

**United Methodist Union of Greater Detroit  
Report of the Executive Director  
to the Board of Trustees  
September 26, 2009**

## **Introduction**

Allow me to begin with a pair of reflections growing out of an autumn divided between teaching (Duke Divinity School) and managing (The United Methodist Union). Both concern clergy and the relationship between early training and future effectiveness. Seminary education is highly individualized and rewards a “lone ranger” approach to success. Work is done alone. Any evidence of collaboration is subject to rigorous scrutiny and review. Few, if any, tasks are assigned to teams. Even study groups are relatively rare. And, to the degree that grades and class rank matter to individual students, competition is the name of the game. All of which means that students work on their own and, more often than not, compete with their classmates. Sure, they make friends with each other (some, more easily than others). They also learn from each other, unless they have an abundance of large lecture classes numbering more than 100 attendees. But, at the most formative period of their careers, they are “soloists,” knowing that success comes down to the choices they make, the work they do, and the results they achieve. Whenever I suggest that a project (or portion thereof) must be done in teams of 3 or 4, I can expect ignorance concerning how to do it and pushback as to why they should. Which means that, while they like each other, they would just as soon not have to work with each other.

Contrast this with my daughter’s experience at Harvard Business School (HBS) where study groups were expected, assignments were all “team-based” and few, if any, evaluations were for individuals only. I suppose a “loner” could survive at HBS, but would find himself or herself continually swimming against the current of the curriculum and the methodology of instruction.

Now, hear the words shared with me, just last week, by a District Superintendent of my acquaintance. “One problem experienced by several of my clergy is that they are non-collegial in their churches. They may do good stuff, but they have trouble bringing anybody along with them. Their lone rangerism comes out in relationships they do not make with staff or key lay leaders. Hence, they achieve little consensus and build few coalitions.”

Do I know what to do about any of this? Not in any formalized sense (although I believe that naming a problem is often the first step in solving a problem). Am I alone in my observations? Far from it. Leonora Tubbs Tisdale and Peter Marty have written about it within the last few years (each from inside academia). Does any of this require action on our part? Not really. But I thought it was an insight I was uniquely positioned to share.

Now, on to more immediate concerns.

### **1. The Wyandotte First UMC loan.**

I have had multiple conversations with these good people and actually chaired the Charge Conference at which key decisions were made. Ron McIntyre is a key

player at Wyandotte and has given invaluable assistance in framing this request. They are asking for “up to” \$350,000 at a rate of 4.25% (our current “norm” for construction loans) with a 20 year amortization rate and a 10 year term....with a balloon payment due at the end of 10 years. Several other factors merit your consideration.

1. Only two of our downriver congregations can be considered “strong churches.” This is one of them.
2. Many of our downriver communities are highly transitional. This one is quite stable.
3. The church is committed to a capital funds campaign early next spring.
4. Without a complete revamping of the heating system, they will be without heat in much of their building the minute it turns cold.
5. Additional projects (sound system, chapel furnishings, and outdoor sign) will not be contracted until the capital campaign is complete (and successful).
6. While the loan will be secured by a mortgage, the real “ace in the hole” is their endowment fund with approximately \$700,000 in assets and some flexibility as to its use.
7. It would be my recommendation that, if a small grant were to be added to this project, it be considered only after the capital campaign in 2010 and just prior to the second tier projects.

## **2. Second Grace UMC Detroit Loan and Grant**

Enclosed in your material, read carefully the information prepared by Charles Boayue. For several years, the congregation has coveted this property (one entire block on Joy Road, just west of the church). By “casual” agreement, church members have parked on the site. Now, a pending sale has placed everything in jeopardy. Related factors include the following:

1. Second Grace is our strongest church inside the Detroit city limits (396 members) and, apart from Hope UMC, Southfield, our largest church with a membership that is primarily African-American.
2. Much of Second Grace’s present indebtedness (owed to the General Board of Global Ministries and the Union) was borrowed to build the Joy-Southfield Community Development Corporation....a wonderful ministry whose story is largely unknown.
3. The church is severely limited when it comes to parking.

4. Though the neighborhood is fairly stable, street parking (especially at night) is dangerous.
5. The initial asking price of this entire city block was \$395,000. A new realtor dropped the price to \$179,000. The new price is \$110,000 and (at that level) should sell.
6. The only building on the block is a Dollar Store for which the tenant pays \$1,500 per month and desires to remain. At that level, Second Grace would gross \$18,000 per year and net \$12,000.
7. Joy-Southfield Clinic would like to expand into the Dollar Store building and will, in the foreseeable future, be able to financially compensate Second Grace.
8. In two weeks, the church has generated \$31,500 in second-mile pledges (to be paid off by December 31, 2009) against the purchase price. Their ultimate target for this effort is \$35,000.

I recommend a \$10,000 grant (against their request of \$25,000). I further recommend some combination of the following:

1. A short term note equal to the second-mile pledge amount at the time of purchase. It would be specified that the Union would have first claim on those pledge payments.
2. The remainder (\$60,000 - \$65,000) would be added to their present loan, terms to be negotiated.
3. Agreement would be secured guaranteeing that all income gained from rental (or related use of the Dollar Store Building) would be returned in the form of debt repayment.

**Additional Note:** We rejected this deal earlier in the summer when the purchase price for the property was considered out-of-line.

### **3. The Faith UMC, Oak Park Loan and Grant**

This may be close to a no-brainer. Faith church is going it alone, following the closing of Exousia UMC which was worshiping in the building until June 30. But they have a new pastor, Jonathan Combs, with five children. The church is thrilled. They desperately need a new sign. Passersby think the building is a day care facility. The outside area could also use some sprucing up. Their request is for \$5,000. I suggest we grant them \$1,500 and loan them \$3,500 at 4.25% (duration to be negotiated). This does not seem like a lot to risk on what could be a “bounce back” opportunity.

#### **4. A Pair of Requests Not Forwarded**

We received a request from Christ UMC, Detroit for a grant of \$6,000 per month to meet an ongoing shortfall in operating revenue. We are already providing major salary support for their pastor, Henry Williams. The future of this church depends on a renter. Minus such rental income, there is little chance for survival. The amount requested could, in a matter of months, become enormous. To date, no plan for future solvency has been forthcoming. For the present time, the District Superintendent has not signed this request. I have thought it wise to follow his lead.

We also received a request to partner with Metropolitan UMC, Detroit, on a new part-time staff position with the potential to develop a worshiping community out of the "regulars" who attend a Tuesday afternoon jazz concert. With the concurrence of Metropolitan's pastor, I have tabled the request until more is known about (and experienced with) the individual involved. Of some concern is that we not "nickel and dime" an approach to Metropolitan's future, which still cries out for discussion by a high-level coalition of "players."

#### **5. Update, Bloomfield Hills St. Paul UMC**

Read carefully the enclosed request (September 17, 2009) from Bloomfield Hills St. Paul to meet our entire Board on Saturday. Read also, my letter of August 26, 2009 to their leaders. Consider reading previous correspondence on this matter, much of which was circulated prior to, or following, the July meeting of the Executive Committee. Know that we have granted them a "brief" time on the agenda. They have a desire to see you as a group. We do not see this as a negotiating session so much as a face-to-face meeting. The information they have requested (current status of three loans) will be provided. No "counter" will be offered. A meeting with our smaller negotiating body will be scheduled in early October.

#### **6. Great Responses To Our Summer Efforts**

As of this moment, work is proceeding at Franklin UMC, Madison Heights UMC and St. Clair Shores First UMC. Everyone is happy. Work has been completed at Ford Memorial UMC. They are happy. Rodney Gasaway has poured himself into a housing ministry at Joy-Southfield. Rodney (and his employers) are happy. A group from Gaylord UMC came to town to work with W. Outer Drive UMC. They can't wait to come back. And thank you letters (not notes, letters) reflect great vibes from the Young Clergy Family Camp and the Summer Urban Youth Camp, both which enjoyed record attendance. We should all be happy.

#### **7. The Status of 17117 W. Nine Mile Rd., Southfield, MI**

Our home base is in major jeopardy. Tenants are fleeing. Vendors are terminating. Bills are going unpaid. Security is a matter of growing concern. Services, too. Foreclosure is a possible outcome. Our lease is up on July 31, 2010. It is highly unlikely that we would renew....if we make it that far. Meetings (coupled with site

visits) have been a held. Feelings have been aired. Options have been explored. It is widely thought that:

1. All three entities (Detroit East, Detroit West, and the Union) should go together.
2. The City should be given major consideration.
3. Location in a church should be a top priority.
4. The stake holders in any decision will include Bishop Keaton.

## **8. Annual Meeting Plans: Full Speed Ahead**

Letters have gone out to the churches. I sent a memo (email) to the pastors. The budget for 2010 will be unveiled at our meeting on Saturday. The Nominations Report will be complete with one more name. Sadly, Paul Thompson switched, not churches, but denominations. I will dearly miss him. All you need to do is lock in the date, Thursday, October 22, 2009. If you are laity, lock-in your pastor. If you are a pastor, don't come alone. I expect to receive the prize for traveling the most miles.