

United Methodist Union Of Greater Detroit

So Who Are We And What Do We Do?

Rev. Dr. William A. Ritter

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1. What is the United Methodist Union?

Our historic Mission Statement reads: “The United Methodist Union of Greater Detroit is a metropolitan mission organization established to promote the work of the United Methodist Church, primarily in the Detroit Renaissance District.”

2. Can you offer us a simpler translation?

I sometimes say that the Union resembles a marriage between a denominational foundation and an urban mission society.

3. Do other districts have one?

No, other districts have a District Board of Missions.

4. Does that make the Union unique in Michigan?

In point of fact, the Union is pretty much unique in the U.S.A.

5. How long has the Union existed?

This is our 96th year.

6. Is the Union an agency of the Annual Conference?

Not exactly. The Union is an independent ecclesiastical corporation whose work is related to, but not under the authority of, the Detroit Annual Conference. This explains why the Union’s governance body is not elected by the Annual Conference.

7. Then how is the Union governed?

There is a Board of Trustees with 36 members (not including Ex Officio members), who are elected at the Annual Meeting of the Union held in October.

8. Is the Board of the Union heavily dominated by clergy?

Not at all. At any given time, only nine of the elected trustees are clergy.

9. Does this make the Union unique in United Methodist circles?

It would seem so. Laity have played a major role in the Union’s governance since its inception. Currently, all four officers are lay men or women.

10. Who directs the work of the Union?

There is an Executive Director who has customarily come from the clergy.

11. Is the Executive Director appointed by the Bishop?

Not exactly. The Executive Director is chosen and hired by the Board. In the event that the individual selected is an ordained clergy person under appointment, the Bishop must agree with the selection and make the appointment official. Failure to do so would render that individual unavailable to serve. If the person selected were from the laity or the ranks of retired clergy, no such complication would arise.

12. Is the Executive Director a full-time position?

Currently, no. In fact, for most of the Union's 96 years, the Executive Director has been employed less than full time. The one exception took place during the latter part of Rev. Dr. Don Scavella's term through the completion of Rev. Dr. Ken Christler's term (1993 – 2008).

13. Who is the current Executive Director?

Rev. Carol Johns will assume the title on August 1, 2015.

14. How many churches does the Union serve?

Currently, there are 66 churches in the Detroit Renaissance District.

15. Is this the high water mark in the history of the Union?

No, as recently as 2008 there were 90 churches under our umbrella.

16. How did the number shrink to 66?

First, the merger of two separate districts, (Detroit East and West) into the Detroit Renaissance District trimmed several congregations, mostly around Monroe. Second, several churches have been closed and several others have merged in the last five years. This includes, a major merger in the DownRiver area, (effective July 1, 2013) which created one congregation and terminated four others. Third, a subsequent re-districting (June 30, 2015) trimmed seven additional churches from the Detroit Renaissance District.

17. Can the Union become involved with a church outside of the Detroit Renaissance District?

There is a back door method by which this can happen, but it is rarely employed.

18. What kind of financial assets does the Union possess?

At the present moment, the Union has assets in the neighborhood of \$14 million.

19. Where did these dollars come from?

The majority came from the sale of properties, interest from loans, rental income and prudent investments, augmented by a trio of bequests.

20. How available are those dollars?

Relatively few of them are in cash and cash equivalents. Over \$8 million of them are in managed equity accounts. Approximately \$6 million of them are in loans, mortgages and land contracts.

21. Is it true that the Union functions something like a bank?

While some of our functions are similar, the word “bank” is not a designation with which we are comfortable. While much of our business is financial, the mission and ministry of churches is our primary focus. At the end of the day, we know what business we are in. Better still, we know “whose” business we are in.

22. How many loans, mortgages and land contracts does the Union currently manage?

At the moment, 52.

23. Apart from loan and mortgage activity, what is the annual operating budget of the Union?

For the calendar year 2015, it is \$600,000.

24. Is this as high as it has ever been?

No, it has been considerably higher.

25. Does that mean that the Union is becoming more cautious and less generous?

No, the Union is doing more with its money than ever before.

26. How can that be, given that the budget is lower?

The answer involves administrative cost containment, tied to the fact that the Executive Director is both retired and less than full-time.

27. Beyond in-house staff, what is the largest administrative cost for the Union?

We budget approximately \$75,000 for professional services. This includes investment management, accounting and auditing, real estate and legal services.

28. How much of the operating budget is made available in the form of grants?

The actual number now exceeds 50% (a remarkable goal in comparison with other ecclesiastical organizations).

29. How are these grants categorized?

Over two-thirds of them are “Ministry and Mission Initiative Grants.” Another category is known as “Annual Grants.” Smaller categories include “Pastoral Salary Support Grants” and “Church Maintenance Grants.”

30. Are “Pastoral Salary Support Grants” decided upon by the Union?

No, they are decided upon by the District Superintendent. The Union simply makes a “pool number” available for the Superintendent to allocate.

31. Has the Union always given a large number of “Ministry and Mission Initiative Grants?”

No, this is a relatively recent initiative. But the goal is very clear. Dollars are made available to churches that are taking major steps forward and are willing to “partner” in the funding. Most of these grants cover multiple years.

32. Do churches get grants for capital projects?

No, they get loans, (at terms that most churches find flexible and favorable).

33. Do many churches derive benefits from their relationship with the Union?

In the past seven years, only 6 congregations have not received funding from the Union at some level or another.

34. That being true, it would seem that most congregations attach high value to the connection they have with the Union.

If that’s a question, the answer is yes.

35. Do Detroit Renaissance churches pay apportionments to the Union?

Yes. The apportionments are in line with the Annual Conference “grade figure.” Last year (2014) only one church made no apportionment payment to the Union, and seven others made partial payments. All of the others paid in full.

36. How much of the Union operating budget is raised through apportionments?

Approximately 17%.

37. Where does the remainder of the budget come from?

As mentioned before, the rest is generated from investment income and interest on loans, mortgages, land contracts and properties under management.

38. Where is the Union located?

At Metropolitan UMC at 8000 Woodward Avenue. Five years ago we moved back to Detroit from Southfield and into a church for the first time in over 90 years.

39. Who else works in the office?

The smart-alecky answer is to say that everyone works in the office. Very hard, in fact. By name, they are Connie Perrine and Audrey Mangum.

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