

Northern Illinois Conference
of The United Methodist Church
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New AC Shepherding Team holds first meeting

By Anne Marie Gerhardt

The newly formed Annual Conference Shepherding Team (ACST) spent a day together on Nov. 11, 2017 at First UMC in Oak Park, Ill., getting acquainted, looking at their purpose and prioritizing responsibilities.

The 23-member team with two co-chairs and a diverse representation of clergy and laity from across the conference is the central group of the restructuring plan approved at the 2017 Annual Conference. The ACST's purpose is to be "an adaptive learning organization to coordinate and communicate the ministry of the NIC for the sake of making disciples for Jesus Christ."

ACST Lay Co-Chair Liz Gracie told the group that considering the scope of the work outlined for the team that the goal was not to leave the first meeting with a plan, but with next steps.

"I was very impressed by and grateful for the spirit of openness, commitment, engagement and collegiality that all members brought to our first meeting," said Gracie. "Everyone expressed hope for our Annual Conference and eagerness for the work ahead."

Bishop Sally Dyck shared devotions based on Philippians 3: 12-16 framing the work of the Shepherding team as one body focusing on a shared mission and goal.

"We need to keep our eye on the mission of the Annual Conference," said Bishop Dyck. "When we serve the mission, it gives us greater clarity to what we need to do and what decisions need to be made. It's important we stay on the road together."

Bishop Dyck pointed to some of the challenges facing the denomination and the annual conference and said she hopes the reorganizational plan will reenergize the Annual Conference's connections that are built into being United Methodists. She said

it's important during these times to work toward making the Northern Illinois Conference strong, stable, and sustainable.

"The restructure is a big technical change that's not adaptive in itself," said Bishop Dyck. "But when you make a big technical change, it can provide opportunities to do some new things so all the entities within the annual conference are healthier and stronger, too."

The ACST worked on a covenant statement and discussed the 12 priorities outlined in the legislation. The group discerned which top two responsibilities of the ACST to focus on first. After small group discussions, the team decided its top priority is to discern a 5-year vision plan. The second responsibility the group chose as of higher importance is for the ACST to "lead as a learning organization in addressing the technical and adaptive, challenges and opportunities presented to the NIC."

"We probably all came with our eyes glazed wondering what we had gotten ourselves into," said ACST Clergy Co-Chair Rev. Myron McCoy. "However, by the time we left we had focused our attention on some key leveraging responsibilities and we could clearly see we had some committed colleagues who were with us on this journey."

The District Shepherding Teams (DST) are still being formed and are being encouraged to hold similar orientation meetings. Chairs from each DST have a seat at the ACST table.

The ACST will meet again on March 10, 2018 along with the DSTs for an adaptive leadership training with Consultant Susan Beaumont.

If you have questions or comments you can reach out to the ACST by email at shepherding@umcnic.org.

The AC Shepherding Team:

Danita Anderson	Mark Manzi
Karen Bonnell	Myron McCoy
Arlene Christopherson**	Harry Nicol
Kathy Dickerson	Dennis Oglesby
Sally Dyck**	Noah Panlilio
Jacqueline Ford	Meg Park
Anne Marie Gerhardt**	Nancy Pendergrass
Liz Gracie	Mary Rawlinson
Rob Hamilton	Luis Reyes
John Wesley Lee	Donna Sagami
Alka Lyall	Laura Underwood

*El Concilio representative TBS

**Ex-Officio

"I was very impressed by and grateful for the spirit of openness all members brought to our first meeting."

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From Bishop Sally Dyck: Reviewing Commission on a Way Forward sketches

In early November 2017, the Council of Bishops met and received the first report from the Commission on a Way Forward. The Commission's mandate is to present a recommendation to the Council of Bishops at their May 2018 meeting to forward on to the Special General Conference 2019 (GC19). The bishops on the Commission, including the three moderators—Bishops

Ken Carter, Sandra Steiner Ball and David Yemba, led us in reviewing their work and the three sketches they presented to us.

The Commission has kept its eye on its Mission, Vision, and Scope. I believe that the document found at www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward-about-us is helpful in reviewing and evaluating the sketches and potential recommendation. Just a few selected lines:

- The matters of human sexuality and unity are the presenting issues for a deeper conversation that surfaces different ways of interpreting Scripture and theological tradition. (From the Mission of the Commission)
- The Commission will design a way for being church that maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible, that allows for as much contextual differentiation as possible, and that balances an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible. This unity will not be grounded in our conceptions of human sexuality, but in our affirmation of the Triune God who calls us to be grace-filled and holy people in the Wesleyan tradition. (From the Vision of the Commission)
- We will give consideration to greater freedom and flexibility to a future United Methodist Church that will redefine our present connectionality, which is showing signs of brokenness (From the Scope of the Commission)

You may have already read about the sketches from the United Methodist News Service which were presented to the Council of Bishops for prayerful discernment:

- Affirm the current *Book of Discipline* language and place a high value on accountability. The BOD says the practice of homosexuality “is incompatible with Christian teaching” and lists officiating at a same-gender union or being a “self-avowed practicing” gay clergy member as chargeable offenses under church law.

- Remove restrictive language and place a high value on contextualization. This sketch also specifically protects the rights of those whose conscience will not allow them to perform same-gender weddings or ordain LGBTQ persons.
- Create multiple branches within the denomination that have clearly defined values such as accountability, contextualization, and justice. This model would maintain shared doctrine and services and one Council of Bishops.

The Commission did not express any preference for the sketches that they have developed and likewise, the Council of Bishops did not vote on or eliminate any of the sketches. Through personal and small group reflection, we made lists of strengths and limitations for each of the sketches so that the Commission can consider them as they continue to do their work. We hope that our feedback will strengthen the Commission's work.



The Council of Bishops prays for the bishops who are members of the Commission on a Way Forward during their November meeting at Lake Junaluska. Photo by the Rev. Maidstone Mulenga

It is still uncertain whether one or more recommendations will be sent from the Commission to the Council and then on to the GC19. An additional Council of Bishops' meeting will be held late winter 2018 to continue to consider the work of the Commission before we will need to make a decision in May 2018. Remember, ultimately the GC19 will make the final decisions—not the Commission, not the Council of Bishops.

Our annual conference has the first week of December as its time for Praying Our Way Forward. I encourage you to pray for The United Methodist Church, the Council of Bishops, the Commission on a Way Forward, our annual conference, our clergy and local churches and our delegation who will be the ones who vote on a proposed plan in 2019.

As residential bishops, we committed to holding conversations with our delegations going to GC19,

urging them to both study *An Anatomy of Peace* (by the Arbing Institute) which we discussed at our meeting, and to discuss the work of the Commission.

The cabinet is presently studying the book, *An Anatomy of Peace*, and I urge churches, cluster groups or other configurations of clergy and/or laity to do the same; not just to address the Commission's work but because it is a good resource for these conflicted and polarized times. It would be an excellent follow-up to the Rule of Christ that Staff-Parish Relations Committees have been trained in over the last three years.

As an annual conference, we will determine ways to engage with the report of the Commission and the Council of Bishops' recommendation after it is made in May 2018. This will allow for greater understanding of what is proposed and engagement with the delegation from the NIC.

People have asked me how I felt about the Council of Bishops' meeting. I have to say that I went filled with dread but I emerged “cautiously optimistic” or hopeful. I think we can do this (i.e. find a way forward) but I also know that there are plenty of obstacles and dynamics that could scuttle the less-than-perfect-for-everyone recommendation when the time comes. Now is not the time for “my way or the highway” thinking or rhetoric. Now is the time to truly be in prayer as Jesus prayed on the night in which he was betrayed:

“I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

(John 17:20-23, NRSV)

I believe we can do this (i.e. find a way forward) not just for our beloved church's sake but also as a witness in a broken world. And so we sang together:

*And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

~Bishop Sally Dyck

Resources:

For more information, news and updates on the Commission on a Way Forward visit their website at www.umc.org/wayforward

UMC Bishops call for respectful conversations in time of uncertainty

United Methodist Church bishops are calling on members of the denomination to engage in respectful conversations amidst growing conflict over political, religious, and justice issues in many places in our world.

As the Council of Bishops met at Lake Junaluska in North Carolina in November, Bishop Sally Dyck said they heard many stories of United Methodist clergy, laity and bishops who have been harassed in many different ways, ranging from physical safety to verbal aggression over what divides us (and not just human sexuality).

“Let us have a 'heart of peace' and not a 'heart of war' toward one another, especially those with whom we differ in many ways,” said Bishop Dyck.

In a pastoral letter released at the end of the Council of Bishops (COB) meeting on Nov. 10, COB President Bruce R. Ough reminded the members that the UMC is a Church which is diverse in its theological understanding of Scripture and Christ's call in our lives.

“Conflict and differing opinions, a natural part of the human and faith experience, come in a variety of forms. We

are called to address our differences with authenticity and respectful conversations which enrich our understanding of God and of one another,” Bishop Ough said.

The bishops reminded United Methodists about Ephesians 4:1-2 which admonishes us “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Why I Am a United Methodist . . .



"I became a Methodist because someone invited me and I was welcomed and made to feel at home in Christ..."

Rev. J. Martin Lee,
Dir. of Congregational Development and Redevelopment

I was recently asked to reflect on this simple question, "Why am I a United Methodist?"

Many of you will have complex theological answers to this question. Perhaps you came into The United Methodist Church after experiencing some pain in another denominational structure. Maybe you fell in love with the Wesleyan theology of grace and gravitated toward The United Methodist Church. It might be that your family has been Methodist since way back – perhaps even before John Wesley was a Methodist.

My answer to the question is quite simple. I am a Methodist because my friend invited me to join the Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF) at his church when I was in the 7th grade. Since that formative experience of Christian community, I have been a Methodist both as a lay member in congregations and as an ordained elder.

I love this church. I do recognize, however, that if a different friend had extended an invitation earlier, I might be a Presbyterian today. In 7th grade, I had no sense of the wider theology of the denomination or how it compared to other church polities. I became a Methodist because someone invited me and I was welcomed and made to feel at home in Christ in that MYF.

This is the power of spiritual friendship! I am a person of Jesus Christ today because of the invitation of a good friend. This was a truly good friend. I accepted his invitation because I trusted this friend who had

cared for me through grieving my uncle's sudden death in an automobile accident. And what a gift I was given with this invitation – a lifetime of serving God.

In this world today, as in all ages, people crave community. People want a place to feel at home, a place that gives them meaning and purpose and where they know they belong. Christian community conquers alone. In Christ, no one seeks alone, no one serves alone, no one grieves alone, no one rejoices alone.

Every one of us has a need to know and be known, love and be loved, serve and be served, celebrate and be celebrated.

I thank God for my true friend who brought me to his Methodist Youth Fellowship. I once heard, "True love comes from someone who leads us to meet God." In my trusted, good friend, I have known that love. We all have someone who led us to a community of faith. Let's remember and honor that person. If they are gone, say a prayer or make some act of remembrance. If they are living, write a card or make a phone call. Say thank you. Then, honor them by extending the same kind of invitation that you received. Welcome someone else into the community of grace. Let the river of grace keep flowing.

I have one postscript to my story. Later in life, when I married a Methodist bishop's daughter, I must say that I did not have much choice other than stay in Methodism! Thanks be to God!



"Leadership knew I was not a member of the church, but they still used my gifts and loved me..."

Rev. Jacques Conway,
Chicago Southern District Superintendent

From my first day of school as a first-grader until I graduated from Loyola University as an undergraduate, I was a member of a Catholic Parish on the South Side of Chicago. My parents enrolled me in Catholic schools because they believed attending would give me a better opportunity to succeed in life because of a Catholic education and religious training. They both attended local public schools and believed I could do better. Also at that time neither of my parents were Catholic or active members of any Protestant church. I was the only member of my family to attend any Catholic school or church.

In the fall of 1979, the all boys Catholic high school I attended, De La Salle, and an all girls Catholic high school on the Southwest side of Chicago, Queen of Peace, sponsored a joint retreat for its senior student body in Plano, Illinois. This is where I met a wonderful young lady who gladly introduced me to The United Methodist Church. That encounter changed not only my faith practice but my life. At that time in my life, I had become very disenchanted with the Catholic Church. During this period in time Catholic school buildings were closing due to low enrollment, without any real efforts of outreach. And as for me, I could no longer accept every image of God, Jesus, or any other figure in the Bible as someone who did not look like me, but mirrored white society in every form and fashion. I learned from my his-

tory classes in high school that the geographic areas where the biblical stories are written about had people of color. Yet, the church decided only to use one color to describe its members, while alienating others of color.

After graduation, I began to attend Rust Memorial United Methodist Church, located in the Englewood community. What an experience. Here, I found both old and young, men and women, the well educated, and those who never had the opportunity to attend school because of the color of their skin or their economic status. Yet, all were welcome and on Sunday mornings, hundreds came to this church on the corner of 59th and Carpenter to worship a God who heard their individual cries.

Leadership knew I was not a member of the church, but that didn't stop them from using my gifts and loving me just because that's what they did at that church. I was invited to work with the youth, serve on the Trustee's Board and even preach a sermon on laity Sunday. Rust Memorial was not afraid or ashamed that I was Black or not a Methodist. They understood John Wesley's call to go out in the world and preach Christ's word.

Many clergy who have served in the Northern Illinois Conference, accepted their call to ministry while serving at Rust Memorial United Methodist Church. I am of that number. And that's why I am a United Methodist today.

Share your faith story

*Wishing you a very Merry Christmas
and Happy New Year*

~ Bishop Sally Dyck and the Northern Illinois Conference Staff.

For resources visit: UMCom.org/advent-resources.



Puerto Rico rises with church's help By Heather Hahn



A torn Puerto Rican flag waves from a car a week after Hurricane Maria ravaged the island. Photo by the Rev. Gustavo Vasquez, UMNS

Puerto Rico is rising up from the devastation of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, but the U.S. territory continues to need The United Methodist Church's help.

Bishop Hector Ortiz shared that message Nov. 6 after dinner with the denomination's Council of Bishops.

Ortiz leads the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico, which is an autonomous denomination that continues to have close ties with The United Methodist Church. Ortiz is a member of the Council of Bishops, which is meeting Nov. 5-8 at Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center.

"The spirit of our people is not destroyed," he said. "The people of Puerto Rico are resilient. Led by the Holy Spirit, we are rising up."

But, he added, "We can't do it alone."

He pointed to the ways church members are already helping the long recovery. With the support of the United Methodist Committee on Relief and several United Methodist conferences, Ortiz said, the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico is providing essential supplies, health clinics and pastoral care to a storm-swept people.

"At the same time that our congregations are responding to immediate needs in their communities, we are drafting a comprehensive, strategic plan with the help of UMCOR that will focus our work," he said.

Ultimately, he expects his church to be "a catalyst of hope for the community in the months and years to come."

The bishops heard updates from Ortiz as well as United Methodist bishops whose areas suffered the recent hurricanes.

One thing is certain: Recovery is just getting started in the hurricane-wrecked parts of Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico.

Bishop Robert Schnase, who leads the Rio Texas Conference where Hurricane Harvey made landfall, described the paradox many areas encounter in the wake of disaster.

A huge number of people are eager to help as soon as disaster strikes, but it's too soon for churches to know what they will need. By the time churches are ramping up a response, Schnase said, the interest in helping has dwindled.

Nevertheless, he stressed the need for volunteer teams is only getting bigger after this year's hurricanes, earthquakes and wildfires.

"Friends, you have our conference, you have the Texas Conference, you have the Florida Conference, you have Puerto Rico, you have Mexico City, you have the West," he said. "It's time to get in the game if you are looking to make a difference."

The needs are particularly acute in Puerto Rico, whose 3.5 million residents are U.S. citizens.

Puerto Rico was already reeling from Irma when Maria made landfall Sept. 20 as a Category 5 hurricane — bringing with it 175 mile-per-hour winds and 40 inches of rain.

"The official death toll stands at 53," Ortiz said. "However, we are certain this number doesn't even come close to reality."

The storm left more than 250,000 homes damaged and more than 100,000 destroyed, Ortiz said. The island lost power, running water and communications.

About 30 percent of the Methodist churches on the island suffered damage with 10 percent not safe for use, Ortiz said.

As of Nov. 7, nearly 60 percent of the island still had no power and many residents had no access to clean drinking water, according to media reports.

Since the storm, some 100,000 Puerto Ricans have evacuated to the U.S. mainland, 80,000 of them to Florida, Ortiz said. United Methodists in Florida and other conferences are working to welcome the evacuees.

Ortiz asked his fellow bishops to help in the following ways: Pray without ceasing, show hospitality to Puerto Rican evacuees, mobilize volunteer teams for the long recovery ahead, and advocate to the U.S. Congress to help rebuild Puerto Rico's infrastructure.

The bishops also decided to take an additional step. During worship services Nov. 7 and 8, the council collected a special offering for the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico and United Methodist Committee on Relief to aid in the island's recovery. On Nov. 7, the bishops and guests at the meeting gave \$9,000.

"Friends, se levanta," Ortiz said before repeating in English, "Puerto Rico is rising up. Together, we will rebuild homes, we will transform lives and we will renew communities to give Puerto Rico a future with hope from God."

Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News Service. Contact her at (615) 742-5470 or newsdesk@umcom.org.

HOW TO HELP

United Methodists wishing to help with Hurricane relief can make donations directly through UMCOR's Domestic Disaster Response Advance #901670. Visit www.umcor.org/Donate.

Churches and individuals also can assemble cleaning buckets. Visit midwestmissiondc.org for more info.



Youth from Woodridge UMC put together more than a dozen cleaning buckets for hurricane relief.



The Midwest Mission Distribution Center continues to be busy this fall loading and shipping hundreds of donations from churches, organizations and individuals for Puerto Rico.

NIC United Methodist Women help organize relief bucket delivery

On Saturday, October 28, a truck from the Midwest Mission Distribution Center (MMDC) picked up 1,029 pounds of disaster relief supplies including cleaning buckets, school bag kits, and layette kit items from the site of the Northern Illinois Conference United Methodist Women's annual meeting at Grace UMC in Naperville.

Linda Priest, who is a UMW officer and MMDC board member, said many women had been reaching out to her wondering what to do with the many items their churches had been receiving and collecting. The annual meeting's mission project was also to collect items for layette kits.

"It was evident to me that my Ford Focus would not hold everything to take to the mission center in Chatham on my own so thankfully the truck was able to come to Naperville for one day," said Priest who encouraged churches and UMW members to bring donations to the annual UMW meeting.

Priest also picked up five gift baskets and layette kit items from Plainfield Academy where students had gone to Dollar General to purchase items. The youth group of Woodridge UMC put together 13 cleaning buckets and brought them to Grace UMC. "The Wednesday night Bible study joined the youth and we prayed before the buckets left the building," said Rev. Danita Anderson, Woodridge UMC Pastor.

About 130 people attended the NIC UMW Annual Celebration day which included guest speaker National President Shannon Priddy, focus groups, fellowship, and prayers for the 2018 Assembly which will be held in Columbus, Ohio, May 18-20. For more information visit www.umwassembly.org.

BISHOP'S APPEAL



Bishop Sally Dyck has designated Global Migration Advance #3022144 as the recipient of the 2018 Bishop's Appeal special offering. In response to the global migration crisis, The United Methodist Church designated December 3, 2017 for a day of prayer and a special offering to raise awareness and funds to aid migrants and refugees. Many resources including a bilingual devotional booklet, videos, sermon starters and Sunday school prayers can be found at umcmigration.org. Northern Illinois Conference churches are encouraged to use these resources to get started on fundraising efforts, raise awareness and continue praying for migrants and refugees around the world. Look for more Bishop's Appeal resources in 2018. The Bishop's Appeal offering will be taken at the Annual Conference June 3-5, 2018.

Chicago campus ministry grows

By Rich Havard, Campus Minister



Inclusive Collective hosts a community meal each month to reach out to students and people experiencing homelessness.

Ever wonder what happened to Agape House, the Northern Illinois Conference's (NIC) campus ministry presence at the University of Illinois at Chicago? You may be excited to learn that Agape House now exists as the Inclusive Collective (IC), a vibrant, growing, and diverse campus ministry in Chicagoland. Our hub is the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), but we have students involved from several colleges in the city and suburbs.

Agape House started around 1965, but after several years of major decline, our Board considered closing the ministry in the spring of 2015. Instead, believing that God is still up to something amongst university students in Chicago, the Board decided to intentionally relaunch in August 2015. What are we up to? Check out what has happened in just over two years:

- **NUMERICAL GROWTH:** We have grown from 0 students in fall 2015 to a diverse group of nearly 50 today, making the IC one of the largest and most diverse groups of young adults in the Northern Illinois Conference.
- **ROOTED DISCIPLESHIP:** This fall, we have over 35 people involved in small groups. We wrestle with Biblical texts and tough topics, experience new spiritual practices, and support one another through joyous and difficult times. We also took 25 folks to Wesley Woods for our second annual Fall Retreat.
- **INCLUSIVE EVANGELISM:** We are committed to creating an invitational culture in our community. From January through September 2017, we have connected with over 2,000 people, including 75+ one-on-one meetings with new folks.
- **ACTIVE FAITH:** Almost 18 months ago, we launched South Loop Community Table, a dinner party that happens every Sunday with students and people experiencing homelessness. This semester, we have nearly 15 folks from our community involved in making this meal happen. And from January through September 2017, we served over 2,500 meals and for 330 hours. Recently, we have grown to 100 people each Sunday! Beginning in October, we also added a worship service once a month. We long for students to be people of direct service though experiences like South Loop Community Table, but we also want them to be formed into Jesus-followers who seek justice. In support of that goal, we took 15 folks on a three-day racial justice pilgrimage to Cincinnati this past March to explore what following Jesus has to do with pursuing systemic justice, and we are hosting a disability justice event in November.
- **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:** We strive to develop students to be creative, energetic, and thoughtful servant leaders of this ministry, the church, and any space they occupy. Our Ministry Intern Program is currently in its second year and the three interns are shaping our ministry in powerful ways, and growing as Gospel-driven leaders for the church and the world.
- **DEANNA'S STORY:** All of these stats and figures are great, but who is actually being affected by our ministry? Check out Deanna's story: "I came into graduate school at UIC in 2015 pretty burnt out on Christianity, and certainly not looking to be a part of a campus ministry. Rather than through faith, I planned to live out my values by doing research on race, segregation, and affordable housing to inform more just housing policy. Research can be a powerful way to seek justice in the world, but for me, on its own, could not bring life to my soul or connect me to the divine. It was just as I was coming to realize my need to re-engage with faith that I stumbled into the Inclusive Collective. Here I have found a place that strives to center the voices of those who have historically been most stifled and excluded by the Church; a place full of goofy, brilliant, passionate humans that bring every uncensored part of themselves to the community, and who welcome me to do the same. With this community, I have spent the past year-and-a-half becoming rooted again in prayer, reflection, and worship, and exploring what it means to 'seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly.'" – Deanna Christianson, a third-year PhD student in Sociology at UIC. Originally from Minnesota, she's dreamed about living in Chicago since she was eight (living the dream!).

Excited about what God is up to in our community? The Inclusive Collective invites you to help make our ministry happen. We are currently in a month-long giving campaign called "Shape a New Story." Due to the tremendous growth and forward movement of the ministry, we have an ambitious goal of raising \$10,000 between before December 17.

To learn more about this campaign visit our GoFundMe: gofundme.com/inclusivecollective. No amount is too small or too large. If you have questions, please contact Rich Havard, pastor of the IC, at rich@letsgetinclusiveuic.org and follow them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/LetsGetInclusiveUIC.



NIJFON awards celebration honors immigration advocates

By Allan Benson

When Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors (NIJFON) held its sixth annual fundraiser Sunday, Oct. 22, it paid tribute to an Elgin lawyer and a Chicago coalition for immigrants' rights.

Recipients of NIJFON's 2017 Champions for Justice Award at Two Brothers Roundhouse restaurant in Aurora were Rockford resident Sara Dady, an immigration lawyer and partner at Dady & Hoffman LLC in Rockford and Dagmarra Lopez who accepted the award for Chicago-based Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR).

NIJFON, a United Methodist nonprofit immigration ministry, is a local offshoot of the nationwide movement created by United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries in 1999. Since that time, Justice for Our Neighbors has grown to a network of 17 sites that support over 40 clinics to serve more than 4,000 clients annually. NIJFON provides free immigration legal services, education, and advocacy at clinics held at United Methodist churches in Aurora, Elgin, Rockford, and Chicago.

Dady has practiced family-based immigration law for 10 years. A board member of NIJFON, she volunteered with lawyers who welcomed immigrants at O'Hare Airport during a federal travel ban earlier this year.

Dady earned her law degree from Mitchell Hamline College of Law, St. Paul, Minn. and her bachelor's degree from Luther College, Decorah, Iowa.

ICIRR is dedicated to promoting the rights of immigrants and refugees to full and equal participation in the civic, cultural, social, and political life of society.

In partnership with member organizations, including NIJFON, the coalition educates and organizes immigrant and refugee communities to assert their rights; promotes citizenship and civic participation; monitors, analyzes, and advocates on immigrant-related issues; and, informs the general public about the contributions of immigrants and refugees.

Past-year accomplishments include:

- With Campaign for a Welcoming Illinois, passed the Illinois Trust Act that provide strongest protection for immigrants in the state;
- With Just Democracy Coalition, passed automatic voter registration to ensure all voters have a voice;
- With Health Communities Cook County, expanded health care access for uninsured.

Nadia Kanhai, co-coordinator of the Aurora clinic at Fourth Street UMC, reported that NIJFON representatives are working with City of Aurora officials to draft an ordinance designating Aurora as a Welcoming City. A draft has been forwarded to Mayor Richard Irvin Kanhai said.

NIJFON clients offering their personal immigration stories were Ekeng Bassey, a Nigeria native and Selena (no last name given) who said her parents brought her to Barrington at age 11 from Mexico.

In a surprise live auction, Charles Wintersteen, NIJFON board member, raised \$900 for the ministry by selling two tickets to the Chicago production of "Hamilton."

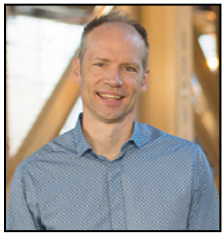
Judith Siaba, NIJFON board chair, closed the event by encouraging audience members to go out and meet their neighbors. For more info visit nijfon.org.



Elgin resident Sara Dady is the recipient of the 2017 Champions for Justice Award from Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors.



Dagmarra Lopez of Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights accepted the 2017 Champions for Justice Award from Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors. (Al Benson photo)



Rev. Christian Coon
Photo by Tricia Koning

Learning by failure By Christian Coon*

Hollywood star Reese Witherspoon dislikes watching herself on screen. In an interview in 2010, she said: “Who feels good looking at themselves...? Nobody, right? And it’s torture! Why would you want to watch yourself being stupid and pretending to be someone else?” Why would you want to watch yourself being stupid, indeed? It’s one of the toughest things about learning from your failures.

And yet doing a review of our failures is necessary. We want to make sure that we are learning from failure, so we don’t simply fail for failure’s sake. This isn’t easy, of course, because who, other than coroners, likes to do autopsies?

We must document failures and then actually use what we learn when we attempt these events and programs again.

Anything worth doing is worth evaluating

Evaluation is crucial. When people ask me about church planting, I often encourage them to think about going through community organizing training, which, among other things, helps individuals learn the necessity of building public relationships. Something else we’ve learned from community organizing is that anything worth doing is worth evaluating.

Speaking the truth in love

We haven’t perfected the art of evaluation at Urban Village, but we have learned it’s almost impossible to be totally objective about evaluation. Real people put in lots of real hours, and they understandably have ownership in what they created and how it turned out. That’s why you can’t forget the tried-and-true process of naming the things that went well and honoring the faithful effort. There’s an emotional aspect to risking and failing, which is why it’s key to remember not to take things too seriously, to name and acknowledge the pain of failing, and to remember that your true identity is not failure but belovedness. But you also have to speak the truth in love (with others and with yourself) when evaluating, and there are practical steps you can follow.

Build evaluation into everything you do

First, you have to include evaluation in your ministry plan. People put a lot of time into planning or organizing an event, and the vast majority of their efforts understandably go into the steps leading up to the event. In my experience, though, even the best planners sometimes fail to include a post-event meeting where you evaluate what happened.

Often you’re so unbelievably relieved and exhausted when the event is over that you just want to put all your notes in a file folder or an Internet cloud maybe to review in the future. But later evaluation rarely happens. When you plan something, then, make sure that you also include a post-event gathering. Make it a celebration of both the lives you touched and the failures that occurred.

Document failures

Second, as you go about working the plan or creating the event, make sure someone is recording everything, and make sure that you know where this information is, especially if the event is annual. There have been times at Urban Village when we’ve done the evaluation after the event and identified some good things to do differently the next time, and somebody writes notes and puts them into some Internet cloud, and the event comes along the next year and we forget who recorded the notes and where the notes are, which means we are relying on our memories.

The tricky thing about memories, though, is they become hazy, and we tend to remember all the wonderful things that happened and never remember the failures. We cannot simply rely on our memories. We must document failures and then actually use what we learn when we attempt these events and programs again.

*Christian Coon, co-founding pastor of Urban Village Church in Chicago and author of "Failing Boldly," believes that a key to fruitful ministry is the ability to endure failure and learn from your mistakes. In the book, he outlines practical steps to encourage honest evaluation.



Save the Date for the Laity Convocation FEBRUARY 17

Both Laity and clergy will gather at Sycamore United Methodist Church on Saturday, February 17, 2018 for the Northern Illinois Conference annual Laity Convocation. The Rev. Dr. Junius B. Dotson, General Secretary of Discipleship Ministries, will be the keynote speaker. A recognized visionary leader in church revitalization, he began his tenure on July 1, 2016.



Rev. Dr. Junius B. Dotson

Rev. Dotson earned his Master of Divinity degree from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. He was ordained in June 1992. In 1996, Rev. Dotson responded to the challenge of planting Genesis United Methodist Church, a new and innovative church in the Silicon Valley of California, which grew into a diverse faith community of nearly 500 people.

As a leader who responds to challenges and opportunities in new and creative ways, Rev. Dotson believes that effective ministry is about training, developing, and empowering leaders to establish ministries that address the needs of the whole person – body, mind, and spirit. A dynamic preacher and public speaker, Rev. Dotson is highly respected for his ability to establish networks that get things done in the faith and larger communities.

Rev. Dotson is leading a new initiative at Discipleship Ministries called “See All the People.” Discipleship Ministries believes that for too long The United Methodist Church has looked for a quick fix to help

guide our discipleship efforts. Therefore, “See All the People” encourages congregations to be in relationship with the communities that surround their churches. The goal is to shift our thinking from fixing churches to true discipleship.

“This is something you have to live into,” Dotson said. “Every congregation has to stay relentlessly focused on making disciples.”

Churches large and small, rural, urban and suburban, traditionalist and progressive, can find common ground in that, Dotson added. While it’s a gospel and Wesleyan imperative to have such a focus, it’s also, as Dotson lays out in his guide, a smart strategy for renewing the denomination.

Dotson includes this quote from the book Building a Discipleship Culture by Mike Breen: “If you try to build the church, you will rarely get disciples. But if you make disciples, you will always get the church.”

The initiative itself has its origins in “deep listening” at annual conferences over the last three years, said Jeff Campbell, Discipleship Ministries’ executive director for conference relationships. Many at those gatherings understood that The United Methodist Church is officially united around a mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. But they reported a need for clarity around what a disciple is and how one is formed.

“From those two questions, what we’ve learned is a real need to connect with the ‘why’ of making disciples,” Campbell said.

At Laity Convocation 2017, we learned to listen to each other and about our “Why.” This year we will continue to discover our “Why” along with our “HOW.” Place February 17, 2018 on your calendar today!

Camps & Outdoor Retreat Ministries News

See and share the pull-out middle insert for the 2018 summer camp offerings. It’s never too early to start planning!

Winter Ski Camps

@ Wesley Woods are scheduled for
January 26-28, 2018
February 23-25, 2018

For registration and information visit at www.niccamp.org.



Exploration Event Guides Young Adults on Path Toward Church Leadership

Exploration is a biennial, three-day event for young adults to listen, discern, and respond to God's call to ordained ministry and to explore their gifts for service as a deacon or elder in The United Methodist Church. This event, hosted by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM), guides students as they discern their call from God to become leaders in the church.

"Attendees showed up already having a sense that God is calling them to ordained ministry; we introduced them to those and other options for ministry within The United Methodist Church," said the Rev. Trip Lowery, Ph.D., director of young adult ministry, discernment and enlistment at GBHEM. "We're helping them sift through the issues involved in discerning an ordained vocation and giving them the resources they need to be successful on their journey."

Conference attendees learned more about United Methodist seminaries and theological schools, explored their gifts for service, and devoted time to both personal and group reflection throughout the event.

"Exploration seeks to respond faithfully to The United Methodist Church's focus on increasing the number of clergy in our denomination," added Lowery. "By creating sacred space together, we challenge the most gifted and promising young people of our denomination to hear, and follow, God's call to the ordained ministry."

Biblical scholar and visionary, the Rev. Kevin Murriel, Ph.D., senior pastor of Cascade United Methodist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, gave the opening sermon at worship on the first night of the conference. The Candler School of Theology graduate spoke to the group on what it takes to follow a call from God, citing three things to remember as you take this path to ministerial leadership:

1. If you want to surrender your all to God, you must be willing to live like you are already redeemed
2. You must love Christ enough to sacrifice for your call
3. In following your call, you must allow God to allow your gifts to take you where you are supposed to be.

Murriel concluded worship by asking all attendees to reach their arms out in surrender to God. As he continued preaching, arms began to sink lower, at which point he addressed the group saying that when your arms grow tired, you must remember that you're not holding them up alone. Attendees proceeded to clasp their hands together with one

another, showing support for each other on this journey with God.

The Rev. Brent Strawn, Ph.D., director of the Doctor of Ministry degree at Candler School of Theology, gave the Saturday morning message. He focused on the "formfulness" of call, sharing that literary form helps with formless—even chaotic—experiences by enhancing and articulating them. "Objection is an expected and regular part of responding to a call," Strawn said. He acknowledged that those following a call from God often feel isolated and that it's not easy. Focusing on Old Testament examples, Strawn reassured the group that even Jesus referenced scripture to better understand how to answer the call.

Throughout the day, attendees went to multiple workshops designed to help them learn about specific ministry paths and related topics, such as funding options for seminary.

The final evening's worship was led by GBHEM's Lowery, an elder in the North Carolina Annual Conference. The theme of his message was on the unique gifts each person brings to ministry, and how those gifts from God connect everyone within the church. "We are different people, and the church desperately needs every single one of us," Lowery preached. "We need to discover our differences and own what makes us different. The church needs the difference that you bring to the body." Lowery compared a life in ministry to a stained-glass window, noting the importance of each individual color. "The power isn't in a single color, but all of them together. A window with one color is an incomplete gospel."

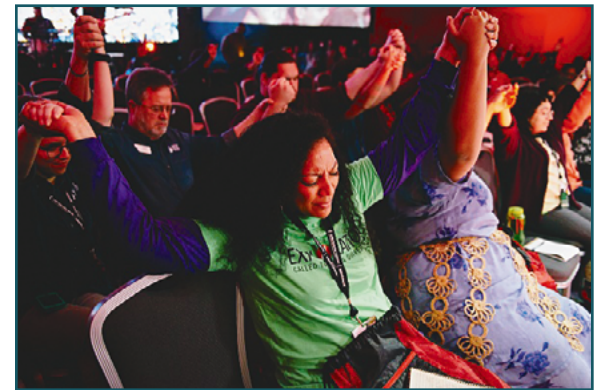
The evening concluded with a baptismal remembrance service where each person drew a colored glass bead from a bowl of water to remember they are each one in the vast spectrum of color. Participants dispersed to spend time in fellowship with one another and within small groups designed for reflection on the day's messages.

On the final morning, the Rev. Jenny Smith, United Theological Seminary graduate and elder in the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference, offered the closing worship message on the theme of overcoming fear while following the call into ministry. "I could keep avoiding the things in my life out of fear, or I could do the thing I knew God was calling me to," preached Smith. She assured participants that each person is worthy of their call saying, "God uses

our brokenness. It's our strength. It's our superpower."

Exploration creates a sacred space for young adults to enter meaningful fellowship, passionate worship, theological reflection, and practical workshops as they discern whether God's call on their life is to ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church and what faithful steps they can take in response.

The next Exploration event will be held in Orlando, Florida, November 1-3, 2019. For more information about this event or a to learn more about United Methodist ministry, please visit explorecalling.org/exploration or www.gbhem.org. Follow Exploration on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram at @explorecalling.



A passionate group of approximately 300 young adults from across The United Methodist Connection gathered in Portland, Oregon November 3-5 to learn more about ministry in The United Methodist Church. Exploration provides these young adults with a space to explore ministry options, gain insight from those in ministry and connect and support others also considering ministry.

It's year-end statistical report season

By Rev. Rob Hamilton, CCFA Chair

Have you ever wanted to change the world? Most churches, if asked that question, would immediately respond "yes." It is a natural response to the life changing power of grace to want to change the world in order that God's love may be more fully realized. This desire to change the world is deeply ingrained in our identity as United Methodists, but I've come to learn that most churches don't realize how much they are already changing the world. You see, I'm a nerd ... no really, I am. I'm that person that gets excited when it is Year-End Statistical Report season.

I realize that many of you are shaking your heads, but the reason that I like the year-end statistical report is because it gives me a concrete example of how the world has been changed through the ac-

tions of the local church. It is a temptation to just fill in the blanks on the report with the same numbers that we used last year, but these numbers reflect lives touched and changed by ministries of justice and mercy. Think about it, those personal hygiene items that your congregation collected to help the local homeless mission, those back-to-school supplies for kids in the community to use, even those prayer shawls that your knitting ministry makes, all have a value to them that should be reflected in their appropriate "boxes" on the report.

This is why it is so important for us to keep accurate records of all the things that we have collected, donated, and distributed throughout the year in ministry and mission. When you total the cost spent on

purchasing each donated item and place that number on your reports, you'll be surprised at just how much money your congregation has given to others in the name of Christ. It is also important to report these numbers so that our Annual Conference and Jurisdiction have an accurate understanding of how active we are as local churches and as an Annual Conference.

You see, changing the world is a part of our identity as United Methodists. The whole apportionment system was started by John Wesley as penny offerings called "askings," in an attempt to pay off the debt accrued when Methodist societies bought an old cannon foundry and turned it into a soup kitchen. Using the gifts that we possess to help others and change the world

is a part of our spiritual DNA. Think how excited your church will be when you are able to tell them how much you actually gave away when you finish those year-end reports?!

Oh, and there is another benefit! Recording and reporting these numbers affects your church's apportionment payments over time, typically lowering them to reflect the ministry that you are already engaged in. So, keep on changing the world ... but let's write it all down so we can celebrate your actions together!

Remember statistical reporting begins Jan. 1, 2018 and ends Feb. 28, 2018.

Visit www.umctables.org to enter your information after Jan. 1.

DYK???



Did You Know?

“United Methodists Respond!”

By Rev. Arlene Christopherson, Assistant to the Bishop/Dir. Connectional Ministries

As we move rapidly to the close of 2017 there is much to recap in a year when the earth has been bombarded with countless natural disasters. These past few months have been filled with stories of devastation. Wildfires in California and elsewhere, hurricanes in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, the Caribbean and the Dominican Republic. Mudslides in Sierra Leone and Columbia, earthquakes in Mexico, Iran, China, our own tornados and flooding in the Midwest. (And the year isn't over yet.) The list goes on and in some ways it's easy to become numb to the suffering around us – our minds can only absorb so much. How can we help? What will be next?

As we enter the Season of Advent and think of about the gift of the Christ child's birth we are blessed by God's grace. We replicate that grace in our traditions of gift giving and celebration. But for United Methodists, sharing our resources, our gifts, isn't just a seasonal activity, it is a way of life.

One of the strengths of our United Methodist connection is our ability to reach into the corners of the world, into the communities in need and to connect every dollar given in aid to those who need it most. Alone, we can give a little, but together we can make a tremendous impact on the needs of those left wanting, hurting, overwhelmed with grief.

While this is not an end of the year report, I was impressed when I recently saw a summary of Northern Illinois Conference local church giving through October. We had given almost \$250,000 to the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Five dollar, ten dollar and \$1,000 gifts come together to make a big impact on the need. United Methodists Respond!

The United Methodist Committee on Relief takes these gifts and coordinates with governmental and nonprofit agencies on site, making sure needs are met. UMCOR not only responds rapidly, it stays engaged. UMCOR is often the last aid organization to leave 5 years, even 10 years after a disaster strikes. United Methodists Respond!

In addition to our UMCOR donations, we have given almost \$250,000 through our Rainbow Covenant advances for missions and Special Sunday offerings. United Methodists Respond!

We collected over \$70,000 for the Bishop's Appeal to address the HIV/AIDS crisis. United Methodists Respond!

Our monetary donations are supplemented by flood buckets and dignity kits that filled a trailer at Annual Conference. United Methodists Respond!

Our giving is expanded by early responders who are helping with cleanup and rebuilding. And in the next few months and years to come the Volunteer in Missions Teams will do the same. United Methodists Respond!

These responders are undergirded by volunteers who work at the Midwest Ministries Distribution Center and Sager Brown Depot, part of the UMCOR relief supply network. United Methodists Respond!

Our donations are heartfelt as we find ways large and small to say "God is with you," "we care," and "you do not suffer in isolation." Our donations are theological as we remember God's abundance and recognize that we have resources to share with others. Our donations are spiritual as we receive in return for our sharing. Our donations are sacrificial when we give beyond the reasonable, like a young girl asking for hurricane relief funds rather the birthday presents. United Methodists Respond!

As we enter this Advent/Christmas season of giving it is heartening to know that United Methodists are connecting the world to God's love. Join us in responding!

DECEMBER/JANUARY CALENDAR NEWS

Shift Training Series

Upcoming Workshops:

- Worship: Event to Lifestyle: December 20, 2017
- Membership to Discipleship: February 7, 2018

Location: The Augsburg Room at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American (ELCA) Churchwide Ministries Center, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago

Are you doing things the same old way and getting the same old results? The Shifts for Leadership training by Phil Maynard offers a better way. Discover the tools and methods to move your congregation into healthy church systems that create a new way of doing life together.

Registration Fee: \$20 per workshop (includes lunch and workbook)

For more information visit: www.umcnic.org.

Questions contact: Laura Lopez 312-346-9766 ext. 724 email: llopez@umcnic.org

Sponsored by the NIC Office of Congregational Development and Redevelopment.



UMW Winter Mission u

January 19 - 21

Learning Together for the Transformation of the World

Location:

Camp Reynoldswood, Dixon, IL

Cost:

(includes meals)

Weekend student: \$150

Commuter student: \$100

Late fee of \$25 after Jan. 6 deadline

Three Mission Study Options:

(Each participant selects one study)

- Living as a Covenant Community
- Climate Justice
- Missionary Conferences of the U.S.

Questions? Contact Robbie Moultrie, Assistant Dean, 708-343-8208, rl.moultrie@yahoo.com. Scholarships are available. Contact your District and Local Mission Teams.

For more info and registration visit umwnic.org.

District Leadership

Trainings for laity and clergy

Chicago Northwestern:

January 27 - 8:15 a.m. - 3:15 p.m.

Location:

Glenview UMC, 727 Harlem Ave., Glenview, IL
Vitality! Vital Christians and Vital Congregations!

Saturday, February 24 - 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Chicago Southern District

Location: Korean UMC of South Suburban Chicago, 19320 Kedzie Ave., Flossmoor, IL
Fresh Ideas for our Churches

Saturday, January 27 - 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

DeKalb District:

Location: First UMC of Dixon,

Workshops include: Strategic Planning and Spiritual Leadership, Best Practices of Children/Youth Ministries, Discerning Spiritual Gifts, Small Group Ministries, Addiction/Mental Health Issues, and SPRC.

Saturday, Jan. 27

Elgin District:

Location: Palatine: First UMC, 123 N Plum Grove Rd, Palatine, IL

Workshops include: Accessible Hearts ministry, Multi-site ministry, needs of the Hispanic church and Technology 2.0.

Saturday, January 27 - 8 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Rockford District:

Location: Faith UMC, 1440 S. Walnut Ave., Freeport

Workshops include: SPRC, Trustees, Statistical reports, Hospitality after the Holidays, Making Disciples, and best financial practices.

For more info and registration on training visit

www.umcnic.org or contact the District Administrators.



Human Relations Day Jan. 14, 2018

The UMC celebrates Human Relations Day on the Sunday before the observance of Martin Luther

King, Jr.'s birthday (Jan. 14). Human Relations Day is set aside as a call to the Church to see the great potential each person holds that is only possible when we are in relationship with one another. For more info visit: www.umcgiving.org/ministry-articles/human-relations-day.

Directory for the
Northern Illinois
Conference
of The United
Methodist Church
2017-2018



Light Shines
Through...

New Conference Directory

The 2017-2018 Directory for the Northern Illinois Conference is now available for purchase through Amazon. The cost is \$6 plus tax and shipping.

The directory includes Conference staff, district information, churches, clergy, laity information and conference-related agencies and committees.

To place your order visit Amazon.com and search Northern Illinois Conference Directory 2017-2018.

To download the directory for free as a pdf visit www.umcnic.org and look for "directory."

Stay Connected

Sign up for the weekly NIC eNews & Appointment Announcements and Sympathy notices.

Visit www.umcnic.org and scroll down to enter your email and name under "Newsletter".

Job Openings

For the latest NIC job openings, visit www.umcnic.org/jobs

Submit News

Please submit items at least two weeks prior to publication date. Include your name, address, email, phone number and name of local church. Space is limited. Electronic submissions are preferred with high-resolution attached jpegs.

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