-year grant of \$5,000 per year, for a total of \$15,000.
- ❖ The Union extended a grant to the **Urban Methodist Youth Camp** for a one-week, on-site camp experience at Michindoh Christian Camp in southern Michigan.

### Looking Forward

The work of the Union continues all year long as we grapple with issues and challenges that local churches face. Presently, we are continuing to work on building infrastructure issues with Beverly Hills United Methodist Church, exploring a new location for Graceful Journey Community Church and the investment committee is now working with Captrust. We have appreciated the leadership for almost two decades of Larry Larmee who is retiring effective October 1<sup>st</sup>.

I also would not want to close without expressing my appreciation for those leaving the board: Eugene Paik, Phil Palmer and Jerry Wenzel. We are fortunate to have an outstanding Board of



Trustees, wonderful professional consultants, and a competent, gracious staff. Sue Sohn and Connie Perrine are always ready to be of assistance to local churches.

The work of the Union plays an important role in the life of the Greater Detroit District. It is my privilege to be the Executive Director and share in the ministry God has entrusted to us. Thank you for your participation as we seek to be a blessing in the name of Jesus.

Rev. Carol J. Johns  
Executive Director

## UNITED METHODIST THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

### BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Your partnership, prayers, and support are a cherished gift as BUSTH seeks to serve the church and the world! In a year like 2023, BUSTH's commitments to equip transformational leaders for peace and justice are all the more necessary and significant. We are hopeful and vigilant in our continued partnership with you.

#### NEWS:

- **Students:** Our academic year 2023-24 entering class was among our most diverse, with 86 new students enrolling, 34% of whom are international students.
- **Faculty:** In September we welcomed visiting [faculty member](#) David Anderson Hooker, Visiting Associate Professor of Religion and Conflict Transformation. Two new faculty searches are underway—an Assistant Professor of Religion and Society and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Religion and Black Studies.
- **Expanding Online Programming:** BUSTH's first fully online master's degree—the Master of Religion and Public Leadership (MARPL)—continues to expand after welcoming its first students in fall 2022. MARPL seeks students who wish to be prepared for leadership roles that creatively engage the challenges of public life. Learn more at [bu.edu/sth/marpl](https://bu.edu/sth/marpl).
- **Faculty Research:** Associate Dean Cristian De La Rosa received a Lilly Parenting Grant for \$1.25 million. Our faculty members published more than 75 books, scholarly articles, op-eds, and book reviews during 2023. Many were interviewed by media publications for their work on academics and activism, fat liberation, caring for creation, responding to congregational trauma, and the spread of Christianity in Africa. Selected stories can be found at [bu.edu/sth/research/faculty-research/](https://bu.edu/sth/research/faculty-research/).
- **Scholarships:** We continue to offer free tuition to UMC-registered candidates for ordained ministry and leadership fellowships that support students in ethnic, gender, and sexuality studies. New funds include the Research & Teaching Fund and Affirmation & Empowerment Fund. We have newly endowed funds for DEI, Theology & the Arts, and Doctor of Ministry.
- **Accreditation and Curriculum:** BUSTH received a renewed full and unqualified listing by the University Senate of the United Methodist Church. BUSTH is concluding a curriculum review for the MDiv and MTS programs which will launch in fall 2024.
- **Online Lifelong Learning:** BUSTH offers online courses for professional and spiritual enrichment of religious leaders. Recent offerings include “Sustaining Spirits while Empires Crumble” and “Preaching Mark with Different Voices.” To learn more, visit [bu.edu/sth/oll](https://bu.edu/sth/oll).

- **Development:** Recent accomplishments include endowing the Faith and Ecological Justice Fund, and new funding for student scholarships and academic programs.

#### **COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE and COMPASSION:**

- BUSTH's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offers webinars on timely inclusion efforts, such as "[Increasing Participation of Students of Underrepresented Backgrounds.](#)"
- This year's [Lowell Lecture](#) topics explore the role and responses of theological education for the challenges of today with lectures from Rev. Dr. Ted Smith (fall) and Dr. Keri Day (spring).
- Work continues to improve accessibility, sustainability, and responsible investing as written in our 2030 Strategic Plan. BUSTH is the first certified Green School at BU and is active in the Green Seminary Initiative.

With faith and gratitude,

G. Sujin Pak, Dean

#### **CANDLER SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT EMORY UNIVERSITY**

Since 1914, **Candler School of Theology at Emory University** has educated faithful and creative leaders for the church's ministries throughout the world. An official seminary of The United Methodist Church, Candler holds true to the Wesleyan value of ecumenical openness, enthusiastically welcoming students from more than 40 denominations, with nearly half of Master of Divinity students coming from the Methodist family, including United Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, Wesleyan, Free Methodist, Church of the Nazarene, and others. Our student body reflects the diversity and breadth of the Christian faithful, with an enrollment of 419 from 12 countries and 38 states, and 44% persons of color. This diversity is a blessing, enriching our life together and providing a "learning laboratory" for ministry in the 21st century—ministry that cultivates community across difference, welcomes all to contribute and belong, and embodies Christ's love in and among us.

Candler offers six degrees (Master of Divinity, Master of Theological Studies, Master of Religion and Public Life, Master of Religious Leadership, Master of Theology, Doctor of Ministry) and ten dual degrees, most of which are available in hybrid or online formats. Response to our new hybrid-format Master of Divinity, which launched in Fall 2023, has been strong: 65% of 2023's MDiv entering class chose the hybrid model, blending online classes and in-person intensives. Plus, around 20% of MDiv students participate in Candler's Teaching Parish program to earn contextual education credit as they serve as student pastors in local churches. Our proven DMin program—with a near 90% completion rate—is 90% online as well. These flexible options plus Candler's recognized academic excellence and hands-on learning opportunities are opening possibilities for even more people to follow God's call to ministry.

Reducing student debt through generous financial aid is a top priority for Candler. In 2023-2024, we are on track to award \$6.3 million in scholarship support, with 100% of MDiv students receiving aid. All MDiv students who are certified candidates for ordained ministry in the UMC receive full-tuition

scholarships, and all MDiv, MTS, MRL, and ThM students receive a scholarship covering at least 50% of tuition. MDiv students also receive financial coaching and complete a financial literacy program to strengthen their budgeting skills and reduce debt. That knowledge will serve them—and the ministries they serve—well into the future.

Candler is growing in exciting directions as it creates avenues to bring high-quality theological education to a wider audience. It is a hub of Christian learning with multiple entry points. Those who aren't seeking an advanced degree can engage in learning through The Candler Foundry, our innovative program to make theological education accessible to the public through short courses, events, and related activities; the United Methodist Course of Study to educate licensed local pastors; the new Candler Center for Christian Leadership to refine business-related skills of United Methodist leaders; and La Mesa Academy, offering diplomas in pastoral leadership via a two-year hybrid program with courses in Spanish, English, and Korean.

One of the biggest news items of the year for Candler is the announcement that after nearly 18 years, Dean Jan Love will step down from Candler's deanship in the summer of 2024. Through Dean Love's transformational leadership, Candler has expanded to offer three new degrees, five new dual degrees, and more online and hybrid options, including the highly successful hybrid MDiv and DMin degrees. She has increased the diversity of Candler's faculty and student body, continued the school's tradition of world-class scholarship in hiring 75% of the current full-time faculty, and grown the number of endowed professorships. Her efforts have enhanced Candler's ability to fulfill its mission in a rapidly changing environment, and she leaves the school in a strong position. The next dean of Candler is expected to be named by early summer.

Candler depends upon your prayers, partnership, and support. Thank you for the countless ways you advance this essential ministry in the life of our denomination. We invite you to visit us online at [candler.emory.edu](http://candler.emory.edu).

—Office of Communications  
Candler School of Theology, Emory University

### **DREW UNIVERSITY THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL**

Drew University Theological School educates and mentors pastors, preachers, deacons, activists, teachers, thought leaders, and change agents for ministry and service in the church and society. Drew Theological School is diverse in theology, vocations, age, as well as racial, ethnic, national, and international identities. Many Drew students are just beginning their ministry, while others come to graduate theological education with prior ministry experience. The latter reflects a growing trend among all theological schools in the United States and Canada. Drew holds in-person classes in Madison, New Jersey, several classes meet exclusively online, while other meet in hybrid fashion, i.e., partially online, partially in-person. This is also the case with chapel worship which originates in Seminary Hall, but also is live-streamed so that students around the world participate. Drew Theological School is a global seminary with a global student population serving the worldwide church.

In Fall 2023 Drew Theological School welcomed 104 new students in all degree programs, with total student enrollment (by head count) growing from 364 students in Fall 2021 to 407 in Fall 2023 semester. Enrollment of international students at Drew increased from 120 students in Fall 2021 to 169 students in Fall 2023. This number includes students who are studying full-time in the U.S.A. on a student Visa, students who are studying online from their home country, and students in the South Korean Cohort of the Doctor of Ministry program.

Drew's interdisciplinary degree programs provide real-world apprenticeships, promotes adaptive leadership skills, and encourages innovation through team-taught core courses as well as a variety of electives that integrate theological disciplines and faith practices. The Drew faculty's shared values are infused across all aspects of the teaching and learning: 1) a commitment to anti-racism; 2) gender and sexual-identity equality; 3) eco-sustainability and environmental justice; and 4) interfaith understanding and cooperation. Drew Theological School has an increase in United Methodist students, additionally, Drew has many United Methodist Global Fellows pursuing further education for ministry. UMC graduates are serving in conferences across the United States, and especially within our nearby regional United Methodist conferences of Greater New Jersey, Eastern Pennsylvania, and New York Annual Conference.

Rev. Edwin David Aponte, PhD, ThD (honorary)  
Dean and Professor of Religion & Culture

### **DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL**

Duke Divinity School can attest to the work of God's Spirit to usher us into a season of hope and continued faithfulness to the mission and calling to serve the church, academy, and the world. In 2023, the Duke University president and provost appointed Dean Edgardo Colón-Emeric for a full five-year term. In his Opening Convocation sermon, he stated: "This year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination in the United Methodist Church. This is the school that prepared me. Today, I give God thanks for still allowing me to serve as a minister of the gospel and I renew the vow I made when I was installed as dean. By the grace of God and en conjunto with you, I will uphold this school's 'commitment to God and the people of God, to the highest standards of academic excellence, and to this university.'"

In the next three years, we will celebrate a number of centennial milestones: Duke University and The Duke Endowment (2024), the 17<sup>th</sup> centennial of the Council of Nicaea (2025), and Duke Divinity School (2026). As a foretaste of those occasions to reflect and celebrate, we have had two important milestone celebrations in 2023. The Office of Black Church Studies (OBCS) commemorated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, an occasion to rejoice in all that God has done through OBCS to bless our Duke Divinity community and to extend the gifts from the Black Church to the whole church. As just one example of the impact and influence from OBCS, the Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale (D'79) received Duke University's Distinguished Alumni Award in recognition of her outstanding contributions in ministry and service.

The Hispanic House of Studies (HHS) celebrated its quinceañera (15<sup>th</sup> anniversary), another opportunity to have our hope buoyed by God's work in our midst. HHS was created by the Divinity School, with support from The Duke Endowment, to support the formation of ministers to

Hispanic/Latinx congregations and communities in the North Carolina and Western North Carolina Annual Conferences and beyond. These efforts are not confined to a limited silo but extend throughout our academic and ministerial programs. For instance, we now offer the “Rediscovering the Heart of Methodism” course in Spanish on Divinity+, an online resource that is widely available for ministers and congregations.

This fall, we welcomed 215 entering students from 35 different states as well as new community members who hold either primary or secondary citizenship in 16 other countries including Canada, Chile, China, Finland, Germany, India, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Russia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, and Zimbabwe. The Master of Divinity program gained 104 new students, with 54 residential students and 50 in the hybrid program. The Master of Arts in Christian Practice enrolled 13 new students; the Doctor of Ministry, 22; Master of Theology, 11; Master of Theological Studies, 29; the Doctor of Theology welcomed five new students to campus, and five special students enrolled. The Certificate in Theology and Health Care welcomed 11 residential students to campus and 15 in the hybrid program. Across all degree programs at the Divinity School, 31 percent of the incoming class identified as a race or ethnicity other than white. Black students made up 21 percent of all students; Latinx students, seven percent. Fifty-four percent of students in the incoming class identify as female. There were 25 denominations represented in the M.Div. entering class, with 26 percent affiliated with the United Methodist Church. Baptists made up 10 percent of the incoming students; Anglican or Episcopal students, 10 percent; and nondenominational students, 12 percent.

Duke Divinity School continues to invest in pathways to support Methodist leadership and pastoral formation. Divinity+ launched the Church Administration series focused on developing practical skills for church leaders. More than 1,000 learners have enrolled in the first two courses, “Theology and Time Management” and “Strategic Management.” We inaugurated the Certificate in Chaplaincy, designed to prepare students to provide spiritual care in a variety of settings such as hospitals, hospice, prisons, higher education, and the military. The certificate can be earned as part of the residential M.Div., Th.M., and M.T.S. degree programs.

The school has also welcomed new leaders who bring their gifts to the work of advancing the mission to serve Christ and the church. Two houses have appointed new directors: the Office of Black Church Studies is led by the Rev. Dr. Eric Lewis Williams (D’05), assistant professor of theology and Black Church Studies; and the Anglican Episcopal House of Studies has named the Very Rev. Timothy Kimbrough (D’83), Jack and Barbara Bovender Professor of the Practice of Anglican Studies. Key members who have joined our staff team include Anita Lumpkin, executive director of enrollment management; and the Rev. Sarah Belles, a Duke Divinity alumna and ordained elder in full connection with the Western North Carolina Annual Conference, as the director of student life

Several new programs demonstrate Duke’s sustained commitment to connecting with churches and ministers. With gratitude to funding from the Lilly Endowment, the Divinity School has launched the Transformative Preaching Lab to prepare creative, culturally competent preachers who can reach audiences in effective and engaging ways. It will expand preaching training for students in the hybrid modality of the M.Div. program with new courses and preaching laboratories along with new capacities to explore and engage digital tools for community worship and preaching. The Transformative Preaching Lab also provides new opportunities for formation in

trauma-informed preaching and preaching in immigrant communities, issues that are especially salient in communities across the country and around the world.

The Theology, Medicine, and Culture initiative has launched the Mental Health Track for Christian mental health practitioners as part of its Certificate in Theology and Health Care. This hybrid certificate program offers spiritual and theological formation for mental health clinicians in a range of disciplines. The research and programming from other Duke Divinity initiatives, including Theology, Medicine, and Culture; Duke Initiatives in Theology and the Arts; Leadership Education at Duke Divinity; and Thriving Rural Communities, continue to provide numerous opportunities to bear witness to God's creativity, compassion, and care for communities and congregations.

Duke Divinity School continues to be grateful for our ongoing participation in The United Methodist Church and partnership with this annual conference. We look forward to our ongoing work with you as we join the leading of God's Spirit in the task of preparing people for Christian ministry. To learn more about Duke Divinity School, please visit our website at [www.divinity.duke.edu](http://www.divinity.duke.edu).

Respectfully submitted by Edgardo Colón-Emeric

Dean of Duke Divinity School

### **GAMMON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

Gammon Theological Seminary is the Interdenominational Theological Center's United Methodist constituent member in Atlanta, Georgia. The Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) is a Christian Africentric ecumenical consortium of seminaries and fellowships that educate students to commit to practicing justice and peace through a liberating and transforming spirituality to become leaders in the church and local/global communities. Gammon was founded in 1883, bearing the name of the Rev. Elijah H. Gammon, a generous clergyman, businessman, and philanthropist. Rev. Elijah H. Gammon invested and endowed the founding of Gammon Seminary in partnership with Bishop Henry Warren and the Freedman's Aid Society. Gammon has educated Black Clergy for almost 140 years, with graduates serving every level of the church, including Bishops, Superintendents, General church leaders, Conference staff, and Clergy in every jurisdiction. Gammon/ITC offers the following degree programs: the Master of Divinity, the Master of Arts in Religion and Education, and the Doctor of Ministry. The support given to The United Methodist Ministerial Education Fund by United Methodist Conferences continues to enable Gammon students to be grounded in the Wesleyan tradition of theological education.

Our 17th President/Dean, Rev. Dr. Candace M Lewis, and the Gammon staff team continue to lead innovatively in chartering a "Brand New Day" for Gammon's recruitment, retention, research and resources, fund development, and scholarship endowments in her first two years of service.

#### **Our new initiatives and celebrations this year, 2023 – 2024, at Gammon, include:**

- In May 2023, Gammon held our 1st Annual Student Scholarship Fundraiser Golf Tournament, receiving \$70,000 in donations to assist students with their tuition, which also helped Gammon build more relationships and partnerships.

- In June 2023, The Rev. Walter H. McKelvey Endowed Scholarship Fund was launched by Dr. Loretta F. McKelvey (wife of the late Rev. McKelvey) and Dr. Walter Kimbrough with a \$50,000.00 matching gift in partnership with the South Carolina United Methodist Foundation.
- In June 2023, The Florida Conference raised and donated over \$ 60,000.00 to the Rev. Geraldine McClellan Endowed Scholarship Fund, which is now fully endowed by the Florida United Methodist Foundation.
- In July 2023 and December 2023, Gammon hosted the Ebony Exploration Event for 75 young adults under 35, increasing participation and forming strategic partnerships with external organizations to enhance the program's reach and impact.
- In December 2023, we celebrated our 140th Founders Day Event/Pastors and Leaders Conference, with over two hundred persons attending workshops (in person and virtual) and our Scholarship Gala Dinner, hosted at IMPACT Church in Atlanta, GA.

The greatest challenge facing Gammon Seminary is the rising cost of theological education and the significant debt our students incur as they answer their call to full-time ministry. Therefore, Gammon is committed to raising a million dollars in the next two years to offer full-tuition scholarships to students called and committed to full-time ministry in the United Methodist Church. We are grateful to this Annual Conference for your support of theological education and your commitment to ensuring pastoral leadership is theologically trained to lead us forward in the Wesleyan tradition.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Dr. Candace M. Lewis, President-Dean

### **GARRETT -EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

For 170 years Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary has been in service to the Church and the Wesleyan/Methodist connection through the formation of Christian leaders in ordained and lay ministries. As the result of a new strategic planning process that seeks to position the seminary more fully and purposefully in service to the global church, Garrett adopted a new mission and vision that will focus our work to this end: *Forming courageous leaders in the way of Jesus to cultivate communities of justice, compassion, and hope...for the thriving of the Church and the healing of the world.*

During this past academic year, Garrett also welcomed its largest entering class in over a decade, with 124 new students, and a current enrollment of 314 students representing 37 states and 21 nations from across the globe. We have experienced particular growth in students from the African continent and the Indian subcontinent, adding to an already richly diverse student body. While our denominational diversity also continues to grow, we also proudly welcomed growth in our United Methodist students who constitute more than 50% of our student body.

Of particular importance in the past year has been the partnership we have entered into with Phillips School of Theology of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME). Phillips students are now also fully Garrett students and together we are preparing the next generation of CME leaders in a robust pan-Methodist/Wesleyan context alongside UMC, AME, and AMEZ students. Phillips President, Dr. Paul Brown, is now also affiliated with our faculty, teaching CME History, Doctrine, and Polity, as well as spiritual formation and organizational leadership courses. It is our

hope and intention to continue to grow this partnership and foster a truly pan-Methodist/Wesleyan ethos which includes our growing global Methodist partners in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Additionally, last year, all Garrett degree programs were made truly hybrid so that students can study with us and earn their degrees either on our Evanston campus or in virtual learning spaces around the globe. This has added an amazing breadth of experience and contexts to our classrooms, where we seek to address real-world challenges with gospel inspired solutions or responses.

Garrett's world-class faculty continue developing curricular innovations that are responsive to the church's growing needs, while also contributing a significant body of scholarly work to their respective fields. Our faculty are also at work developing The Garrett Collective, an online platform of theological learning and resources for churches and partner organizations inspired by our faculty's research and/or strategic partnerships. Finally, at this critical juncture in the history of United Methodism, faculty leaders are providing essential guidance to UMC students, while also continuing to envision with hope the next expression of Methodism that is responsive to the Spirit's call for such a time as this.

### **METHODIST THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL IN OHIO**

**Curriculum revision offers shorter paths to degrees:** Beginning in the fall of 2024, MTSO will offer incoming master's degree students a slate of revised programs offering clear, achievable paths to their vocations. This curriculum revision will give most students the opportunity to complete their degrees in less time. Under the updated curriculum, the Master of Divinity degree requires 75 credit hours and is achievable in three years. The Master of Theological Studies, MA in Public Theology, and MA in Social Justice require 39 hours and are achievable in two years.

The revised curriculum for each master's degree is organized around four cores: the Values Core, Methods Core, Vocational Electives Core and Integrative Core. Detailed information is available at [mtso.edu/degreeupdates](http://mtso.edu/degreeupdates).

### **The MA in Public Theology gets a new name and updated focus**

MTSO's newly revised MA in Public Theology degree (formerly the MA in Practical Theology) deepens the knowledge and skills of those working to build societal peace, justice and the common good. The MAPT offers formation for the next generation of practical, public theologians by cultivating abilities for negotiating the dynamic interplay in these areas: Christian heritage, congregational culture and contemporary society; theological, educational and social- science disciplines; and the diversities of human and creaturely existence.

### **Cross-cultural immersion is expanded**

Previously required for the Master of Divinity and MA in Social Justice degrees, cross-cultural immersion trips are now required for all MTSO master's degrees and are covered by tuition. Cross-cultural immersion is not a mission trip. Rather, it is an opportunity to learn from and fully experience another culture, rather than attempting to "help" or impact cultures different from one's own. Trips nurture a global perspective and serve as a foundation for learning to respect the rich diversity of beliefs and practices in the wider church.



Participants in the January 2024 cross-cultural trip visited South Africa. Upcoming destinations include Mexico and Italy.

Respectfully submitted,  
Danny Russell, director of communications

### **SAINT PAUL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

Educating tomorrow's leaders by offering on-campus, online, and hybrid learning courses at a FLEXible schedule, Saint Paul School of Theology is a seminary serving a diverse community committed to the formation of people for innovative, creative ministry through rigorous academic life. Grounded in the academic study of faith and ministry, theology is practiced in a traditional classroom and remote spaces. Our contextual curriculum features Ministry Collaboration Groups, Practicums, Spiritual Formation Retreats, and Seminars. Students learn from dedicated faculty, experienced pastors, and community leaders about best ministry practices, leaving our graduates with the tools and first-hand experience necessary to meet the needs of a changing world.

At the core of our mission at Saint Paul is the formation of people for innovative, creative ministry through rigorous academic life. In 2024, we are launching two exciting new programs to revitalize current pastors and preachers and prepare seminary students for music ministry. First, with the help of Lilly Endowment's Compelling Preaching grant and the leadership of Dr. Casey Sigmon, Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship and Director of Contextual Education and Pause/Play Center for Preachers, Saint Paul School of Theology is creating a Center that addresses the risk of losing heart and prophetic imagination as a preacher in this divided world. The [Pause/Play Center for Preachers'](#) mission is in its name: to hold space for busy preachers to pause and play their way into a renewal of their vocation as preachers of the Good News. Second, for Fall 2024, as part of our Master of Arts in Christian Ministry (MACM) degree program, we will launch a first-of-its-kind specialization in Modern Worship Music. Saint Paul will partner with The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection and their [COR Worship Collective](#) to prepare students to write, produce, and perform modern worship music. Students will integrate a worship leaders' skills with their study of theology, the bible, history, and worship in a diverse, inclusive, and spiritually enriching environment. Lastly, we recently completed the (Theo)Logic Studio on our Oklahoma Campus. The Studio is for creating, recording, and editing digital media resources for the ministries of students, staff, faculty, and alums. The Studio is a place for content development, from podcasts and video resources to digital graphics.

We continue to invite Saint Paul students, alums, and friends to join us in a hybrid format, where participants may join in-person or online, allowing everyone to come together as one institution from wherever they are. Saint Paul offers weekly chapel services throughout the academic year featuring students, alums, faculty, and local leaders. In addition, weekly Spiritual Formation allows attendees to engage in spiritual practices led by new Oklahoma Chapel Coordinator Rev. Alanna Ireland '23. Some practices take us outdoors or to other sacred spaces, and others have us connect with community leaders.

For the 2023-2024 academic year, we brought 41 new, faithful theologians from across the world to our learning community. International students from South Korea, Belgium, and Mexico added to the

global learning environment on both campuses and online. Twenty-seven percent of incoming students identified as a race or ethnicity other than white, and 53 percent identified as female.

Saint Paul staff and faculty continue contributing to the academy, church, and society. The faculty of Saint Paul School of Theology maintains high standards of scholarship, research, publication, and engagement. Over the past year, their many activities and publications have been so numerous that space permits only sharing selected highlights:

- Dr. Israel Kamudzandu, Lindsey P. Pherigo Associate Professor of New Testament Studies and Biblical Interpretation, published *Translation as Incarnation: The Bible in the Twenty-First Century Global South* and was the featured guest speaker of our January forum.
- Dr. Joshua Bartholomew, Assistant Professor of Ethics, Church, and Society, published *Black Theology and The Black Panthers*
- Dr. Elaine Robinson, Professor of Methodist Studies and Christian Theology, published *Leading with Love: Spiritual Disciplines For Practical Leadership*
- Rabbi Michael Zedek, Rabbi-in-Residence, published *Taking Miracles Seriously: A Journey to Everyday Spirituality* and hosted a forum with Dr. Jeanne Hoeft, Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Care, and Franklin and Louise Cole Associate Professor in Town and Country Ministries, on The War in Israel and Traumatized Communities
- Dr. Mike Graves, Professor Emeritus of William K. McElvaney of Preaching and Worship, published *Jesus' Vision for Your One Wild and Precious Life (on Things Like Poverty, Hunger, Polarization, Inclusion, and More)*

The 2023-2024 Fiscal Year brought a change in leadership to the Seminary. Rev. Neil Blair '80 retired as President on December 31, 2023, and President Jay Simmons, formerly Vice President of Institutional Advancement, took the helm at the start of 2024. In addition, Saint Paul Board of Trustees' Chair Dr. Amy Hogan stepped down as Board Chair, with Ms. Sharon Cleaver assuming the position until the end of June 2024. Our current strategic plan is set to conclude within the coming year. Consequently, the Board of Trustees formed a task force several months ago to prepare the next iteration of our strategic plan. Members of the Seminary's Executive Leadership Team are now working with faculty and staff to refine the draft scripted by the task force. These efforts will continue over the next few months until we have a document ready for review by the Board of Trustees. While we are still too early in this effort to comment on any specific initiatives, the plan ultimately endorsed by the Board will guide all our efforts for the next several years. Therefore, this effort is critical in defining how we ensure that Saint Paul remains a vital and vigorous Seminary committed to preparing our students for creative and innovative ministry.

For the 2023-2024 fiscal year, Saint Paul Course of Study (COS) School educated 250 individual students, including 79 new students, with approximately 600 registrations and offering 46 classes. Serving 31 Conferences, 89 Districts, 116 Full Time and 126 Part-Time Licensed Local Pastors comprised these registrations. Seventy percent of these students are taking more than one course. To help offset student costs, twenty percent of all students received aid from their conference or church. COS School continues to attract a diverse student body. One hundred eighty-eight students ranged in age from 30 to 65, and 62 students ranged in age from 66 to 82. Students self-identified across four racial/ethnic groups. Fifty-two percent were male, and forty-eight percent were female. Many COS School students serve more than one church, many rural, with a few dozen students

serving three or more churches. We helped 23 students finish the 20-course program this year, issuing them certificates of completion.

With approval from GBHEM, the school has continued its course offerings in both asynchronous and synchronous online formats. Utilizing this online format, we reached students in 28 states. We continue to offer online registration completed by the student with the ability to access their student account through Populi as used by our Seminary students. COS also uses the same learning platform, Moodle, as our Seminary students. By implementing the Course of Study School into Populi, these students share the same benefits as the Seminary, allowing them to participate in the Saint Paul experience. They have full access to the Seminary library on campus and online, with several required readings accessible as an eBook. We have invited COS School students to join our Saint Paul School of Theology Weekly Chapel Services and Spiritual Formation gatherings and other Saint Paul events.

Saint Paul is a financially healthy Seminary. We operate with a balanced budget, no debt, and an endowment that is 9-10 times the size of our annual expenses. Sustainability has been our focus over the past six years, and we have achieved our goal. Investments in our future bring exciting new opportunities for our students, staff, and faculty. As always, we continue to be grateful for donations from the community that provide technology, scholarships, and evolving academic programs to students. Our significant technological investments have allowed us to maintain a hybrid educational delivery model, providing a flexible working arrangement for our students.

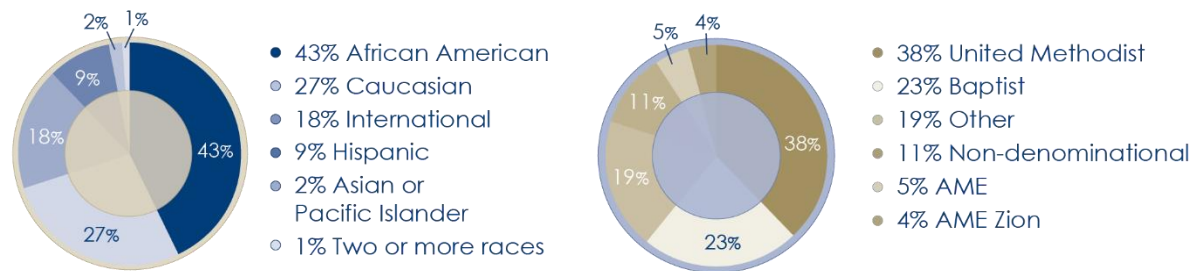
We are continuing to enhance our partnership with Zoom and Neat. We now have Neat Bars & Neat Boards in all our classrooms. In addition, during this last year, we implemented a Neat Board in Harris Chapel on our Oklahoma Campus. We also have Neat Boards in multiple common areas to encourage ad-hoc use of the technology for breakout groups and other miscellaneous meetings between our two campuses and our remote students. One of the best features of this technology is its ability to receive automatic real-time over-the-air feature upgrades. Zoom & Neat continue enhancing our learning environment by rolling out new enhancements, including enhanced whiteboarding, noise cancellation, and AI features. Our Neat equipment continuously monitors several environmental factors within our classrooms: air quality, temperature, humidity, VOC, and CO2, as well as being able to tell if the classrooms are occupied and how many individuals are in the room. We can also monitor the audio/video quality and network connectivity in each of our classrooms, as well as the connection quality for all remote students attending the class. We are excited about the additional enhancements that will come to our classrooms from Neat and Zoom over this next year.

Saint Paul School of Theology is blessed to be your partner in ministry and help those seeking to discover more and answer the call. Your advocacy for the Seminary and generous financial support have been vital in realizing our accomplishments. Many thanks for the innumerable ways you have helped Saint Paul. Your prayers and actions on behalf of the Seminary are a blessing to all of us.

Jay K. Simmons, President

## UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

For more than 150 years, United Theological Seminary has prepared men and women to serve as faithful and fruitful Christian leaders who make disciples of Jesus Christ. In the 2022-2023 academic year, the seminary served 547 students, representing 36 states, 20 countries, and 43 denominations, with 38% of students identifying as United Methodist. United in Christ, the student body is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial community that is 43% African American, 27% White, 18% international, 9% Hispanic, and 2% Asian or Pacific Islander.\* During the 2022-2023 academic year, 120 graduates completed their programs.



## Houses of Study

United's academic programs include seven Houses of Study for denominational, church renewal, and/or language- and culture-based ministry, including online Spanish and Korean houses of study. These houses of study have enrolled over 120 new master's students in the United States and around the world.

## Bishop Bruce Ough Innovation Center

In 2023, the Bishop Bruce Ough Innovation Center, directed by Rev. Sue Nilson Kibbey, engaged more than 5,000 participants through 64 resourcing events and activities. The Center partnered with the Black Methodists for Church Renewal Laity Advocacy Committee to conduct the 2023 Laity Leadership Institution. The Center also launched a *Dynamite Prayer* movement, based on the guidebook *Dynamite Prayer: A 28 Day Experiment* (Invite Resources, 2022) by Rev. Kibbey and Rev. Dr. Rosario Picardo. Multiple United Methodist conferences and more than 90 congregations across denominations committed to be part of a Dynamite Prayer Wave and received resourcing on the practice of "breakthrough prayer."

## New Faces at United

Over the past year, the seminary welcomed several new members to the United community. Bishop James Swanson, most recently bishop of the Mississippi Conference of The United Methodist Church, was installed as United Methodist Bishop-in-Residence. Dr. Pauline Paris Buisch and Rev. Dr. Xavier L. Johnson joined the faculty as Assistant Professor of Old Testament and Assistant Professor of Preaching and Black Church Studies, respectively, and Dr. Eliseo Mejia came on board as the Academic Oversight Officer for the Hispanic House of Study.

## Reducing Student Debt

Finances shouldn't stand in the way of a seminary education. That's why United has launched the Fresh Wind: Where the Spirit Takes Flight campaign to add \$10 million to the scholarship

endowment, which will dramatically increase the seminary's capacity to provide scholarships to students for many years to come. As of January 2024, the seminary was more than 70% toward the \$10 million goal.

Dr. Kent Millard, President

*\* Student data represent unduplicated headcount enrollment for the 2022-2023 academic year. Demographic figures represent those who responded.*

### **WESLEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

The mission of Wesley Theological Seminary (WTS) is to equip persons for Christian ministry and leadership in the church and the world, to advance theological scholarship, and to model a prophetic voice in the public square.

Despite the challenges posed by the global landscape, WTS continues to flourish, driven by our commitment to excellence in theological education and community engagement:

**Master of Divinity, Master of Arts, Master of Theological Studies Degrees:** We offer pathways to meet the needs of a variety of students. Whether traditional, brick and mortar, in-person study or a flexible, online, hybrid model (Wesley FlexMA), WTS is committed to curating space for theological reflection, academic inquiry, and practical application. <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/study/>

**Doctor of Ministry Degree:** WTS is a leader in DMin education offering specialized tracks of study for scholars going into parish ministry, global missions, or military chaplaincy. <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/doctorofministry/program/>

**Wesley Innovation Hub:** WTS received a \$1.2M grant from the Lilly Endowment and will embark on groundbreaking initiatives that harness the power of technology, entrepreneurship, and interdisciplinary collaboration. <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/wesley-innovation-hub/>

**Center for Public Theology:** WTS received a generous grant from the Trinity Wall Street Foundation to launch "The Public Theology Fellows Program," an innovative initiative to bridge gaps between faith communities and political action. <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/ice/programs/public-theology/>

**Community Engagement Institute:** WTS received a generous grant from City Seminary in NYC for the innovative, immersive study and praxis of urban ministry. <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/ice/about-us/overview-2/>

**The Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion:** WTS is thrilled to share two new exhibits, *Sacred Ground*, which focused on the intersection of community-engaged art and spirituality;

and *Paradise Lost*, a captivating exhibition highlighting transcultural, multicultural, and interreligious narratives. <https://www.luceartsandreligion.org/>

**Lewis Center for Church Leadership:** The Lewis Center conducts leading edge research for the local church. WTS is pleased to report a growing demand for transformative leadership training within religious communities. <https://www.churchleadership.com/>

Rev. Dr. David McAllister-Wilson, President

Submitted by Lyvonne Briggs, Director of Strategic Communications and Marketing

## UNITED METHODIST GENERAL BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND MINISTRY

### AFRICA UNIVERSITY REPORT

**Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.—Philippians 4:9 (NRSV)**

Africa University greeted 2024 with bold faith and eager confidence because of the goodness of United Methodists who are faithful, generous, and passionate about investing in changing lives and communities.

Thank you, Michigan Annual Conference, for the deep commitment and extravagant generosity that returned your investment in the Africa University Fund (AUF) apportionment to 100 percent of the asking for 2023. Your unwavering engagement has helped Africa University to evolve into the cornerstone institution for The United Methodist Church's mission of disciple-making for transformational impact in Africa and beyond.

As United Methodists fortify themselves for the 2020 General Conference in 2024 and its outcomes, Africa University urges the members of the Michigan Conference to:

- **Support Africa University's effort to secure General Conference approval of Report #4.**
- **Encourage your conference to continue to invest in the Africa University Fund at 100% of the 2016 budget level as outlined in the resolution that is before the General Conference.**
- **Help identify at least two (2) churches (keystone congregations) in your conference that will commit to provide second mile gifts of \$6,500 each or \$13,000 in total for annual scholarships for two undergraduate students. This will help address any shortfall in giving to the fund.**

In 2023, sustained by the generous, steadfast support of The United Methodist Church, Africa University:

- Provided more than \$2M in scholarships and financial aid grants to students who would otherwise fail to access higher education.
- Enrolled 2,219 young women and men from 26 African countries.

- Launched its second new academic unit in less than a year—the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences—with a first cohort of 279 students.
- Showcased innovations, such as lozenges made from the indigenous *Zumbani* plant, and IT solutions to reduce food waste and make vital research findings more accessible to those who need the information.
- Saw its alumni swell to more than 12,000 serving in 32 African countries, with the addition of 954 graduates in June.

Africa University is grateful for your support, and we hope good news like this propels the Michigan Conference and other annual conferences to keep on doing these great things.

The Michigan Conference was one of sixteen (16) annual conferences that invested 100 percent of their commitment to the Africa University Fund (AUF) in 2023. Overall giving across all jurisdictions in 2023 was 79.61 percent or \$1,836,175. Despite experiencing a year-on-year decline of 4.12 percent, the AUF remains at number two among the seven general church funds.

Well done, Michigan Conference! Your generous support for the Africa University Fund apportionment ensures that all our students are enjoying safe, first-rate learning and living facilities as they acquire the knowledge and skills needed to increase food security, overall health, good governance, abundance, and peace in their communities. Let's keep on doing this great work and may the God of peace be with you!

*James H. Salley, Associate Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement and President/CEO of Africa University (Tennessee) Inc.*