



Greater Southwest District

Michigan Conference

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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July 22, 2022

Grace to You and Peace in the Name of Jesus Christ,

About a week before July 4th, workers began to demolish Welborn Hall. The building, which was located just across the parking lot from my office near the campus of Western Michigan University, was new when I was a student at WMU in 1988. It took months to build and housed the university's Printing Marketing and Management department. I signed up for that industry-leading program at Western as an incoming freshman, thinking I would use the training I received to work with Wycliff Bible Translators to print Bibles in previously unwritten languages. That desire lasted a semester. It was sublimated by a meandering process of experiencing God's calling and rejecting that call because, at age nineteen, I really, really didn't want to pastor a local church. Welborn Hall lasted a good deal longer than my desire to set movable type and transform printed pages into offset plates using process cameras. But when what I imagine were the effects of a dramatic shift from the printed pages of the 20th century to the digital publishing of the 21st made Welborn Hall obsolete and the presence of black mold made it difficult to repurpose, it came tumbling down even more quickly. The whole process of razing the building took less than two weeks.

As I watched the excavators quickly reduce the walls, windows, and doors of Welborn Hall to a less than colossal pile of debris I, like the poet observing two vast and trunkless legs of stone while travelling in an antique land, wondered if there was a lesson. What I took away was the realization that it takes a lot more time to build something up than it does to tear it down. Not a great revelation to be sure, but it mirrored what I have been observing in relation to The United Methodist Church since becoming a District Superintendent.

As I began my tenure as a District Superintendent, I drank deeply from the Kool-Aid brewed up in *The Book of Discipline* defining the role as that of "chief missional strategist." As a "missional strategist," I felt the need to draft a mission statement that would shape the substance of the District's work. This sounded right: to organize, equip and engage the people called United Methodist in Southwest Michigan so that every church offers a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. And so, it became a guide for going forward and building upon the foundation my predecessors in this role laid. I don't feel like much has been built.

Admittedly, it's been a difficult series of seasons for building anything new. Navigating the troubling ecclesial waters churned up in the aftermath of the Special General Conference, organizing the Greater Southwest District from portions of the former Albion, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids and Lansing Districts, waiting for Disaffiliation and Division, and holding fast while Covid-19 did its worst all created challenges. In the face of these circumstances and the anxiety they create, perhaps it's understandable that "building" has not made it to the top of the agenda. What's not understandable is the extent to which some have engaged in tearing things down. Pastors, church leaders, the Michigan Annual Conference and The United Methodist Church have all been targeted for tearing down. The only thing more I will say about this is that we don't have to act like we are broken to fix things.

So, if present circumstances seem not to allow this season to be one of building and tearing down doesn't make all things new, where should we focus instead? For me the emphasis that has emerged in these last several months is to create conditions through which God's purpose can be fulfilled. And in moments when I have questioned whether the daily grindstone of doing this is all there is, the Spirit has spoken a word to my spirit, "For now, it is enough."

I know many of you have struggled to be and do enough in this past year. You have probably had enough of meetings and requirements as well. In realization of that, I am resisting the urge to make the last round of Fall Conferences in the Greater Southwest District productions or command performances. So instead, we will convene Fall Conferences as Charge Conferences and these meetings will be held via ZOOM, just like last year. Although attendance is open to anyone who wants to be present, only members of your church leadership need to be at these Charge Conferences. Our agenda will be limited to cover only what is required by *The Book of Discipline*. The only item we will address beyond this are items you bring and a question I want to place before you. The question I want you to give some thought to in advance of our meeting is: "How can the District create conditions in our church through which God's purposes can be fulfilled?"

ZOOM meetings with the SPRC in each congregation will be scheduled immediately before your Charge Conference. These meetings will last 30 minutes. Churches that are part of multi-point charges or circuits can choose whether they wish to hold joint SPRC meetings with me or, if concerns dictate, schedule these meetings for separate times. Additionally, churches with significant issues or concerns may request an in-person meeting. These special, in-person meetings may or may not be scheduled outside of your Fall Charge Conference.

All required materials for Charge Conference can be found online at michiganumc.org/resources/forms. Your forms and reports need to be in the District Office one week before the scheduled date of your Charge Conference.

I look forward to joining you as we seek the best ways to create conditions through which God's purpose can be fulfilled.

Stay Grounded in Grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dwayne Bagley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, stylized initial 'D'.

Dwayne Bagley
Superintendent, Greater Southwest District
Michigan Annual Conference