

MI CONNECT

Michigan Area of the United Methodist
Church News & Information

Print Edition

MIConnect Monthly Magazine

April 2017 Review

Blessings flow with 2017 Annual Conference Bishop's Appeal



The Haiti Hot Lunch program has been feeding Haitian school children for years and the Michigan Area has been the biggest supporter of the effort. Currently, however, there's only enough funding for three meals a week. The Michigan Area Haiti Task Force hopes to increase days served to five a week for the 20,000 children who are fed.

Churches and individuals across the Michigan Area are invited to participate in two ingathering offerings during Annual Conference in 2017. Congregation are asked to collect donations and dollars in May so that pastors and members to Annual Conference can bring contributions to Acme the week of June 1-4, 2017.

Monetary donations are sought to enhance the lives of Liberian and

Haitian children. The Bishop Judith Craig Children's Village is a haven for scores of orphaned children in Liberia, many with families touched by Ebola. The ministry offers love, support and education to improve the future for children and this African nation.

The Hot Lunch Program feeds up to 20,000 children a day in Methodist Schools in The Republic of Haiti. For many children living in poverty and still

recovering from the devastating hurricane that hit in October 2016, the Haiti Hot Lunch Program is the only healthy food many of these kids will receive all day. Present funding provides meals to these children three days a week. The Area's goal is to make sure there's enough for five hot lunches a week.

Offerings will be shared: 45% to support

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MICONNECT

Michigan Area of the United Methodist
Church News & Information

April 2017

MIConnect provides the official news of The Michigan Area of The United Methodist Church. This printable edition is a summary of the month's top news published online every Wednesday in MIConnect Weekly. Find the "rest of the story" at MichiganUMC.org.

Bishop David A. Bard
Publisher Mark Doyal
Editor Kay DeMoss

We are 800 churches making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Connected in the Spirit with our neighbors, we are making a difference across the state of Michigan.

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Putting FAITH in ACTION

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Bishop David Bard

The Joyful Journey

Many of you have heard about the decision of the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church regarding the election this past July by the Western Jurisdiction of the Rev. Dr. Karen Oliveto as a bishop. The Judicial Council has ruled that Bishop Oliveto's election as a bishop violates church law

because of our denomination's limits on the service of "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals." The Judicial Council further added that Bishop Oliveto remains in good standing as a bishop until an administrative or judicial process is complete.

For some reading this, you are celebrating that we are maintaining Biblical faithfulness and holding one another accountable to our covenant. For others, this is another step in moving The United Methodist Church away from inclusivity, from being a denomination more reflective of God's love in Jesus Christ. Within Michigan United Methodism I expect there are tears of joy and tears of sadness, shouts of acclamation and shouts of anger. This decision may leave you asking, "What's left?"

In responding let me begin by reminding us of the way The United Methodist Church is organized. There are several denominational bodies which give expression to United Methodism. Only the General Conference speaks for the entire church. The Council of Bishops provides oversight and support in service of the mission of the church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The Judicial Council determines the constitutionality and "legality" of actions taken by others within the church. In the case just considered, the Judicial Council was ruling on the constitutionality and legality of an election in the Western Jurisdiction. While we share a mission, each body has its task within our denomination. The Judicial Council provides its perspectives and rulings and offers its reasons for doing so. When the Judicial Council acts, it does so regarding a very particular set of circumstances. Their rulings do not change *The Book of Discipline*.

The Judicial Council has acted, and the election of Bishop Oliveto has been ruled in violation of church law. The ruling does not remove Bishop Oliveto from the episcopal office but provides the basis for further administrative process. I appreciate the opportunities I have had to get to know Bishop Oliveto in these past few months. I have found her to be a person of deep Christian faith and one who is profoundly committed to the mission of the church. She took a significant risk in offering herself for election. She stepped away from a significant pastorate and relocated. She willingly turned her life upside down. Whether or not you agree with the Judicial Council decision, I hope we are all able to see the significant impact that it has had on a person's life.

What's left? Some of you may feel that nothing is left, that the time has come to leave or to focus solely on advocating for a denominational division. I am asking all of us to take a step back and breathe and pray. I would remind us that the Commission on a Way Forward, authorized by General Conference and accountable to General Conference through the Council of Bishops, continues its work. This group of people remains committed to deep listening, to honest sharing, to fervent prayer. They are seeking to hear the Spirit amid all the voices vying for attention. Let's give this group its opportunity to work. Many of you join with me in praying regularly for this Commission. Please continue to do so. I don't know what's possible, but I am committed to giving the possible more time and creativity and prayer.

As part of this on-going conversation, I will be convening gatherings in the fall to

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DAC Story of the Month

Joy comes to the table at the 2017 Annual Conference

KAY DEMOSS

Senior Editor-Writer, Michigan Area

When the Michigan Annual Conference convenes on June 1, 2017 there will be two new faces on the platform. Members will welcome Bishop David Bard to his first time in the chair. And the Rev. Joy Barrett will take her place as Conference Secretary.

"I am feeling confident," Joy says. "Bishop Bard is an excellent presider and parliamentarian." Then she adds, "And I come stacked with plenty of post-it notes and pens."

By the time Joy takes her seat at the Governors' Hall of the Grand Traverse Resort, she will have been in the role of Secretary for five months. During that time she has been active with various committees, received lots of information and has done some team building.

All done in anticipation of what's needed to help people and procedures function and flow smoothly once on site. Of course the Annual Conference Journals—the historical record of the event—are "a huge piece." The Journal Committees of the Detroit and West Michigan conferences have worked together to examine how each have functioned in the past and how they may now work together. "We have figured out how we will take minutes collaboratively and perform other tasks as a whole team," Joy reports.

There will be two Annual Conference Journals again in 2017 and in 2018 as the *Book of Discipline* requires. "As we think about moving toward publication of one Journal in 2019," Joy says, "we are hoping, with Bishop Bard's permission, to form a task group that will look at what each has been doing and make recommendations about content and format of a single document."

Asked about what excites her about this new position, Joy says, "It is a delight for me to be part of something new and



Rev. Joy Barrett speaks on the floor of the 2016 General Conference in Portland, Oregon. She has been a clergy delegate from the Detroit Conference to the last seven General and Jurisdictional conferences. ~mic photo/Mark Doyal

to help others embrace our new identity as the Michigan Annual Conference." She enjoys cultivating relationships with people, "I've heard about but haven't had the opportunity to work with creatively in the past." Joy acknowledges that both annual conferences do things very well. "Now we can bring it all to the table as a catalyst for what God is calling us to be and do in the future."

As energizing as she finds the job of Conference Secretary to be, Barrett says the scope of the work is daunting. "I have jokingly said that almost every week I find some new aspect of what the job is all about," she laughs. She is grateful for colleagues in both conferences who "in their gentle ways have indicated that it is time to take care of this...and that."

The Rev. Joy Barrett brings pastoral and administrative gifts to the role as well as a passion for connectional ministry. This is good, for the role of Conference Secretary "consists of more than administrative trivia and widgets."

At present Joy serves as Senior Pastor of Chelsea 1st United Methodist Church.

Prior to the Chelsea appointment Barrett was Superintendent of the Ann Arbor District. Further, the Detroit Conference has elected Joy Barrett as a clergy member to the last seven General and Jurisdictional conferences, beginning in 1992.

What is Joy's hope for the 2017 Annual Conference? She says, "My hope is that we will come with open hearts and open hands, eager to build relationships with one another as we deepen our connection with God."

Joy acknowledges that it will be challenging both to make room for new things and to name the things we have to let go. "We will need to confront realities concerning things that will need to be done differently. We will need to do appropriate grief work in order to embrace what is out there ahead of us."

Joy approaches the 2017 Annual Conference as a "wide circle of sisters and brothers in Michigan." She rejoices in the many possibilities that will open members "to the leading of the Spirit as we discern how we can take our next steps of discipleship in this time."

Bishop Bard comments on nine-district proposal

BISHOP DAVID BARD Michigan Area

Among the duties of a bishop delineated in The Book of Discipline is the following: to form districts after consultation with the district superintendents and after the number of the same has been determined by the vote of the Annual Conference (415.4). Last July, when interviewed as part of the episcopal electoral process, no one asked how I might proceed with forming districts. Imagine that! I doubt that anyone thinks about this when discerning whether to offer themselves to the election process for bishops, or among those voting for the candidates.

Fast forward a few months, and here we are! At the 2017 joint meeting of the Detroit and West Michigan Annual Conferences, we will consider two proposals

regarding districts. The first proposal is the Nine District Resolution. There is also a map to review. (See below.) Please keep in mind this map is for illustrative purposes only. It represents just one possible way we could organize nine districts.

The second proposal is to authorize a task force that will be part of the consultative process. This task force will examine financial and legal issues that may be involved in the transition from twelve to nine districts, and make recommendations about these issues.

According to the Discipline, it will be my responsibility to draw district lines in consultation with others. I will use as my primary consultation group members of the Full Cabinet, including the Clergy Assistant to the Bishop, the District Superintendents, and some conference staff – including the



Michigan's United Methodists had three opportunities to share their thoughts on the shape of the Area's districts with Bishop Bard. ~mic photo/Mark Doyal

Directors of Connectional Ministry and the Conference Lay Leaders. Given the size of the Full Cabinet, a smaller working group may help us get started.

During this process we will consider the current district lines and charge alignments, accounting for geographic affinities, and working to maintain the incredible spirit I am finding in our current configuration. It is important to acknowledge that while these actions are significant, the district's lines can always be changed over time as may be needed for mission and ministry.

Once the new district boundaries are established, I would ask District Superintendents to gather a few key leaders, lay and clergy, to offer advice on district names and office locations. I have provided a more detailed process for forming the districts. That can be found in the AC Legislation Guide online at 2017.michiganumc.org.

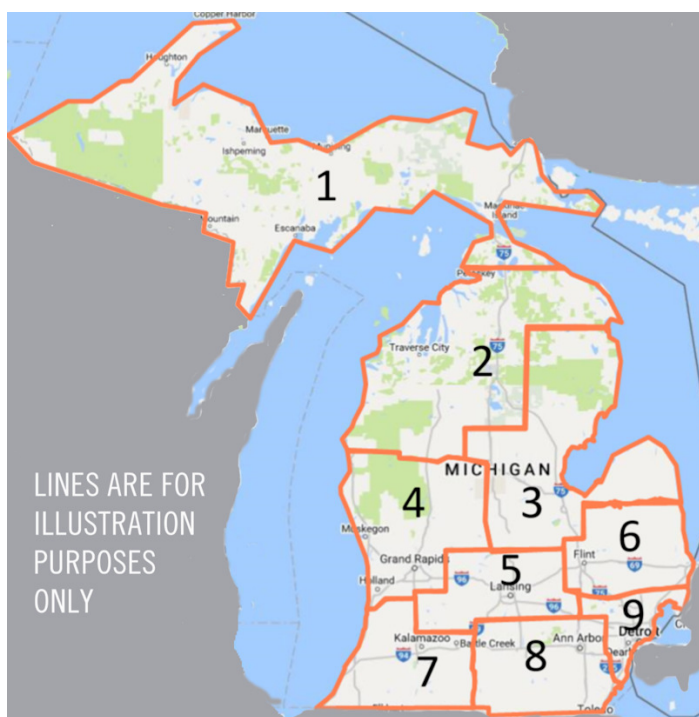
In a book I have been reading as part of my personal devotional life, Sister Joan Chittister writes: "The marriage of confusion and creativity is the beginning of new life. We start now from

"The marriage of confusion and creativity is the beginning of new life."

~Sister Joan Chittister

places we have never been allowed to imagine before and out of them we can imagine new conclusions as well." (*Between the Dark and the Daylight*, 86).

There will be confusion along the way, but my prayer is for the creative Spirit of God to again brood over the waters – in this case Great Lake waters that surround us as Michigan United Methodists – and bring forth something new that shines with the grace of God.



Drinking the Cup ... *holy smorgasbord*



When you're asked to leave the pastorate in favor of a superintendency or other staff position like Clergy Assistant to the Bishop, you give up a lot. You give up the regular rhythm of preaching. You give up the intimacy of pastoring one congregation – giving up that pastoral role with people you love. You give up the joy of the life of one congregation.

But you gain plenty of things, too. One of the things that you gain is more freedom to live out Sundays and holidays with more flexibility – gaining a greater appreciation of the church of Jesus Christ from a different perspective.

So, I had a diverse Holy Week, not tied to one congregation. It includes the beginning of a much anticipated post-Easter vacation to North Carolina. Here is part of the glorious Holy Week smorgasbord that I experienced.

Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday, Diane and I were in Chicago visiting our oldest son and family. We attended their church, All Saint's Episcopal Church in the Lincoln Square area of Chicago. This was a joyous Palm Sunday celebration, with lots of children, including a parade around the block. The congregation was very diverse, representing this north Chicago

neighborhood. The service did *not* reflect the confusion that many services have trying to do both Palm Sunday and Passion Week. They stuck to Palm Sunday with only hints of Passion Week at the end. They did a dramatic reading of the main characters surrounding the Palm Sunday event. Much of it was about the confrontation with the *Powers and Principalities*, and it could have come right out of Walter Wink's "The Powers that Be." The diversity, the celebration, and the theology all touched my heart.

Maundy Thursday. I attended our home church, Kalamazoo First UMC, for the Maundy Thursday service. The focus was on the towel of service. We were challenged to take off our shoes and socks and go through the service, including Communion, with them off. And while we didn't do a foot-washing, we were encouraged to experience the vulnerability. Theologically, it helped drive home the point concerning the radical reversal of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. The cosmic truth of this reversal is almost too powerful to comprehend, but it was an awesome witness that night.

Good Friday. The plan was to attend the evening Good Friday service at the Springdale Mennonite Church in Waynesboro, VA. But we got there late and missed the service – the first Good Friday service I've missed in decades. I'm glad that forgiveness is abundant.

Easter Saturday. On Saturday morning, Diane, Hannah and I went to Monticello – an American Cathedral. I am only partially kidding. The home of Thomas Jefferson is beautiful, right now in springtime splendor. And it celebrates the genius and complexity of the man. Jefferson's religious views have been much debated over the years. He was a man of the Enlightenment and is often described as a deist or a Unitarian. He famously revised the Gospels by removing all of the passages which seemed to him to be miraculous or mythological. The remaining passages – the ethic of Jesus – love your God with all your being and your neighbor as yourself – were embraced by Jefferson as the greatest ethical teaching ever.

Easter Sunday. Easter Sunday morning, Diane, Hannah and I attended the Kitty Hawk United Methodist Church on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Diane and I lived in North Carolina while I was in seminary at Duke, so the NC version of United Methodism was not too surprising. But the slight cultural differences were apparent, especially to Hannah. The pastor was committed and folksy. The sanctuary was inviting and beautiful, tastefully balancing tradition and current technology. I am always touched when I go into another United Methodist Church in another part of the country and see the UMC Hymnal that I love so much. The celebration of the resurrection of Christ was joyous and heartfelt. I am proud to be with brothers in sisters in Christ from North Carolina or any other part of the globe, and pray that we can remain together.

While I miss Holy Week in one congregation to which I am appointed, I am grateful for having the opportunity to experience Holy Week in this fashion – a small slice of the fullness and diversity of our faith.



WMC Story of the Month

He helped make impossible dreams come true

KAY DEMOSS
Michigan News Editor

Those gathered at Grand Rapids Trinity United Methodist Church on April 29, 2017 heard him described as a “prince,” a “giant,” a “friend,” and “relentless.” They had come to celebrate the life of the Rev. Dr. Robert Charles Smith.

Bob passed away at his Clark Retirement Community home on April 20, sound of mind and still eager to remain active as a disciple of Jesus Christ and transformer of the world.

As with most memorial services, the scripture, hymns and tributes evoked memories of the man and honored his character and achievements.

But the act of worship that called forth Bob’s spirit in the most powerful of ways was Trinity member Bill Chowning’s singing of,

“The Impossible Dream.”

For colleagues knew Smith as a man “willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause,” particularly when that cause was hunger ... in the neighborhood or around the world.

A faithful life

The Rev. Ed Perkins, Smith’s long-time friend, reviewed Bob’s journey of life and faith.

Bob Smith was born in Grand Rapids in 1919 to a “not particularly church-going family.” His height would lead him to play Goliath at Wallin Congregational Church (thus began his distaste for literal interpretation of scripture, according to Perkins) and then to the basketball team of Valley Methodist Church.

There he became a leader in the Epworth League and dreamed of becoming an attorney. His mentor’s

suggestion that he become a preacher “hit Bob like a bolt of lightning.”

Impossible dream, however, as Bob lacked the resources to pursue such a goal. The mentor then became a benefactor. It was to the generosity of that mentor, that Smith traced his own humanitarian zeal. He would help others as he had been helped.

After graduating from Garrett Theological Seminary he went on to serve Dowling: Country Chapel; Banfield; Middleville; Ovid United Church and Shepardsville; Mt. Pleasant 1st; and Jackson 1st Methodist churches. In 1971 Smith’s ministry went beyond the local church serving as Superintendent of the Grand Rapids District and Director of the West Michigan Conference Council on Ministries.

A young woman at Banfield heard of the appointment of a new pastor and asked, “What have they sent us this time?” Bob was to marry that young woman, Helen Gray, and she would be at his side as a tireless advocate for mission until her death in 1998.

Mission champion

Bob’s passion for mission was exerted during his tenure as Conference Council Director. During the memorial service the Rev. Julie Liske read remarks sent for the occasion by Bishop Sharon Z. Rader. Bishop Rader joined the West Michigan program staff in 1981.

She recalls, “Among my

responsibilities was global and local mission work and Bob immediately knew I would need to be tutored, encouraged, and challenged to help the West Michigan Conference be one of the leading conferences in support of mission ministries.” She went on to say, “Bob was one of UMCOR’s most vocal and faithful supports. He wanted the West Michigan Conference to never be guilty of compassion fatigue.”

Bob was an architect of West Michigan’s “Six Lanes of the Advance” that has provided scope and direction for congregations’ mission giving for nearly 50 years. The West Michigan Conference led the denomination in per capita giving to mission for years, largely on the outpouring of millions of dollars for hunger and disaster relief. As Perkins would note, “Largely due to the incredible energy and influence of Bob Smith.”

Upon his retirement from the West Michigan Conference in 1983, Bob Smith served the United Methodist Committee on Relief until 1992. The stole worn by Ed Perkins during the memorial service was given to Bob on one of his many trips with UMCOR.

Perkins reported that Bob and Helen both partnered with UMCOR leaders Harry Haines and Norma Kehrberg. “The Midwest Office for UMCOR was in their basement,” Perkins remarked. “With the help of Dave



Bob Smith welcomed to India for dedication of a project of the United Methodist Committee on Relief. He was a man for whom doors were opened and who opened doors for others. ~photo courtesy Dorothy Smith

Wiltse, West Michigan's graphic designer, they published the UMCOR Updates that circulated nationwide."

Bob's efforts were not confined to the basement. He traveled extensively raising both awareness and dollars. Perkins read from a recent letter sent to Bob by Norma Kehrberg: "You are the best promoter and enthusiastic supporter for UMCOR, the church, and for God. Always charismatic. Always optimistic. Always cajoling."

An anecdote shared by Ed Perkins dispelled the notion that Bob overlooked nearby neighbors to the advantage of those abroad. "Bob was tireless for mission here in Grand Rapids." A favorite project was the Trinity UMC garden out of which Bob personally made regular deliveries to South End Community Ministries (SECOM) and North End Community Ministry (NECM). And thanks to countless phone calls from

his bed and chair, Bob once set a record for participation in the local hunger walk even though he was laid up in rehab. Nothing impossible for those "ardent in spirit" described in Romans 12:1-16, read early in the service.

Legacy lives on

It happened that the United Methodist Council of Bishops was meeting in Dallas at the same time the congregation was gathered in Grand Rapids to remember Bob Smith. However, three bishops sent comments, excerpted here ...

Bishop David Bard, read by Rev. John Boley: "Bob was a person of deep faith who cared passionately about The United Methodist Church ... He was esteemed as the embodiment of a thoughtful Christian faith ... His service to church and world were exemplary."

Bishop Donald Ott, read by Rev. Doug Vernon: "You opened my eyes. You stretched my heart. You challenged my commitment



Bob Smith enjoyed the Mission Fair at the 2015 West Michigan Conference. It was the 75th consecutive visit to Annual Conference for Bob, having never missed a session during his entire ministry. ~mic/Kay DeMoss

to the world second only to Jesus ... I came to Michigan as your bishop and for eight years you kept asking, 'What was I doing, what was I thinking, and what was I planning for The Advance' ... *Relentless and hope-filled and expectant* are my words for you."

Bishop Sharon Rader, read by Rev. Julie Liske: "Bob paid attention to what was going on in the United States and globally and he believed, as Christians, we have the responsibility to respond ... He wasn't perfect but he surely was one of God's own, sometimes larger than life but always seeking to grow in the fullness of a faithful follower of Jesus."

At the time of his death, Bob Smith was in nursing care at Clark Community but was still contributing to the work

of the Mission Team at Trinity UMC with the help of his wife, Dorothy. As Perkins explained, Dorothy was Bob's, "secretary, chauffeur, wife, caregiver and partner in ministry over the years."

During the service, son Robert H. Smith paid tribute to his father saying, "It's not about how long you live but about how much you live. He was a great humanitarian who cared about those who struggled to survive." And then he gave a challenge to those in the pews who tend to be too content with what's possible. "Please give a moment's thought to what you can do to perpetuate his goals in this cruel world."

The spirit of the Rev. Dr. Robert C. Smith is alive. The dream continues.



November 1985, Bob Smith stands with Norma Kehrberg and Indian leaders at the dedication of a new earthen reservoir constructed with the aid of the United Methodist Committee on Relief. ~photo courtesy Dorothy Smith



CROSSROADS DISTRICT ... Juddville UMC will again be hosting the community Farmers' Market. They support young entrepreneurs like Kingston Clingan, as all vendors set-up and sell free of charge.



DETROIT RENAISSANCE DISTRICT ... NOAH Project Exec. Director Amy Brown and Bag Lunch Coordinator Chelsea Williams, present the Golden Sock Award to Rev. Jeff Nelson, Royal Oak 1st UMC. The congregation donated 1,593 pairs of socks during Sock-It-To-Me September.

Snapshots of Vitality



HEARTLAND DISTRICT ... A blessing of the farm machinery took place at Pompeii UMC on April 2. Pastor Mona Dye stretches to consecrate a big rig for service in the fields.



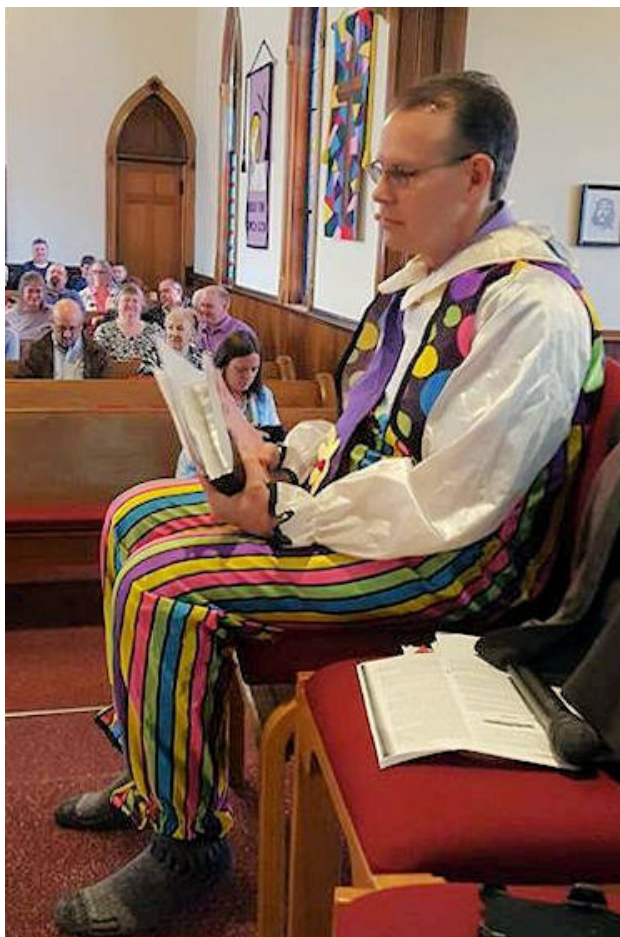
GRAND RAPIDS DISTRICT ... This parking lot is so big and my wheelbarrow is so small! A young volunteer helps with spring clean-up at Grand Rapids: Trinity UMC.



SAGINAW BAY DISTRICT ... Bishop David Bard and Superintendent David Kim have a new Best Friend... Great Lakes Loons mascot, Lou E. Loon.



HEARTLAND DISTRICT ... Thousands of Easter eggs and a whole lot of God's love went into the egg hunt and activities at Mt. Pleasant 1st UMC.



KALAMAZOO DISTRICT ... Otsego Pastor Joe Shaler was a Fool for Christ during Lent 2017.



ANN ARBOR DISTRICT ... These Adrian College students have fun at the Global Marketplace, held on campus, during a break from raising awareness about human trafficking.



Perspectives on Hope

Rev. Dr. Jerome (Jerry) DeVine
Director of Connectional Ministries, DAC

With considerably mixed emotions, Ruth and I pulled out of our former driveway for the last time late last week. For eight years the house had offered us shelter, hosted our family gatherings, listened to laughter, sorrow, love and prayers. We had sacrificially given sweat and muscle, creativity and time to turn a stripped-out foreclosure into a family place of grace and belonging. Our grandchildren had decided how rooms could become their arenas of play and imagination.



From that place and space of familiarity and comfort we were now heading into a new place of transition, filled with vision yet with many challenges. It will take some time to create a new space for life and family to be lived out in the church house we are in the midst of remodeling. While we are elated that the home we departed will have a family that loves it, we know we need to acknowledge the mixed emotions we feel as we move into this transition.

As I worked on one of the remodeling projects of our new home, I began to meditate about what we United Methodists are trying to do to give shape to a new Michigan Conference. It seems to me that some of the same emotions are at play. On one hand we, as lay and clergy members of the two annual conferences, overwhelmingly felt compelled and voted to become one conference. I believe this was deeply rooted in the building of relationships and the over 30 shared ministries across the state that were already bearing fruit. It was rooted in a belief that God is actively in our midst seeking to guide and move us into a life-giving future. It was rooted in a commitment to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of our communities and the world. Yet, to move into that future has meant we will need to acknowledge and own the emotions of driving out of our “driveways” of comfort and familiarity, some for the last time.

We are all working on the “remodeling” plan of the Michigan Conference as we head to Annual Conference this year. The legislative items going to annual conference are the blueprints. United Methodist consultant, Gil Rendle, in his book Journey in the Wilderness: New Life for Mainline Churches, reminds us that this is difficult work:

“Letting go is more than passively accepting a loss. It is no longer clinging to the hope that the old will return. It is a full and active letting go, which is difficult since the old is rooted so deeply.”

When Ruth and I drove out of our former driveway, we paused on the street and allowed ourselves time to offer tears of gratitude for what had been, tears that also acknowledged our grief over what we were letting go of. In the letting go we then could drive to our place of new beginnings.

One of the lectionary texts for April 30th is Luke 24:13-35. This is the story of the post-resurrection appearance of Christ on the road to Emmaus.

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles

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APPEAL from p. 1

The Bishop Judith Craig Children’s Village, 45% to fund Haiti Hot Lunch Program, and 10% will support Michigan Area Task Force work with emerging ministries in Haiti and Liberia.

Checks should be made payable to “Detroit Annual Conference” or “West Michigan Conference” noting “Haiti/Liberia Offering” in the memo line.

The second ingathering is of goods for the Safe Harbor of Traverse City, a program dedicated to the physical and spiritual welfare of the area’s homeless. This ecumenical ministry provides a rotating shelter. They are organizing a permanent shelter site to open in the fall of 2017.

Household goods and personal care items are needed to stock the shelves. Members are asked to carry donations with them to Annual Conference including: bras (smaller sizes); women’s panties (all sizes); men’s underwear (briefs and boxers all sizes); deodorant (small size); washcloths; brushes and combs; toothbrushes; and razors.

Annual Conference is a time for worship, decision and fellowship. Contributions to these Conference Ingatherings can also making Annual Conference an occasion for Mission Outreach. Thank you, in advance, for your generous response. It makes a difference.



The Judith Craig Children’s Village near Liberia’s capital of Monrovia, has been sheltering children from civil strife and diseases like Ebola since 2000. ~umns photo

United Methodist News in Brief

General Conference 2019 Session



On April 25, 2017 the United Methodist Church's Council of Bishops, announced the call to a special General Conference on Feb. 23-26, 2019, in St. Louis, Missouri. The special meeting of The UMC's top lawmaking assembly will be limited to acting on a report by Council of Bishops, based on the proposals from the Commission on the Way

Forward. The 32-member commission, appointed by the bishops, has the charge of finding ways for the denomination to stay together despite deep differences around homosexuality. Since The United Methodist Church formed in 1968, it has only held a General Conference once outside of the normal four-year schedule. That was in 1970 to organize the merger of Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren denominations.

Call for peace in Korea

A statement by Bishop Hee-Soo Jung was published April 19, 2017 on the website of the Wisconsin Conference. Bishop Hee-Soo Jung is the episcopal leader in Wisconsin. "Our options should be peace options. Working together toward an end to the divisions and hostilities that divide Korea should be a high priority for our Church, as well as our country. It is important that actions have consequences. We do not ask anyone to ignore violations of human rights, or threats to global security, but we should seek to model solutions that create and build a viable future, instead of imposing one nation's values on others. We call for President Trump, Vice President Pence, and our military decision makers to use caution, discretion, and patience in dealing what our American media most often characterizes as 'threat,' 'violation,' and 'aggression.'"



Missionary coming to Michigan



Rev. Paul Webster serves the General Board of Global Ministries, assigned as the Director of the Mujila Falls Agriculture Centre in Zambia. Every three years United Methodist missionaries return to the United States to thank supporting churches and to provide ministry updates. Paul is due back this May. It is likely he will tour the Michigan Area late summer. To

schedule a visit contact: Jackie Euper, Detroit Conference Secretary of Global Ministries: tjeuper@tm.net or 810-441-7624 or Sharon Burkart, West Michigan Secretary of Global Ministries: sharonannburkart@gmail.com or 269-660-8881

Hope from 10

from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

Imagine the mixed emotions of the "two of them" as they walked down this pathway of transition. Memories of shared meals with Jesus and the disciples may have flooded their thoughts. Memories of healings and times of teaching contrasted with the violence and shock of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion were further complicated by the stories of the empty tomb. They were in a journey of transition. As much as they may have wanted to they could not go back to the place of comfort of the past, nor could they see clearly yet what the future shape of the vision and hope would be.

Sometimes the mixed emotions that are inherent in a time of transition can make it difficult for us to see clearly, preventing "our eyes from recognizing" that the risen Christ is walking on this pathway with us. Lovett Weems, Jr. reminds us that:

The natural inclination of all groups is to resist change, regardless of the merits of who we are. Such resistance is not so much a moral failure of the people in our churches as it is a gravitational pull of groups toward stability rather than change." (Take the Next Step; Leading Lasting Change in the Church)

When the movers delivered

the last load of our belongings to our new project home I have to admit that Ruth and I were overwhelmed. Trying to find some semblance of normality in the midst of boxes and construction materials was daunting. I think it will feel this way for some of our laity and clergy who are involved in district and conference leadership as we seek to more fully live into the new Michigan Conference in the year of transition ahead of us. It will feel this way for some of our agencies, organizations and staff. For a while it may be difficult to know where to find things, wondering which "box" a ministry got packed into. For a while some will feel a sense of loss for that which was familiar and comfortable. In the midst of this there will also be moments of excitement as relationships expand, ministries emerge and grow, and signs of God's presence with us are seen as our eyes are opened.

The Gospel story from Luke ends with a meal, and in that breaking of bread "*their eyes were opened*" and once again they could affirm, "*Were not our hearts burning within us ...*". After days of living in the midst of boxes and sawdust, Ruth cleared off the dining room table and enough of the kitchen counters so that we could prepare our first home-cooked meal in our new place of transition. Breaking bread together gave us a new comfort in our new place. May it be so for all of us as we gather in our local churches this Sunday, and as we gather up North for the 2017 Annual Conference.



Home Words Bound

Rev. Benton Heisler
Director of Connectional Ministries, WMC

I recall a study book we used as a resource in one congregation I served in the early 1990's. My children were toddlers. All four of their grandparents were living in their own homes and very self-sufficient. I really did not have much of a frame of reference as I tried to lead the study titled, "Becoming Your Parents' Parent."

Fast forward to this week and all the reference points have changed. My father died 27 years ago of a sudden heart attack. My mom died three years ago in the course of a day, after living 18 years in a range-of-care retirement community. Linda's father died 12 years ago in her parent's mobile home with the two of us by his side after a 3 year fight with cancer. Linda's mom celebrated her 87th birthday this past weekend ... in a hospital, surrounded by family. Monday we moved her back to the memory care facility where she is now receiving Hospice. Doctors are not sure if it will be two weeks, two months...maybe longer...? Congestive heart failure and other complex factors have their own time table.



Her name is Faith. Her life has been a quiet witness that patterned her name. For the past 12 years, since her husband's death, she has lived in our home. Just a month ago, the dementia and its complicating issues prompted our transfer of her to a care facility. Her room there allowed us to set all her same furniture and photos and lamps in the same place. "Her apartment," as we explained it, looked just like her space in our home. There was just a new set of "friends & family" at the meals now.

Not surprising, all the family members are at different stages of grief, depending on the relationship and grief work each of us has done to date.

"Holy Week" has a new context for me this year. This family transition of one blessed soul beginning the final journey from this life to the next is indeed a "Holy Time." Person's heartfelt messages of "praying for you;" "we've been through it ourselves;" "let me know how I can help;" have been sustaining manna for each difficult moment.

I am confident that our family journey is not unlike this road many of you have walked as well. What came to my mind as I began to craft this message to you was how there were some parallels to the transitions taking place in the Michigan Area of the UMC. There is anticipatory and real grief related to changes in process or foreseen for the near future. There are important "thank you and good-byes" to be said to meeting places, relationships, structures, programs, "how we have always done it" and what might have been or never was.

I am thankful that as our family gathered following the "meeting with the doctors" we willingly all prayed, as did one of the physicians who accepted our invitation to remain. Our family knows this is only the end of the "Journey" in this life. Because of all of

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discuss possibilities for unity in light of deeply held yet differing convictions about the nature of revelation, the love of God, and the appropriateness of same-sex attraction. I hope you will be part of such conversations.

A more meaningful response to the question of "What's left" is that the mission of the church in a hurting world is what remains. We may disagree about how best to wrestle with and read Scripture, but we agree on the amazing love of God in Jesus Christ and the human need for that gracious love. Too many lives are unraveled or unraveling, too many people lack love and the ability to give and receive it. Too many people are addicted and need help, too many children go hungry, too many people are sick and poor. The world is too violent, power and greed and short-sightedness blind individuals and nations. There is too much pain and hurt for us not to focus intensely and passionately on sharing God's love in Jesus Christ so that disciples are made, and lives are transformed and the world is transformed. As we pray for our church, let's continue to do the work of the church and be the church.

Recently in preparing for a devotional time for a meeting, I again read these words from I Peter: *Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.* (3:8) I hope you will join me in continuing to be shaped by such words, in the power of God's Spirit.

Thank you for reading this. I encourage you to read the official response to the Judicial Council decision from the Council of Bishops.

It is an honor to serve as your bishop, even in this difficult and challenging time for The United Methodist Church. Thank you for sharing in ministry together as Michigan United Methodists.

Court says election of gay bishop violates church law

LINDA BLOOM

United Methodist News Service

The consecration of a gay bishop violates church law, the top court of The United Methodist Church has ruled.

However, the bishop “remains in good standing,” the Judicial Council said in Decision 1341, until an administrative or judicial process is completed.

“Under the long-standing principle of legality, no individual member or entity may violate, ignore or negate church law,” said the decision, made public April 28. “It is not lawful for the college of bishops of any jurisdictional or central conference to consecrate a self-avowed practicing homosexual bishop.”

Officials in the U.S. Western Jurisdiction consecrated the Rev. Karen Oliveto as a bishop on July 16, 2016. Based in the Denver area, she is the episcopal leader of the Mountain Sky Area, which encompasses Colorado, Montana, Utah, Wyoming and one church in Idaho. The petition to Judicial Council and the council’s decision did not specifically name Oliveto.

A petition from the South Central Jurisdiction raised four questions about the legality of that election. Judicial Council claimed jurisdiction to review its petition “only with respect to the consecration of an openly homosexual bishop” and said the rest of the petition, related to nomination, election and assignment, “is improper.”

The vote on the decision was 6-3. Judicial Council members N. Oswald Tweh and Deanell Reece Tacha filed a joint dissenting opinion that the council had no jurisdiction over the petition. First lay alternate W. Warren Plowden Jr., who was sitting for council member Beth Capen, and council member Ruben T. Reyes each filed a concurring and dissenting opinion.

The court rejected the argument made during oral hearing by Richard Marsh, Western Jurisdiction counsel, that Oliveto’s same-sex marriage to Robin



Bishop Karen Oliveto (left) leans over to speak with her wife, Robin Ridenour (behind Oliveto) prior to a meeting of the United Methodist Judicial Council in Newark, N.J. The denomination's top court ruled on April 28 that the consecration of a gay bishop violates church law. At right is Bishop Elaine Stanovsky. ~umns photo/Mike DuBose

Ridenour in 2014 was not a public statement about her sexual practices. “A same-sex marriage license issued by competent civil authorities together with the clergy person’s status in a same-sex relationship is a public declaration that the person is

a self-avowed practicing homosexual” for purposes of the prohibitive language in the Book of Discipline, Paragraphs 304.3 and 2702.1(b), the council ruled.

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whom Jesus was and what God did for us through His Son in the course of this “Holy Week” that culminates on Easter, we are people of great Hope! Focusing on this abundant, life giving, and eternal love, brings such great peace.

The UMC is only 3-5% of the population in any given context. But look at what the incredible impact is as God uses each of us as agents of healing, forgiveness, restoration and peace. I pray that as we continue to form the “new” Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church we will always keep in mind Who we serve in in this process and Whose children we are. We are the sons and daughters of the Lord God almighty, who was, and is and is to come.

Quoting the great sermon and book by Tony Compolo, “It May be Friday but Sunday is Coming!!!” Death may be at our door, but Eternal Life is through the door on the other side.

I pray we each not only hold on to that truth by faith, but by our faith demonstrate to the world the life transforming power of the Risen Christ, bolding proclaiming, like the first visitors at the tomb, “He is not here! He has risen! He has risen indeed!” (Matthew 28: 5-6)

Editor’s Note: On April 12, 2017, Faith Esther Nystrom, mother of Linda Heisler and the Rev. Rob Nystrom, passed away. We express our condolences to her family.

Bishop Ken Carter on how we got to where we are

BISHOP KEN CARTER Florida Conference UMC

For those who want to dive in deeply into what is happening in United Methodism in the present moment, I recommend the abundance of statements and interpretations that are easily accessible via the web. Here I am speaking in reference to the called General Conference, the Judicial Council and the Commission on a Way Forward. This is something different – a brief overview of events that have led to where we find ourselves that can be read in 5-7 minutes.

1. American Methodism began and flourished as a movement with a very clear set of doctrines, a very thin book of discipline, a very high set of expectations for discipleship and a very real struggle with slavery and racism. We failed in that struggle, and some of the divisions have been with us ever since. A recent statement of full communion with the Pan Methodist (historically black churches – AME, AMEZ, CME) is a step in the right direction.

2. There have always been multiple streams of theological diversity in American Methodism: revivalism, the social gospel, personalism, neo-Wesleyanism, process theology and theologies of liberation. We have been able to live together with theological differences, while affirming a doctrinal core. This is the distinction made in the UMC *Book of Discipline* between our doctrinal standards and our

theological task. I have also found the work of Tom Langford in his *Practical Divinity* to be very helpful. My simple point here is that we have always been a church with differing theological perspectives; yet, we are united by a rich and deep understanding of the grace of God that leads to sanctification – which is itself God's gift – and the means of grace that form us as disciples.



Bishop Karen Oliveto (left) meets Dixie Brewster for the first time prior to the opening of oral arguments before the United Methodist Judicial Council meeting in Newark, N.J. Brewster is the petitioner questioning whether a gay pastor can serve as a bishop in The United Methodist Church. At rear is the Rev. Keith Boyette, representing Brewster before the council. ~umns photo/Mike DuBose

3. Largely through migration and missionary movements, American Methodism came to align with ancestors of the Wesleys in Europe and to establish churches in Africa and the Philippines. At the same time, our relationships with churches in Latin America and the Caribbean are more loosely defined, as these bodies are autonomous. Still, we engage in mission and prayer together (two examples would be Cuba and Haiti). At present the global body that is The United Methodist

Church is present on four continents: the United States, Africa, the Philippines and Europe. Our process for decision-making is aligned with membership. This decision-making occurs every four years at a General Conference, held in 2016 in Portland and in 2020 in Minneapolis. Methodists have met in conferences since our very beginning.

4. Because of our impasse on definitions and practices related to LGBTQ identity and implications for the unity of the church, the General Conference in Portland called for a special General Conference to focus exclusively on this matter. This was seen as a more faithful and helpful alternative than the more efficient (but also harmful) practice of taking up these questions in a few minutes, when the outcomes are of such great concern to so many. This called special General Conference included

provision for a group to prepare the church for this work. The group is the Commission on a Way Forward, 32 persons who come from across the globe in approximate proportion to our membership and diversity. This Commission will meet nine times, and its purpose is to prepare the larger church for decision-making that will help us to find a way forward, beyond our present impasses. I am honored and humbled to serve as one of three moderators of this Commission.

5. As the Commission does its work, life in the church goes on, in all of its diversity, confusion and disagreement. One aspect of this is the Judicial Council's decision regarding the contested election of a bishop in the Western Jurisdiction. The decision of the Judicial Council is a legal response to the questions of both LGBTQ marriage and ordination in the church. It is distinct from the processes of both the Commission on a Way Forward and the General Conference. At the same time protest and renewal movements continue to do their work. The media (social and otherwise) often exacerbate the divisions and ignore the much greater reality of a common ground.

6. For some the present denominational work is a distraction. For others it is for the purpose of clarifying who we are as United

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Church law requires all clergy persons to dedicate themselves to “the highest ideals of Christian life,” the decision said, including “their commitment to abide by and uphold the church’s definition of marriage and stance on homosexuality.”

An openly homosexual and partnered bishop is in violation of those minimum standards.”

The decision further found that an openly homosexual and partnered bishop may be charged with disobedience to church law, along with other bishops and clergy persons who actively participate in the consecration of a bishop who has been found to be a self-avowed practicing homosexual through a judicial or administrative process.

“Self-avowal does not nullify the consecration and cause removal from episcopal office but is a sufficient declaration to subject the bishop’s ministerial office to review,” the decision said.

Judicial Council spelled out the process required by The Discipline for such a review, which begins with the filing of a complaint against the bishop.

If action is not initiated by the jurisdictional or central conference, the president or secretary of that body’s college of bishops must take action.

Pending the supervisory response process to review episcopal membership and office, the college of bishops,

in consultation with the committee on episcopacy, “may suspend the bishop from all episcopal responsibilities for a period not to exceed 60 days.”

The process allows for a bishop to be placed in the retired relationship “regardless of age” if it is “found to be in the best interests of the bishop and/or the church.”

If there is no resolution, “the president or secretary of the college of bishops may refer the matter as an administrative or judicial complaint,” the ruling concluded.

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Methodists. Some see a future for our church only through a definition of orthodoxy that includes

traditional understandings of marriage and ordination. Others see a future for our church that is fully inclusive of persons in same gender marriage and open to the gifts of LGBTQ persons in ordained ministry. And yet others hope for a future UMC that can include both traditional and progressive practices.

7. The decision of the Judicial Council, the report of the Commission on a Way Forward and the actions of the called General Conference will provide a blueprint for the future of United Methodism. The decision of the Judicial Council will respond to a very specific question, and is significant



Members of the 2016-2020 Judicial Council. (From left) Front row: Deanell Reece Tacha, N. Oswald Tweh Sr., the Rev. Luan-Vu Tran. Back row: Lydia Romão Gulele, Ruben T. Reyes, the Rev. Øyvind Helliesen, the Rev. Dennis Blackwell, and the Rev. J. Kabamba Kiboko. ~umns photo/Kathleen Barry

in the short term. The General Conference’s decisions in 2019 and 2020 will shape the church in a more substantive way and will define our capacity to find a way forward.

I would encourage those who love The United Methodist Church and seek a future with hope to:

- consider the complexity of a much more diverse tradition in our past and a much more diverse and global reality in our future;
- not be quick to assume the worst about denominational leaders and advocates for renewal and protest; many of them are United Methodist Christians to their core. Here the distinctions in *The*
- recognize that there are LGBTQ persons in virtually every local United Methodist congregation and their gifts are a great blessing to the church and the world;
- place ourselves with humility under the Lordship of Jesus Christ as we seek to become more holy, and
- to take life, and the life of our denomination, one day at a time, to trust in the work of God and to seek God’s will through a process that, yes, does take a very long time.

~ Reprinted from website MinistryMatters.com

United Methodist Committee on Relief ‘does good well’

REV. JACK AMICK
UMCOR Disaster Relief

My grandmother used to say that one of the worst things that can be said about a person is that “they mean well.” Yoda said similarly, “Do or do not. There is no try.”

I like to say about the staff of the UMCOR Disaster Response unit that we help partners “do good well.”

“We do this because Christ told us to care for the least of these.”

Some of our partners come to us with ideas that are clearly defined. They may just need a clarifying question or two. Often, we can learn from them. In other instances, partners approach UMCOR with ideas that require help to develop. Our staff coaches them by sharing best practices, tips, and

explaining standards that have been established internationally for humanitarian assistance.

In some cases, we help partners move from meaning well and trying to do good to doing good well.

For some partners, the grant they receive from UMCOR may be their first foray into disaster response. In those cases, especially, we work to help them improve their understanding of best practices.

Sharing best practices may mean helping partners find culturally acceptable food rations that are consistent with caloric intake standards as recommended by the World Food Program, or daily water consumption guidelines suggested by the Sphere standards, a joint consortium of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that ensure excellence in humanitarian assistance.

Or maybe UMCOR demonstrates how to select beneficiaries in a way that is



The Rev. Jack Amick (left) assists with distribution of RainFresh water filtration units in Torbeck, Haiti. A 2016 grant by the United Methodist Committee on Relief supported a partnership with the Canadian non-profit, GlobalMedic. ~GlobalMedic photo

impartial and identifies the most vulnerable in a community. Or perhaps we introduce a partner to the principles of protection in humanitarian assistance.

We listen to partners, building on their ideas. We learn. And we share what we’ve learned with others.

Ultimately, we do all this because, on behalf of The United Methodist Church, UMCOR cares for the vulnerable and weak in this world. We do this because Christ told us to care for the least of these. And so, for 77 years, UMCOR has worked to “alleviate poverty without regard for race or creed.”

Not too far back in our history, UMCOR would have shipped food or other items from the United States to help survivors of disasters. But we’ve learned that practice is not the best for the community being served. Shipping from the US can sometimes take up to eight weeks. In that time, what is required on the ground can change dramatically. Instead,

we encourage partners to purchase supplies locally or regionally.

In some cases, we support partners as they give vouchers or cash to beneficiaries so that they, themselves can select the food they want from local shops—in cases where markets are operating.

“We learn. And we share what we’ve learned with others.”

The three main humanitarian principles that undergird all our work are that the dignity of disaster survivors should be maintained, that we do no harm, and that we serve with impartiality. I have heard it said that “humanitarian” assistance is secular and not Christian. On the contrary, well-implemented humanitarian assistance can be a real sign of unconditional love. It can be, dare I say, sacramental. It can be a physical reminder that God loves all.



Partnership is crucial to UMCOR's work. Our most important partners are the survivors of conflict and natural disasters, whose insights help us target our aid. Partnering with local organizations allows UMCOR to help strengthen these communities. ~umcor photo