

**United Methodist Union of Greater Detroit**  
**Report of the Executive Director**  
**For the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees**  
**February 24, 2010**

## **Introduction**

Having been in the Good News Business for nearly a half century, I keep my eyes open for stories that will cheer and encourage. Especially when these stories are about churches....local churches....our churches.

So let me tell you about Four Towns UMC, out Waterford way, located in an area where there are nearly as many lakes as people. This church has had a long (albeit checkered) history. Sometimes, it had a full time pastor. More often, a part-time pastor. Occasionally, a student pastor. Currently, a shared pastor. Shortly after assuming my present position, I gave this church a little help with a boundary dispute. A few days later, I dispatched someone to help with a water-in-the-basement-problem.

Then, last summer, I was invited to consult with them on a Sunday afternoon regarding issues involved in a consideration of closure. I won't say who invited me, or who felt that closing their church was either inevitable or desirable. But I went, thinking I would walk them through a closure-related booklet prepared by another Annual Conference....a booklet featuring six possible roads a congregation might travel toward extinction. Driving to the church, I marveled at the new sub-divisions that dotted the landscape. Quietly, I pondered the strange juxtaposition of institutional death and a healthy community. Arriving a few minutes before the appointed hour, I found a group of 25-30 people ready for this "hired gun" dispatched from headquarters.

Truth be told, I enjoyed the meeting. But what confounded me was their surprise (even shock) concerning the booklet and it's appropriateness to their situation. Simply put, "closure" was not on their radar and they couldn't discern why anyone would believe it was. But I proceeded through the booklet, page by page. And while I took them close enough to peer into the black hole of extinction, there was not much lingering there.

Looking back upon it, the meeting may have been something of a wake-up call. Since that Sunday afternoon, I have had a pair of discussions with two key lay persons. During one of them, I offered to pony-up a little money to help them with a project long overdue, only to be told: "Thank you, but let's see if we can do this by ourselves." Which they did. So I spent the money elsewhere.

Today is Shrove Tuesday. Later this afternoon I am heading for Four Towns UMC to eat pancakes and sausage. This dinner marks the official re-opening of their church kitchen, shut down by local authorities for several violations of code. Now they have a new dishwashing system (among other additions) and a new Seal of Approval. Before tomorrow's ashes smudge my forehead, I will taste the fruits of their Lenten labors tonight.

Among the other things my visit will confirm is that their worship attendance is up and that they closed the year with a \$6,000.00 balance in their Operating Fund. They have also taken a Capital Improvement Fund from minus numbers to a balance of \$3,000.00. Last month, they paid every last dime of their apportionments and are now ready to take on their next renovation project.

- Are they beyond challenge?
  - Of course not.
- Are they in a better place?
  - It would certainly seem so.
- Isn't it a long way to go for pancakes and sausage?
  - Yes, but the horse knows the way.
- Will the taste be worth it?
  - Sweeter than honey.

Thankfully, I failed in my role as a closure consultant last summer. Fortunately, God is full of surprises.

### **Now, on to more pressing matters:**

#### **1. Update: Soul Harvest Ministries**

Attached, find my most recent letter to Bishop Evans documenting our rejection of his appeal asking us to “settle the outstanding debt at the amount already paid.” In that same letter I extended our offer to bring all financial and legal matters to closure in return for a cash payment of \$10,000.00 by June 1, 2010. By the time we meet, I hope to have their response.

#### **2. Update: Christ UMC, Detroit**

Work on the roof (four flat sections) is now complete to everyone's satisfaction. While one or two potential renters continue to sniff around, there is no offer in hand nor money on the table. Meanwhile, the church struggles to survive. Early in January, a faulty thermostat in an upstairs classroom led to frozen pipes and extensive water damage. The church's treasurer called the insurance company which, in turn, authorized a cleanup and repair company to do the work. The insurance company has now paid out over \$32,000.00. At no point in this process did anyone call the Union, the District Superintendent, or even the Trustee Chair of the congregation. Between the insurance company's payout of \$32,000.00, our roof repair of \$34,800.00 and the money we allocated to turn the utilities back on last fall (\$8,000.00), the church has now benefited in the amount of \$75,000.00 over the last 3 months but is no closer to a ministry plan (or financial plan) to shape its future. The phrase “money pit” seems sadly appropriate here. I do not recommend any future expenditures unless another emergency should arise threatening the building itself. My impression is that the Conference continues to discuss issues of closure. Initiatives I generated about “a partnership” have sparked some interest, but no activity.

#### **3. Updates: Real Estate Dealings**

##### **A. Gateway Circle Condo**

We are dealing with a buyer (one of nine offers submitted) who is able to qualify for a mortgage. The purchase price is \$90,000. The clock is ticking nicely. There is a better than average chance this sale will actually go through.

## **B. First UMC, Pontiac, (14 Judson Avenue)**

We have a signed purchase agreement with Berea Family Tabernacle of Faith. This is the group that signed an offer sheet last summer but backed out before closing. Any interest from the Phoenix Center is now history. The current purchase price is \$100,000 on a Land Contract with \$10,000 down, a 6% interest rate, a 5 year balloon payment and monthly payments of \$544.46.

## **C. 18035 Wildemere**

We have an offer of \$107,000 on this home. Unfortunately, the offer is being renegotiated due to an appraisal which will not support the purchase price. The buyer remains motivated, raising hopes for a successful outcome. This will be a Land Contract sale, with \$7,500 down, a 7% interest rate, and a 5 year balloon payment. The buyer will pay an extra \$334.00 per month to eventually reach a down payment of \$15,000.

## **4. Updates: Capital Repair Projects**

The Roofing repairs are now complete at St. John's UMC, Royal Oak and (as mentioned earlier) Christ UMC, Detroit. The work at St. John's was done by Kearns Brothers, Inc. The work at Christ UMC was done by American Standard Roofing Company. Everybody involved is highly satisfied.

## **5. The Lawsuit Involving Scott Memorial UMC, the United Methodist Union, the Extension Fund of the Detroit Annual Conference and the General Board of Global Ministries.**

As expected, this is being viewed as something akin to a fishing expedition undertaken by a plaintiff in search of "deep pockets." Our attorney, Barbara Ulman, has entertained an offer from the plaintiff's attorney regarding a "Letter of Dismissal" for all four parties. Upon receiving it, we will accept (as will the Extension Fund). Our cost will be in the range of \$1,500.00 which will cover the fees of our attorney.

## **6. Bringing Desmond Tutu to Metropolitan UMC, Detroit Thursday, April 15, 2010**

As a part of your packet, find a pair of documents related to a pending visit by Desmond Tutu. One is a "Word from Rick Jones" describing the project. The other is a letter I wrote to 15-20 potential benefactors. Both pieces are informational only. It is now quite certain that this will happen. I have worked to place it at Metropolitan UMC. This may be the first time any of us will see this historic sanctuary full. The media exposure could be incredible.

So what am I asking you? I would like us to underwrite (up to a \$5,000 limit) the costs of the evening that will be associated with Metropolitan. I am talking about bulletins, reception, parking attendants, security, etc. Metropolitan UMC cannot afford these costs. In return, we will receive major credit for pulling this together. Our Community Development Committee has agreed 100%. What's more, for all our talk about Metropolitan's future, we have not spent one dime on this church since I became your Director.

## **7. A Peek Ahead to March**

When next we meet as a Full Board of Trustees (Wednesday, March 24, 4:00 p.m.), we will have an expanded request from the Urban Youth Camp to discuss. There will also be request from Motown Mission (Carl Gladstone) and, most likely, Carleton UMC. I will also have a complete update on our move to Metropolitan this July. It should be a full agenda.