



# Creating A PLACE TO BELONG

**United Women in Faith**  
UMCH Campaign Committee

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*“For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size  
of a mustard seed, you will tell this mountain,  
‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move.  
Nothing will be impossible for you.”  
(Matthew 17:20-21)*

April 11, 2023

Dear friends,

**United Methodist Community House began as an idea—a grain of faith—the size of a mustard seed.** In September 1902, a group of women from Grand Rapids First UMC learned about newly arrived Syrian immigrants. Knowing that these families would have special needs, they felt called to put their faith into action and started “settlement work” among them. UMCH was born.

As the community changed, so did the ministries our predecessors offered at UMCH...whatever it took to help meet the needs of people in the community.

And over time, that tiny seed of faith took root. In response to one of the most important needs in the community, UMCH opened a Day Nursery in 1936—the first childcare center in the city of Grand Rapids. Eventually, in 1956, all the programs were moved into a newly remodeled and expanded building at 904 Sheldon Avenue.

**With faithful support from all of us as United Women in Faith, that once-tiny seed continued to flourish throughout the 20th century and into the next.**

Today, UMCH is one of just a handful of nationally accredited child development centers in the City of Grand Rapids, serving more than 100 children each year from infancy through preschool. UMCH provides after-school activities and support for school-aged children at nine schools throughout Grand Rapids. They help more than 100 older adults each year with transportation, meals, and social support. And their Fresh Market helps a growing number of neighbors access fresh, healthy, affordable foods in what had been a food desert.

UMCH is the only United Women in Faith National Mission Institution in Michigan, and the President of the Michigan Conference is always on the Board. So, during my term as President, I travel to Grand Rapids—to 904 Sheldon Avenue, where UMCH still calls home—to attend Board meetings, as those before me have also done.

***And I find myself reflecting on that once-tiny seed.***

The author and professor of forest ecology, Suzanne Simard, studies how forest ecosystems care for one another. She has identified how certain well-established trees help sustain life around them. She calls these “Mother Trees.”

Mother Trees stabilize the forest and make the living things around them—entire ecosystems—more resilient.

Nurtured by an outpouring of love, support, and prayer from United Women in Faith for more than a century, I can’t help but see how the seed our predecessors planted in 1902 has grown to become a Mother Tree.

**Soon, UMCH will break ground on a major, visionary expansion project.**

Through a combination of government and private funding, UMCH will serve hundreds more people each year through renovations to 904 Sheldon and expanding the campus to a new building across the street.

Through this expansion, UMCH will create space to care for almost twice as many children each year, as well as add second-shift and crisis drop-in care for families with urgent needs. The space will include affordable senior apartments and a dedicated senior activity center where older adults can age in place with strength, health, and wholeness.

UMCH will also develop a dedicated intergenerational space where young children and older adults can spend meaningful time together, the Fresh Market at UMCH will have a permanent home, and multi-purpose areas will create places where the whole community can come together.

***Not since the birth of UMCH in 1902 has there been a moment in history so in need—and so deserving—of our faith, our prayers, and our willingness to move mountains. That’s why I’m asking you today to join me in donating to this historic effort as a member of the 1902 Society.***

As United Women in Faith, we tackle the hard work of the world without hesitation.

**Inspired by the work of our predecessors, I pray you will join me once again, as a sisterhood of faith, to put our faith into action.**

Blessings and peace,

Julia Paradine-Rice  
President, MI Conference United Women in Faith

**P.S. For this momentous occasion, we have created a 1902 Society to remember our mustard seed of faith beginning and all that it has become today. *Every gift matters.*** Every donor will receive a special bookmark and be listed on our website in alphabetical order (unless requested to remain anonymous).

**The 1902 Society begins with a commitment of \$19.02 per month for 36 months.** Gifts between \$19.02 per month and \$190 per month include the bookmark and website listing, will be listed on a 1902 Society sign at UMCH, and will receive a 1902 Society enamel pin at a 2023 UWF Annual Celebration. Gifts of \$190.20 per month and higher for 36 months include recognition as above and will be listed on a plaque in a space dedicated to the United Women in Faith in the new building.

Gifts can be made (or recurring gifts scheduled) using the enclosed pledge card and return envelope, or by visiting **[umchousegr.org/faith](http://umchousegr.org/faith)**.