

The Arbor Vine

Ann Arbor District of The United Methodist Church
Rev. Mark E. Spaw, District Superintendent

MARCH 2016

Leadership Training Day keeps getting better!

If you missed the workshops on February 27 in Howell, you missed an excellent program. Melanie Carey gave an inspiring and touching keynote address, encouraging us to care for the young people in our churches and giving us ideas for doing it.

The six workshops were engaging and educational, inspiring some participants to plan extended programs. The hallways were buzzing with conversations and happy greetings.

Reports from the High Five program showed 100% participation and report submission. High Five reports showed how all the Ann Arbor District churches are working to increase membership, attendance, giving, and spiritual growth. The churches with the highest increase in each area were recognized.

Membership Change: Dexter UMC

Membership Change by Percentage: Wellsville

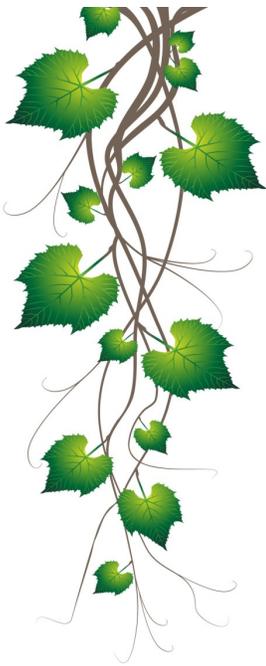
Worship Attendance Change by Percentage: Monroe Heritage UMC

Change in Giving by Percentage: Ann Arbor Calvaery

Change in Worship Attendance and Giving: Ann Arbor First UMC

Thanks again to the Special Events Task Force: Wendy Everett, Mark Miller, Joel Walther, Megan Walther, Don Weatherup, Tina Zimmerman.

If you missed it this year, make a note to attend next year!



Page 2

DISTRICT NOTICES

ADDITIONS TO THE ANN ARBOR DISTRICT DIRECTORY

Last month we made an error, reporting that Helen Jeanne Doanne live in Saline. She lives at the Chelsea Retirement Community, at 801 W. Middle St, Apt 361.

UNITED METHODIST MEN

The Detroit Conference United Methodist Men will be meeting this spring on April 30, 2016. This meeting will feature Gil Hanke, General Secretary of the General Commission on United Methodist Men. West Branch UMC, West Branch, MI, has graciously agreed to host our day-long meeting.

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

Encourage your church or group to participate in the Who is My Neighbor? 6 week Spanish Language Study. The study is great for preparation for mission trips. The teacher's book, with a how-to guide and the student books are available to purchase at Cokesbury. Email Sonya Luna, at sluna@detroitconference.org to sign-up.

ONE-EIGHTY CONFERENCE, MARCH 10

Visit www.dewittredeemer.org to learn about the one-eighty conference, which offers speakers and workshops to promote a successful turnaround for your church. It is held at Redeemer UMC in DeWitt, MI.

FREE E-NEWSLETTER FROM THE LEWIS CENTER

Leading Ideas is the thoughtful, experienced weekly online newsletter of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Seminary in Washington, DC. Each week you will receive information, resources, and strategies to help advance God's mission in your ministry. To check it out and subscribe, go to www.churchleadership.com/leadingideas.

OH, FOR A HALF-DOZEN TONGUES TO SING

The West Michigan Chapter of the Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts will host a workshop for small choirs at White Cloud UMC. Six choir directors will offer tips. \$20. Contact Buff Coe at buffordc@aol.com.

HOME REPAIR MINISTRY

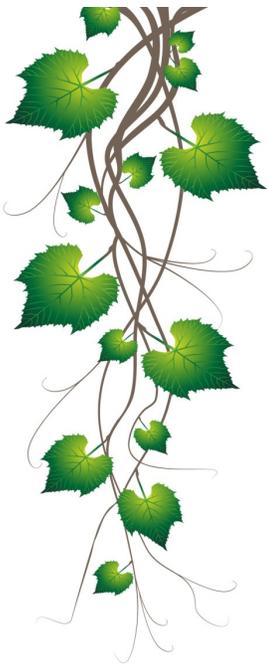
Cods Country Cooperative Parish has 3 opening for VIM teams this summer. The cost per person is \$225.00 person. This is home repair ministry in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The dates are June 19 - 25, June 26 - July 1 and August 1 - 6. Please feel free to call Randy Hildebrandt at cell (906) 235 - 3553.

14TH ANNUAL KEEP MAKING PEACE CONFERENCE

Sat April 16, at University UMC in East Lansing, 9:00—4:00. The subject is "Mass Incarceration: Locked In, Locked Up, Locked Out." For more information contact Rev. Rich Peacock at rjpeacock@wowway.com.

FUMC WESLEY FOUNDATION LOUD LECTURER, MARCH 12-13

Dr. Norman Wirzba of Duke Seminary will lead a discussion on the Spiritual Exercise of Eating and speak: "Nature or Creation: "What Difference Does it Make?" See www.fumc-a2.org.



Page 3

Spaw's Paws

Some thoughts from your D.S., Rev. Mark E. Spaw

THE JOURNEY

It is the Lenten season... a time for our faith journey to, hopefully not begin, but continue! But if your journey is beginning, let's all head out together full of hope, joy, love and faith! We live in a time of skepticism and doubt. No wonder, for there are those who try to sell us a bill of religious goods. People report things to us that don't quite ring true. An intrepid explorer has found a board that came from Noah's Ark! How does he know? Still folks send in a donation to get a splinter of that board. A friend sends us an email saying a professor at a big university claimed that he would believe in God if a piece of chalk that he dropped didn't hit the floor. It lands in the cuff of his pants. Some folks will forward it to everyone they know. But we check it out and it never really happened. *Who* comes up with this stuff? We need a healthy dose of skepticism.

We also, and more importantly, need faith! During this season of Lent experience God, in His actions, calling, nudging, and love. We think that if only God would act in an unmistakable way, we could banish our doubt and have real faith. No event, even a spectacular one, wipes away all doubt and guarantees faith. We don't earn God's actions by our faith. Faith creates a space for God to act. Faith helps us to understand what God's actions mean. A lack of faith will keep us from experiencing God's grace and power.

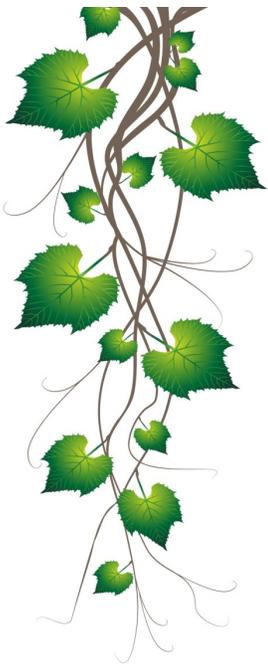
Faith is never a slam dunk! We have to choose faith. Faith makes us vulnerable. We can protect ourselves by skepticism, but we can be too well protected. We can protect ourselves so much that we miss out on the blessings. Faith does not mean we fall for everything people tell us. Faith doesn't mean we can just stay in denial. Faith does mean that we continue to have hope. Faith does mean that we find a way to give thanks even in the midst of pain and disappointment. Faith does mean that we don't give up on God. Faith does mean that we look for God's presence even in what looks like ordinary life. God is at work! Faith is not hoping God will act... Faith is knowing God will act!

Let your faith journey and this Lenten season deepen your faith! On Easter morning let's join together in hope, joy, love and faith.

A faith filled Lenten Season,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "MARK". The letters are bold and slightly slanted, with a casual, personal feel.

Rev. Mark E. Spaw, D.S.



Page 4

Knitted Together in Love: A Prayer Shawl Retreat

Friday, May 6 at 6:00 pm to Sat, May 7 at 6:30 pm.

Come to Judson Collins Camp for a weekend of knitting, tatting, quilting, crocheting, and crafting! Beginners as well as veterans are welcome. Share your ideas for prayer shawl ministry, or learn how to get one started. Come for the whole event or just a part. \$60 per person (1 night/3 meals/snacks). \$45 for Saturday only. Contact them at Judson.collins.center@gmail.com.

Lay Servant Training

Lay Servant School is full for the Spring classes. Come back in the fall for the best lay servant program in the Conference—October 29 and November 12. Brochures will be sent to your church. Classes are open to all, even if you do not plan to become a Lay Servant.

Listening Tour March 12

Bishop Kiesey is on a Listening Tour throughout the state to develop the future of the Michigan Area as two Conferences become one. The next meeting is on March 12, 10:00-12:00 at Cornerstone UMC in Caledonia MI. You are welcome to attend, to learn and to contribute your thoughts.

Annual Conference 2016

The General Conference schedule for this year has necessitated a change in the dates for the Annual Conferences in Michigan. Annual Conference will be held from Wednesday, June 8 to Sunday, June 12, 2016. It will be held on the Michigan State Campus in East Lansing.

Detroit Annual Conference and West Michigan Conference will meet during the same time period. Business sessions will be separate, but there will be joint sessions for worship and programming workshops.

There will be a website dedicated to news about Annual Conference. It is <http://2016.michiganumc.org>. The website is not finished at this time, but it will hold the answers to many questions about the event.

There will also be email updates for everyone who registers for Annual Conference. Registration begins on March 28. Registration will be done online. They will take registrations at the door, but be prepared to wait in line.

Ann Arbor District Liberia Partnership & John Dean Town Project

Update 2/12/2016

Friends in the UMC's Ann Arbor District:

As always, I wait too long between communications. The result is a huge pile-up of news!

Easter VIM

Patti Yerke of South Lyon First and I are getting ready to go to Liberia, to check on progress on our John Dean Town Health project. We will be traveling with a group led by Rev. Kathy Dickreide of the East Ohio Conference, along with others from the East Ohio, West Ohio, and Illinois Great Rivers Conferences. The group includes high school students to grandparents. We will arrive on Good Friday and worship on Easter Sunday at Camphor Mission Station!! On Tuesday, Patti and I will leave with GBGM Health Missionary Mary Zigbuo to spend four days in John Dean Town. We'll check out progress on well construction, see another round of midwife trainings, and enjoy riding all the way into town on the new car road!

We'll have many more details once we return, and we hope to quickly have an active "dance card" of speaking engagements. Please invite us to come to your church!

John Dean Town Project

The John Dean Town Health Project is a multi-year international mission initiative of the Ann Arbor District, begun in late 2012. The focus is on improvement in maternal and infant health in some 18 villages within walking distance of remote John Dean Town, in the Liberia Annual Conference's St John River District. John Dean Town lies in the heart of our Covenant Partnership region in south-central Liberia, roughly mid-way between the small cities of Buchanan and Cestos/Rivercess. The main project activities are: 1) 12 quarterly trainings for village midwives or "Traditional Birth Attendants" (TBAs), and 2) construction of drinking water wells for 18 villages near John Dean Town.

Fundraising Status

Our initial goal was to raise \$80,000 over three years, by the end of 2015. I confess that I had no idea whether the goal was remotely realistic. Today I am extraordinarily pleased that we have so far sent a total of \$63,373.31 via the Advance – and this is during precisely the same period when the Ann Arbor District contributed huge sums to Imagine No Malaria! Please note that the John Dean Town projects is entirely consistent with Imagine No Malaria, and is in fact exactly the type of project the IMN often funds. So regardless of which your congregation supports, we are all pulling in the same direction.

Participating Congregations

From information available via The Advance website, I know that 27 congregations from the Ann Arbor District are project contributors. Plus we have two congregations from other Districts pitching in as well, due to the heartfelt preaching of Rev. Beth Librande, formerly at Plymouth First. Rev. Beth, her husband Dave and son Isaac all traveled to John Dean Town with our Ann Arbor District VIM in Jan 2014. She has continued to share the story since being reappointed to Freeland in the Saginaw Bay District, and also gave a special talk at Clarenceville in Livonia (Detroit Renaissance District).

Wholehearted gratitude to all participating congregations, listed below. As I look over these church names, I think of the privilege I and other Task Force members have had to share what the UMC is doing in JDT – speaking to Mission committees, UMW circles, adult Sunday School classes and District events. I think of Clayton UMC – do you know that your faithful monthly contributions are a source of joy and amazement in Liberia? I think of Ann Arbor First, whose VBS kids and UMW circles have wrapped Liberia in their arms. I

think of Whitmore Lake Wesley, with members who did an enormous fundraising effort in hopes of traveling on a VIM to Liberia. When the Ebola Crisis hit and VIMs were cancelled, they sent all of these funds straight to John Dean Town. I think of Erie, Morenci, Fowlerville, Monroe St Paul's, Howell Oak Grove – people who have made long drives to listen, and then responded. I see Macon, South Lyon, Belleville, Saline, Milan Marble Memorial, Tecumseh, and again Erie and Morenci – churches that have been leaders in the Liberia partnership since the start, and whose experience and example made this project possible. I can't mention you all individually, but please know that I am blown away and personally grateful for what you are doing for the Kingdom of God. Please also know that some donations to John Dean Town were made direct to the Advance, with no congregation identified. So if you don't see your congregation on the list, it's possible that your members have contributed as individuals and are counted in the totals, but with their church name unknown to me.

Contributing Congregations

Church Name	Church City
Adrian First	Adrian
Ann Arbor First	Ann Arbor
Belleville First	Belleville
Brighton First	Brighton
Chelsea First	Chelsea
Clayton	Clayton
Dixboro	Ann Arbor
Erie	Erie
Fowlerville First	Fowlerville
Hardy	Howell
Howell First	Howell
Macon	Clinton
Marble Memorial	Milan
Morenci	Morenci
North Lake	Chelsea
Novi	Novi
Oak Grove	Howell
Petersburg	Lasalle
Plymouth First	Plymouth
Saint Paul's	Monroe
Saline First	Saline
South Lyon First	South Lyon
South Rockwood	South Rockwood
Tecumseh	Tecumseh
Wesley	Whitmore Lake
Willow	New Boston
Ypsilanti First	Ypsilanti
Clarenceville	Livonia (Detroit Renaissance District)
Freeland	Freeland (Saginaw Bay District)

The Ebola Crisis and Project Disruption

As Rev Kathy (my East Ohio VIM leader and very experienced Liberia worker) says, "When you come to Liberia, bring your most flexible self." This has been good advice for monitoring this project as well. The Ebola Crisis hit after the 2nd of our planned 12 trainings. During the crisis, convening large groups was forbidden, especially those involving multi-day meetings with shared meals and sleeping arrangements (in this case, on the floor of the JDT church). Trainings were not restarted until Aug/Sept of 2014, putting the project almost a year and a half behind schedule.

I want to make three other points about the effect of the Ebola Crisis on this project. First, the health workers of the Liberia UMC Health Program demonstrated great courage and competence. Ganta Hospital is located near the border with Guinea, and was an early epicenter of Ebola cases. Yet because Ganta's director quickly implemented excellent safety and quarantine protocols, *not one staff member at Ganta became ill*. The contrast with the rest of the country, which lost hundreds of nurses and doctors, is stunning. And my heart clenches to think of Rebecca, the John Dean Town Clinic nurse, continuing to visit villages and treating malarial fevers, not knowing if or when one of her patients might turn out to have Ebola. Luckily, the sickness never hit the JDT area. But she showed faithful courage nonetheless.

Second, the strains caused by the crisis led to an understandable period in which we had only irregular communication with the Health department. This was compounded by turnover in leadership. Victoria Tomah resigned as Liberia Annual Conference Health Coordinator in early 2015. (She is now with ICRC.) GBGM's Mary Zigbuo served as interim director for six months, and the department head is Mr. Allen Zomonway.

Third, as communications resumed between me, Mrs. Zigbuo and Mr. Zomonway, it became clear to me that some non-trivial portion of our contributions – probably between \$10,000 and \$15,000 – had most likely been used for purposes other than expenses at John Dean Town. I strongly believe that those funds were used by the Health Department in its emergency Ebola Response measures, and NOT in any way for personal enrichment or corruption. But the paper trail just isn't there.

UMCOR and GBGM are working aggressively in Liberia to improve practices related to accountability, and just plain accounting. But this is a long haul. I have seen a noticeable improvement in money flows and communication since the Ebola Crisis, and have good confidence in Mary and Allen going forward. But I acknowledge a lack of traceability in exactly what all of your gifts have been used for to date.

A Future Physician for the John Dean Town Clinic!

I am excited to report that a new strategic thrust of the LAC Health Department is to increase the volume and scope of services provided at the John Dean Town clinic. This magnifies the impact of our project; ours is not a stand-alone effort, but part of a long-term capacity-building plan.

One critical component of that plan has just been put into place, thanks in great part to Janis Shuster of Adrian First UMC (formerly of Tecumseh). Mary and Allen have made it a priority to provide a doctor to split time at the clinics at Camphor Mission and John Dean Town – these are currently the only UMC health facilities without a physician on staff. Recruiting a physician for such an assignment is not easy. But Mary and Allen identified Mr. Robert Sieh, now in medical school in Liberia. Robert is from a UMC family – in fact, his father is currently the director of the Judith Craig Children's Home, which has been dear to the Detroit Annual Conference since its founding.

Just last week, an agreement was signed that will lead to Robert Sieh becoming physician to Camphor Mission and John Dean Town by 2019. Kudos to Jan Shuster for championing this work! The agreement is that East Ohio and plus Jan and I (representing the Ann Arbor District as fundraisers and donors) will each pay \$4807 over the period 2016-2019 to the Liberia Annual Conference, to cover costs of food, lodging and school supplies for Robert Sieh while he completes medical school. Mr. Sieh must complete medical school successfully. He will then be under contract to serve for two years as physician in the UMC Health Program, serving Camphor Mission and John Dean Town.

Patti and I hope to meet Robert while we are in Liberia. What a tremendous step forward! And what a wonderful multi-partner act of faith! We will be happy to share more about this on our return.

Support for Our Trip

The main goal that Patti Yerke and I have for our upcoming visit is to verify exactly where we stand on the timeline for project activities. Exactly how many wells installed to date? Exactly what is the planned timeline

for future trainings? How are trainings thus far affecting maternal and infant health outcomes? Should we allow some realignment of future project activities to dovetail more effectively with long-term plans for the John Dean Town Clinic? We are anxious to see for ourselves and report back to you.

One of the things we plan to do is shop for school supplies, children's clothing, and birthing kit supplies while we are in Liberia. That is, we hope to take funds with us, and support Liberian businesses by *buying supplies in-country that are readily available there*. We will take these with us to JD Town.

We will also have some room in our suitcases to take other items: heirloom (non-hybrid) vegetable seeds, letters or photos from your churches, or perhaps other items that can help build relationships. Please email me at ewiarda@mmtc.org if you have something you would like us to bring.

If you wish to contribute to our in-country shopping expedition, please send a check made out to Chelsea First UMC with "2016 Liberia c/o Wiarda" in the memo line. You will have to trust me, as I will be carrying your contribution with me as cash! Please send by March 7, 2016 to: Chelsea First UMC, 128 Park St, Chelsea, MI 48118. "Attention Liberia Missions".

John Dean Town as "Official" District-Wide Project

Our original fundraising period as an "official" District-wide project is complete. But our Covenant Partnership between the Detroit Annual Conference and the Liberia Annual Conference endures, as does our District relationship with our particular Liberia partners. We will continue to raise up opportunities for your churches to participate, and we believe that Health work at John Dean Town remains worthy of our support.

God is Great! ALL the time!

Love to you all, Edie

MARCH BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

- 5 Jinah Choi Chun
- 7 David Arnesen
- 8 John Grenfell III
- 8 Susan Sharai
- 10 Doug & Marianne McMunn
- 12 Chris Butson
- 14 David McKinstry
- 16 Maria Kesson
- 17 Matthew Hook
- 18 Carolyn Harris
- 18 Joyce Weiss
- 21 Lynét Gruenberg
- 21 Gwen Nagy
- 24 Sue Rice
- 26 Beverly Forsyth
- 30 Kenny Walkup

Ann Arbor District Office
of the United Methodist Church

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Return Service Requested



The Arbor Vine
