A Word from D.S. Dr. Charles Boayue, Jr.

The Question We Face:
Musings of a New District Superintendent

Grace and peace be unto you in the precious name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Elizabeth, Charles III and our family want to thank you for the opportunity to work together in the vineyard of our God.

As we begin our work together, I want to thank the Reverend Melanie Lee Carey, who served as the first superintendent of the Detroit Renaissance District, for her leadership and motherly care of our district and its congregations. I know it was not an easy task to be the first to bring this district together as one. The Detroit East and Detroit West Districts were two great districts with unique identities before they were unified into the Detroit Renaissance District of The United Methodist Church. I had the privilege to serve as the first chairperson of the Committee on Superintendency as we worked to create this district. I bring to this new position a sense of history and some relevant experience. We will always love Melanie Carey and her family and I wish them well in their new assignment.

I also want to thank Bishop Deborah L. Kiesey who appointed me to serve as your district superintendent. Bishop Kiesey wants our district to be strong, effective, and catalytic in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. She wants every congregation to be deliberative and effective in serving our communities and our God. And I am committed to this task.
I came to the Detroit Conference in the summer of 1988 as a seminary intern from Duke University to Metropolitan United Methodist Church. I returned in June 1989, immediately after my graduation from Duke Divinity School, to begin my ministry in the Detroit Conference. Ever since that day, I have served four appointments (Metropolitan Associate; Detroit Jefferson Avenue; Conference Urban Missioner; and Detroit Second Grace). Urban ministry has evolved as the focus of my ministry, although I was born and grew up in a small rural town in north central Liberia (Ganta). Serving in the Detroit metro area has helped me to better understand and appreciate the urban context of life and ministry. And my experience in the City of Detroit and Michigan leads me to ask a fundamental question of us: **What will it take to be effective in ministry in southeastern Michigan?**

I know it will take many things, including a love for the people of God across this metropolitan area in their diversity; a conviction that we live in an urban mission field; a burning desire to win souls for Jesus Christ; and a willingness to take calculated risks to make new friends across racial, cultural, economic, gender, linguistic, and ethnic lines. But before we get into the “doing” of ministry, we must first come to terms with the “being” of our true identities. So many people grow weary “doing” this and “doing” that for Christ. But we cannot offer our best to our God until we have come to terms with who we are and whose we are in Christ Jesus.

I was born on December 8, 1959 at the George Way Harley Memorial Methodist Mission Hospital in Ganta, Nimba County, Liberia. [The hospital and mission station were built by GBGM missionaries Dr. George Way Harley and his wife, Mrs. Winifred J. Harley in the 1920s. It was the first Methodist Mission established in the deep hinterlands of Liberia.] My mother and father, Fannia and Charles Boayue, Sr., are still alive for which I give thanks. She lives in Cumberland (Maryland) with my sister and he lives in Farmington Hills, (Michigan) with us.

When I became old enough to understand some things, my mother told me a story
about the events surrounding my birth and first week of life that has changed and
shaped me significantly. She said that about three days after my birth at the Ganta
Mission Hospital, the attending physician, Dr. Hyla Waters, released us to go home. As
we traveled from Ganta to our farm house in a pickup truck used for public
transportation, the truck hit a bump and tumbled off the road, rolling downhill several
times and landing in a ditch below. During the tumble, she held me firmly in her bosom
until the truck settled at the bottom of the ditch. Fortunately, no one was fatally
wounded, but my mother suffered a deep cut on her forehead and kept bleeding. She
and I were returned to the hospital and again, Dr. Waters, a missionary from the
General Board of Global Ministries, attended to her wounds and released us the next
day. We made it home safely this time.

The details of this story of my first week in this world have reminded and
haunted me all my life. That a white American woman missionary doctor (who
originally wanted to serve in China but had to be reassigned to Liberia when China’s
Cultural Revolution expelled her) would be the one to deliver me and save my mother’s
life in Ganta, Liberia in 1959, is an affirmation of how God works in mysterious
ways! That my mother would love me so much that she would risk her life to secure
mine at a moment’s notice has constantly pushed me to a deeper understanding of
what God’s love can do in and through people like us.

At an early age, I fell in love with the United Methodist Youth Fellowship (UMYF). From
the sixth grade until my early college years, I was active in the UMYF in Liberia and
became its conference president. I went to camps, conferences, workshops, revival
services, annual conferences, and ecumenical assemblies across Africa and the world,
representing Liberia. Through these formative experiences I came to realize that, in
spite of all the activities and programs offered by the church, the things people need
most from the Church are answers to life’s basic struggles and questions. God’s Spirit
in every human being cries out for accommodation in an environment that is
appropriate for its residency and life. Thus, the mission of God and the witness of the
Church must offer a pathway to this environment of accommodation and life, full life. Dr. Hyla Waters used her expertise and love to heal my mother and to give me an opportunity to live. I want to use that opportunity wisely and faithfully. I suppose that my early formative experiences have led me to believe that, while our ministries must encompass all ages, nations, and races, it does help tremendously to reach people as early as possible with the transformative love of Jesus Christ as Dr. Hyla Waters did for me. The Book of Ecclesiastes makes this appeal: "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, 'I find no pleasure in them’ – before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred."[Ecclesiastes 12:1-5a]

I come as one example of what Christian love and witness has done for a young man, way out in the tropics of Western Africa, and how that witness can make a difference for others. I want that same kind of missionary zeal that propelled Hyla Waters to China and Liberia and into my life to be the kind of zeal that propels us to reach out in the Detroit Renaissance District to our young people whose mothers cry out for life-giving and life-saving help!

The Church that reaches children, youth, and young adults with the word of God and the community of faith will find itself in a better position to minister to their parents and grandparents because these adults are often preoccupied with seeking help for their children. That is why ministries with children, youth and young adults are a primary focus of my life and I invite you to join together and let us do it together. When we begin to saturate southeastern Michigan with emphasis on children, youth and young adults, we will soon find our cups overflowing with people and with
the potential of lasting, faithful change! Imagine hundreds and thousands of young people celebrating life and their hopes at camps, conferences, Bible studies, worship, and in prayer all across this district. Imagine how much potential for social change and faithful witness this will mean for the future of the Church and the glory of God’s name! Imagine how glorious it would be for brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity and in service! Just imagine...

People are looking for identity and meaningful relationships. They seek satisfaction and fulfillment. They desire to belong to something good. They want the world around them to be more loving, more caring, and more just. And they are looking for partners to make this happen. Their thirst for righteousness and their hunger for justice remind me of Jesus’ prayer that God’s “will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

I invite you to ponder the question, What will it take to be effective in ministry in southeastern Michigan? I believe it will take people who are transformed by the love of God and are willing to be instruments of God’s healing presence in the world. People like Dr. Hyla Waters, who know no bounds to their discipleship and no limits to their love. And the resources will come when we “seek first the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness.”

I come to join with you to seek the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness for our lives and our communities. I pray and hope that we can do so together!

I look forward to see you at your charge conference this year, by the grace of God. Let us redouble our efforts to serve God with all we have and all we are.

With faith and commitment,

Rev. Dr. Charles S. G. Boayue, Jr.
Superintendent, Detroit Renaissance District, the United Methodist Church