

Africa University: The school of dreams in the valley of hope

By Rev. Laurie Haller

Grand Rapids District Superintendent

“You are at the school of dreams in the valley of hope.”

Our tour of Africa University (AU) in Old Mutare, Zimbabwe, began with these words from administrator Andra Stevens.

In early November six clergy and laypersons from the Grand Rapids District of the West Michigan Conference met with university officials and students at AU. Our goal was to determine how we might best partner with AU in order to sustain and enhance university programs.

Why Africa University?

Africa University is a vibrant United Methodist university whose 1,200 students come from 25 countries and 85 percent of whom return to their home countries after graduation. The ability of AU to nurture ethical servant leadership, peace, and prosperity on the African continent is essential to the welfare of the African people as well as world peace.

By investing in the success story of Africa University, we are engaging in the transformation of governmental structures and institutions on the African continent. AU graduates are pastors, doctors, attorneys, politicians, business owners, non-profit leaders, and educators who are bringing hope to their countries.

What is AU's greatest need?

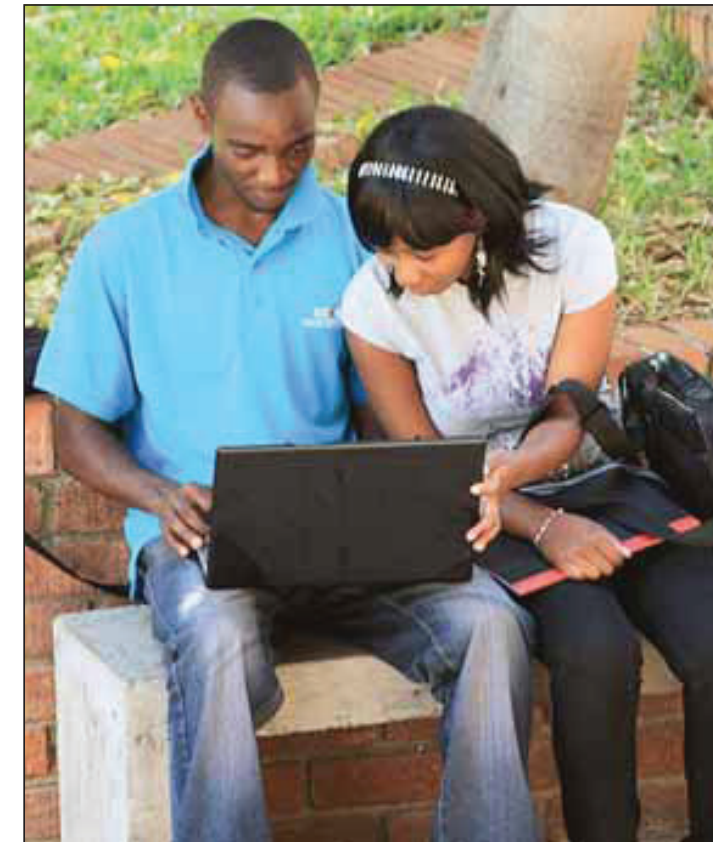
AU has a compelling need for a gathering place on campus where innovation and hope grow out of relationship building, dialogue, and holy conferencing among people from many nations.

The *Africa University Ubuntu Gathering Center* could host VIM Teams, conferences, lecturers, MBA candidates, as well as doctors, nurses, and volunteers from the nearby Old Mutare UM Medical Mission, thus dramatically reducing the AU's accommodation-related costs.

The *Ubuntu Gathering Center* could be a visible sign of our United Methodist connection as well as the African concept of *ubuntu*, which implies that we are one human family, fellow travelers on this earth and therefore responsible for each other.

Why now?

Both AU officials and the Grand Rapids District AU Task



LEFT: Grand Rapids DS Rev. Laurie Haller visits with African children on a recent trip to Old Mutare, Zimbabwe to visit Africa University. **RIGHT:** More than 1,200 students attend Africa University in Old Mutare, Zimbabwe and the West Michigan Conference has stepped up its partnership to help the school succeed on a number of levels.

Force believe that God has brought us together for this project at this time.

While we are mindful of the US economy and the need to continue supporting Haiti, we must continually offer a variety of opportunities for United Methodists to be in mission.

In contrast to mission projects that provide direct aid to people in need, the *Ubuntu Gathering Center* focuses on the justice, medical, theological, business, and agricultural ministry of education on a continent that desperately needs sustainable, collaborative, and ethical leadership.

How much will the project cost?

Construction costs have been capped at a maximum of \$500,000.

In a recent speech to AU donors, Nontombi Naomi Tutu, a human rights activist and the daughter of Nobel Peace Prize

winner Desmond Tutu, said, “When people are raising their hands and asking, ‘Where is our dream?’ Africa University says to the people of Zimbabwe and Africa that a functioning institution is not simply a possibility here—it is a reality.”

This is our dream: the *Africa University Ubuntu Gathering Center*, transforming Africa one student at a time.

The Grand Rapids District AU Task Force will begin fundraising in 2011. An *Africa University Ubuntu Gathering Center* offering has been approved in all of our conference churches in 2011, and one will also be taken at West Michigan Annual Conference, where Dr. Jim Salley will speak on Friday, June 3. Churches and individuals in both conferences are invited to participate in this project.

If you would to learn more, please contact Ed Edwardson at gypseachief@aol.com or Rev. Laurie Haller at grsupt@wmcumc.org.