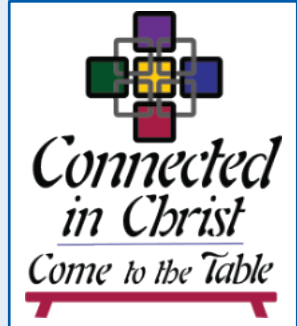


The Northern Illinois Conference OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Reporter

July/August 2023 Volume 169 | Issue 2 umcnic.org

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More Annual Conference photos on page 2 and throughout the issue.



From Your Bishop:

Vision, Juneteenth, and Table

We are so blessed by the many hands that helped plan and assist us for our 2023 Annual Conference! I was grateful to assemble around a theme of invitation: “Connected in Christ: Come to the Table.” A sacred invitation to be at table in the ways that Jesus envisions it is always the challenge before us.

I have been listening around the annual conference and studying the work of the Annual Conference Shepherding Team. I might offer a draft of my own that synthesizes their message with what I am hearing now—and I would send this to you, mention it in gatherings around the conference, and to them for more table conversation about our vision. I would invite prayer and input about our thinking and working with this picture:

By your Spirit makes us one as
a beloved community life together,

living a theology of abundance for developing vital faith communities that make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

I was in a worship service in May and when I heard this prayer, one that I had prayed for decades over the table, I was moved to tears: “By your Spirit make us one.” Our nation, our UMC, and our Northern Illinois Conference have a sacred invitation to receive the healing unity we find at the Lord’s Table—only God’s Spirit can bring that to bear—but we can receive it!

As I thought about Juneteenth and pictured an image that has the capacity to heal and restore by means of a framing vision, I thought of Dr. King’s image of beloved community. How do you picture beloved community? Where is beloved community breaking out among us? Where is it being prevented? How might we incorporate

our commemoration of Juneteenth into a deeper commitment to beloved community?

Sometimes God uses small moments to whisper and teach, as evidenced by this small poem written after thinking about spreading honey, the scriptural picture of milk and honey, and that we were living all this in a Juneteenth day:

spreading honey
out to the crust
Juneteenth morning

We have God enough to move us there so that our faith communities vivify this good and our mission. I look forward to more conversation.

Know that I am praying for you. Blessings for the day.



Conference Overview: Come to the Table, Go Out in Ministry

By Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communications

“I believe God is preparing a table,” Bishop Dan Schwerin told Northern Illinois Conference members at their 184th annual session, which met June 6-8 in Schaumburg, Ill. “I believe God is preparing this remnant church to cast vision for a great coming together as a resistance and alternative to the hurt and harm in our culture.”

The conference theme, “Come to the Table,” informed Bishop Schwerin’s “state of the conference” address, in which he reported on what he’s heard since being assigned to Northern Illinois in January. Clergy and lay have told him of hopeful changes and distressing divisions.

“Tables can be the place where your fault lines hurt even more, or they can be the place of equipping God’s newness. There is something sacramental about a table where people have had difficult conversations, with respect and dignity, and a sense of God’s presence. We know from the gospel accounts that betrayal at a table of fellowship stings deeply.”

Recalling that many of the gospel stories of meals and feasts point to inviting those who are not always considered worthy, the bishop said that healing from wounds created by division and injustice will require the belief that all people are of sacred worth. “We must equip all the callings in our span of care that enable our conference to live out of a beloved community framework. Clearly, ‘beloved’ must describe the composition and ethos of our community.”

A highlight of the conference was an evening of prayers and testimonies for peace in the Korean peninsula. The Korean-American clergy of the conference led prayers and songs and told stories of the harm done by the delay of a peace agreement between

the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea).

During their session, lay members learned some important practices of having Christlike conversations with people with whom they disagree. In this time of conflict in the denomination and the wider world, these skills are greatly needed.

Continuing the theme of “Come to the Table” during his two-part Bible study, Dr. Rolf Nolasco reminded conference members that Jesus’s banquet includes everyone—and gives those of lower social status places of honor at the table. Dr. Nolasco, Rueben P. Job Professor of Spiritual Formation and Pastoral Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary in Evanston, Ill., proposed that if Jesus is God in human flesh, Jesus identifies with the most disdained in society. This includes those who identify as being part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Eight churches were approved for disaffiliation, contingent on their completing all requirements by June 30: Calvary UMC in Stockton, Faith Evangelical UMC in Elmhurst, Fenton UMC, La Luz UMC in Elgin, McConnell UMC, Plano UMC, Van Brocklin-Florence UMC in Freeport, and Willow UMC.

Three churches closed because they were no longer sustainable, to the regret of the annual conference: Epworth UMC and Grace Calvary UMC, both in Chicago, and Trinity UMC, Sterling.

The conference approved a 2024 budget \$6,176,042, increased by \$102,591 over 2023.

Find more details on these events throughout this issue of *The Reporter*. To find more photos, videos, and information, visit umcnic.org/ac2023.



United in hope: Korean reflections and prayers

By Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communications



Rosalynn Anderson of Englewood-Rust UMC, Chicago, adds her prayer for peace to the fence model.



Annual Conference members participating in the tong sung prayer, joining their prayers with others for a peace agreement in Korea

It was like a scene out of Acts 2: A diverse group of a few hundred people, with skin colors ranging from brown to ivory and speaking with varying accents, stood facing the same wall in a suburban Chicago convention center, arms outstretched, praying loudly in their native tongues for peace on the Korean peninsula.

A group of Korean-American pastors led the Northern Illinois Conference members on June 7 in prayers, songs, and personal testimonies for peace in this 70th anniversary of the Korean Armistice. The armistice ended the war, but an expected peaceful settlement has never been completed.

This was perhaps the most moving part of the Northern Illinois Conference session.

Signed on July 27, 1953, the armistice was designed to end armed conflict in Korea until a final peaceful settlement was achieved. It established the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)—the de facto new border between the two nations—put into force a cease-fire, and finalized repatriation of prisoners of war.

The division of the peninsula into two nations separated families. The hoped-for peace has yet to materialize.

For their service, the Northern Illinois Korean clergy began by leading the gathering in song and a litany that called participants to “cry with the people of Korea in hoping for peace to bring down the walls of hostility, pain, and antagonism.”

A 35-member NIC Korean Clergy Choir sang in Korean “You Open the Morning of Peace.”

Between songs, some of the leaders spoke of their own or their family’s personal experiences of the Korean war and the waiting period of the armistice. Rev. Hwa Young Chong spoke of her father’s having lost an eye during the war and, though he was once an active church member, questioning the existence

of a loving God who would allow the violence and suffering of the war years.

Rev. Martin Lee told of his mother-in-law’s hope that she would one day be reunited with her sister. She had crossed the border from North to South Korea in 1948.

Since then, his mother-in-law’s family has been one of the ten million divided families in Korea. His mother-in-law yearned all of her life to see her sister in North Korea. Unfortunately, she died before that could happen.

The tong sung prayer—in which people simultaneously speak aloud their own prayers—was the culmination of the event. All conference members were moved to join with their own prayers for a peace settlement in Korea. The sound was transcendent.

Rev. Chong told of a former railroad bridge that had once connected north and south Korea. At the end of that bridge is borderline fence, where people have attached their written prayers for peace and unity.

Conference members had an opportunity to join this expression of prayer. The service featured a model of this fence and leaders invited conference members to write their peace prayers on fabric strips and tie them to the fence. Soon the chicken-wire model was filled with colorful strips of cloth.

In a time of anxiety and grief in the life of United Methodists, this service—though it told a sad story—inspired hope and unity around a shared longing. It was a moment that gave participants a glimpse of a church that can return to its central callings to peacemaking and transformation.

To watch a video of this beautiful service, visit vimeo.com/835654627.

Setting a Table for All: Bishop's State of the Conference Address

By Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communications



The Annual Conference theme, “Come to the Table,” prompted Bishop Dan Schwerin to recall tables where he’s sat.

Small tables with Formica tops, covered with oil cloth. TV tables. Picnic tables. A

long wooden table at Great Grandma’s house for learning addition and subtraction. Tables with laughter, tables of abundance, tables of learning new customs, and tables of comfort and sharing. A season of kids who delight in gross things done at the table. His favorite table is eggs and toast with his wife, Julie.

“Tables are about making room for others to break bread together, and if your together is not together, it is difficult to eat together and enjoy the company of who we are,” Bishop Schwerin said in his state of the conference address on June 6.

“Tables can be the place where your fault lines hurt even more, or they can be the place of equipping God’s newness. There is something sacramental about a table that has had difficult conversations, with respect and dignity, and a sense of God’s presence. We know from the gospel accounts that betrayal at a table of fellowship stings deeply.”

Summarizing the article “America is in a ‘Great Pulling Apart.’ Can we pull together?” (Washington Post, Jan. 31, 2023), Bishop Schwerin concurred with author Danielle Allen that our nation is in a period she calls “the great pulling apart.” Americans are pulled apart by income inequality, unequal outcomes meted out by justice systems, health care, and education. We are pulled apart by polarization and an unworkable and hurtful immigration policy.

“To be the body of Christ is as countercultural as it has

always been,” the bishop observed. “How is The United Methodist Church in the Northern Illinois Conference a resistance and alternative to the great pulling apart in our culture?”

That alternative is found at tables, he said, and the Bible contains many stories that include tables.

“Our best parables are about inviting those in the highways and hedges to the table, about taking the last seat and putting others before us,” he said.

Since his arrival in Northern Illinois, Bishop Schwerin has met with 64 different groups—local churches, local pastors, lay leaders, the Annual Conference Shepherding Team, the five districts, superintendency committees, the NIC Foundation board, the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary board, caucus groups, Net Zero meetings, and more.

In these gatherings, he says he has heard celebration of our anti-racism work and challenge that we are barely scratching the surface of equity.

“The civil-rights pilgrimage and the migrant support work are so powerfully necessary,” he said. “We have so much potential for Hispanic ministry in our conference and I look forward to continued attention to those possibilities.”

“I have heard joy related to being a Reconciling Conference in The United Methodist Church since 1986! That makes this our 37th anniversary year of leading the denomination toward fully including LGBTQIA+ folks. I also hear the pain of people who do not feel safe in their church. Inclusion and equity are a must if we are to live out God’s dream of table.”

Expressing gratitude for the signs of faithfulness he has seen here, he mentioned Rev. Christine Young Sun Kim, a missionary from the Northern Illinois Conference to Tanzania. She has led the development of a global middle

continued on page 4



In Memoriam

Active Clergy

Donald T. Plock

Retired Clergy

Jean Bush-Norris

Gary Curl

Kay Dillard

Jim McDonald

Bettye Mixon

Burton Randle

William R. Shealy

John Cantwell

Elmer Dickerson

Dennis Groh

Nicholas Mitrovich Jr.

Dennis Morales

John Rathod

Donald Walden

Spouses of Active Clergy

Bridget Cole-Tabb

David Jones

Saul Garcia

Spouses of Retired Clergy

Eric Hage

Ann Reed

Neil Trinko

Clara McLaughlin

Paula Svendsen

Lay Members of Annual Conference

Walton Davis Jr.

Rodney Osborne

Arthur Webb

Vivian Matthews

Forest D. Rice



Laity Address Reminds Us of Our Mission

By Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communications



“Local churches are the strength of the conferences,” co-Lay Leader Mark Menzi told Annual Conference members in the Laity Address on June 8. “While there is training and resources available in districts and conference, it is in the churches where the ministry is happening, disciples being made, people are going into the community to see the people and minister with them.”

Mark is one of three co-Lay Leaders for the Northern Illinois Conference, but he will be stepping down soon to serve as one of the chairs of the Annual Conference Shepherding Team.

Many churches are doing excellent ministry with the neighbors, he said, highlighting many of them, from the those that offer safe spaces for after school, provide leadership training for youth, knit prayer blankets, open their churches to shelter, and much more.

“You are showing people of your community who Jesus is and who you are as followers of Jesus,” Mark said. “We reach out as Jesus would—to the least and the lost; those in need of food, water, and shelter; and those in need of a caring word and a smiling face.”

Churches can get absorbed with ministries behind the

church walls. Those are important, Mark observes; but they must strengthen us for our ministry outside the church and in their neighborhood.

Mark pointed out that Bishop Tom Bickerton, the outgoing president of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, observed that the UMC is a church that is not doing what we went out do to, the mandate of loving God and neighbor. The cost of several churches’ disaffiliation has distracted our focus from what God has told us what we are to be about.

“We know that God is always with us,” Mark said. “We know that God is doing a new thing in us and through us, through the local church. The strength of our relationships and our faith help us to reach out to our neighbors.”

This is not the responsibility of the conference Board of Laity, however. “Let us help you. We all need to be connected so that we can do ministry together.”

“We come to the table because Jesus invites everyone to the table,” said, echoing the theme of the Annual Conference. “Notice that our communion liturgy uses terms like ‘us’ and ‘we.’ It tells us that we are connected. Communion binds us to each other and to Christ.”

To watch a video of this address, visit vimeo.com/835654528.



Honoring Those in Leadership Ministries

Video of the Celebration of Ministry service posted here: vimeo.com/showcase/10438291.

Commissioned for the Work of an Elder

Jaeon Cho Clayton Scott Edwards
G. Morris K. Jarkloh Jr.

Ordained as a Deacon

William Cody Johnson

Ordained as an Elder

Beverly Doreen Dukes James Fu
Sung-Eun Kim Elsa Noemi Meza
Elizabeth M. Rutherford Jieun Mori Siegel
Tyler Swihart-Ward

Local Pastors

Lino Aragon Xiomara Aragon-Castro
Joshua D. Brown Ron DeBaun
Nicholas Joyner Shalamar Molina-Perez
Jenny Moller D. Josiah Montgomery
Jacqueline Salgado Ivan Sarabia
John Marc Sianghio Jr.

Consecrated Lay Deaconess

Joann Cultura Melad

Sending Forth a Missionary

Rev. Jane Eesley

Retiring Clergy (with years of service)

Cynthia Anderson (19) Julie Blunt (23)
Susan Flinn-Portee (23.25) Brian LeBaron (17)
Claire Marich (15) Miguel Nieves (26)
Noah Panlilio (28) Gary Peluso-Verdend (40.25)
Jim Rough (46) Jonathan Singleton (33.5)
Brett Todd (28.75) Brad Wilson (41.5)
Mary Zajac (17)

Laypeople Learn Keys to Civil Conversations

By Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communications

That our society has become polarized on many issues—to the point of rage, in some cases—is obvious to anyone who reads the news or follows social media. Is civil conversation on disputed subjects possible?

The co-lay leaders of the Northern Illinois Conference think so. During lay session on June 6, they led to participants to discover how to have Christlike conversations with people they disagree with.

Introducing the principles of Christlike conversations, Mark Manzi, one of the conference lay leaders, told those present that “it’s impossible to love Christ and hate others.” The painful conflict in the church has also challenged church members’ abilities to remain respectful when discussing controversial topics.

“Any response to another person needs to start with humility,” Mark said. “This was key for Jesus.”

“Our job is to seek to understand. To understand, we must listen.

“We need to get better at listening,” Mark added. “We need to focus and not be distracted. We need to think, ‘Maybe I really can learn from this person.’”

He offered these practices for better listening:

- Repeat and summarize what your conversation partner said.
- Use minimal encouragers, like “Oh?” “I understand.” “Then?” “And?”

- Ask questions to draw out the other person.
- Acknowledge the person’s feelings and background.
- Use “I” messages. Express and take responsibility for your own views and feelings.
- Don’t use the word “why”; it can be inflammatory.
- Don’t give advice that wasn’t asked for.

Mark said that most importantly, we need to practice these principles.

Participants divided into small groups and reflected on what they learned. They were encouraged to share their reflections with the Board of Laity, to help them with the planning in the coming year.



Continued from page 3

secondary school during the Covid-19 pandemic. Next year the first class will graduate, and the ministry continues to grow.

Some Northern Illinois United Methodist expressed their concerns to him frankly.

“I heard the conference described as ‘unwell, dysfunctional, mistrusting, having a victim mentality, lacking transparency, understaffed, unaccountable, bullying, and hopelessly political,’” he said. “I have seen bullying with my own eyes. Let’s be clear: for bullying to take place there must be a bully, the bullied, and bystanders. Siblings in Christ, I will not be a bystander.”

Clergy spoke of being exhausted by trying to minister in an uncharted time of pandemic. Racism and heterosexism have hurt people in overt and insidious ways. The pain of learning that children were abused in some of the Boy Scout troops that may have met in our churches is heart-wrenching.

Even taking all this into account, “I believe in this time of pulling apart we have a prophetic and evangelical opportunity to be people who are about coming together and bringing together and healing together as a resistance and alternative to the hurt and harm in our culture,” the

bishop said. “I believe love has always been God’s daring, alternative to hurt and harm. We need leadership capable of mending and building up.”

It is expected that Northern Illinois Conference will be asked to share a bishop with another conference. This is already done in some other annual conferences. Those conferences are not merged. They still operate as distinct annual conferences, as they have always done. It is simply the case that the two conferences would share the same bishop.

Bishop Schwerin explained that Northern Illinois will soon increase its planning, with a mix of people who are diverse, representing different leadership roles in the body, and will operate transparently. The team will report progress and seek feedback as they go. Building relationships between the conferences is a priority, he said.

Looking to the ministry ahead, the bishop reaffirmed the importance of a diversity and respect in leadership.

“We must be one with multiracial and diverse theological leadership to cast vision for a beloved community framework or our gospel message is bankrupt and increases harm,” he said. “The healing that we need is multi-faceted but grounded in ethics that reflect a belief

that all people are of sacred worth. We must equip all the callings in our span of care that enable our conference to live out of a beloved community framework, beloved first. Clearly ‘beloved’ must describe the composition and ethos of our community.”

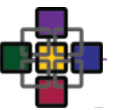
Growing into a healthy conference “will require leadership that is grounded, mature, and builds trust that allows us to focus on the vision,” Bishop Schwerin said. “For every one of us, we must be the change we wish our conference to be.”

He concluded by returning to the image of gathering around a table.

“I believe God is preparing a table,” he said. “I believe God is preparing this remnant church to cast vision for a great coming together as a resistance and alternative to the hurt and harm in our culture.

“As the table of a new church is being set, a new hospitality for the whole people of God is needed, and I believe courageous spiritual leaders set the table for the good of the whole.”

To watch the video of this presentation, visit vimeo.com/835650828.



Urgency Is Not Enough: Shepherding Team Talks About Change

By Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communications

Liz Gracie, who has been one of the co-chairs of the Annual Conference Shepherding Team for the past eight years, told the Annual Conference 2023 members of an insight the team recently gained: Urgency is not enough; leaders have to internalize change itself.

The ACST heard this challenging but intriguing assertion from Susan Czolgoz, a consultant who specializes in church organizational development. She led the team in a day-long workshop and produced a report that the team will discuss in July.

The insight prompted Liz's reflections on being part of the task force that led to the formation of the ACST.

"How many of you have ever said, 'Where does the annual conference stand on this issue?'—say, human sexuality. Or 'can't the annual conference help us with this problem?'—which might be technology or building needs," Liz asked.

On the other hand, she said, she has heard people complain that an initiative "seems top-down," and then choose to ignore it. She has heard this even from those who were part of crafting the initiative.

This has not helped strengthen the shared ministry of the NIC, she said. She pointed to the ever-shrinking budget of the conference, a shared system of support and collaboration, as a sign.

"To turn this trend around or, at least, to plateau at our current level, our annual conference must engage in and empower genuine leadership," she said. "If you are in this room, you are a leader of the Northern Illinois Conference and your constructive contributions are needed."

She identified a second hard truth: "Our reluctance to assert and accept leadership has allowed churches to struggle on their own," she said, "and the persistence of that state of affairs is dragging down the church that we love."

"Our responsibility as leaders is to reframe the notion of hope for our local churches: that United Methodists should be inspired to hope for more than remaining independent in deteriorating buildings," she said.

The concerns of churches' attachments to their buildings, the ways clergy are appointed (sometimes one pastor might serve two or more churches), and the role of thriving churches all contribute to challenging of finding a clear path.

"If your church is currently thriving, I would encourage you to consider how to position yourself to serve as a destination for smaller congregations ready to depart their buildings," she said.

This means something more than simply allowing those folks to join your church. It requires intentional efforts to learn about those who have left a beloved but now closed church and allow them to be part of shaping the present and future of the larger church, Liz explained.

Rev. Hwa Young Chong, who has shared the leadership role with Liz, was struck by Susan Czolgoz's understanding of liminality.

Liminality is a kind of in-between time, Rev. Chong explained. One time is ending and the new one has not yet arrived. The time between can be a long one.

"On the one hand, I recognize that it's not easy to live through liminality," said. "We are not in charge, as we recognize the not knowing, the confusion, and the ambiguity as we go through liminal space and time.

"On the other hand, we know that, for Christians, liminality is not entirely a foreign concept. We proclaim God's kin(g)dom that is 'already' here and has 'not yet' arrived—at the same time," she observed. "We witness to our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is both divine and human. We have faith in a God who is transcendent and immanent. People of faith have seldom lived in an either/or world. Rather, our life in God has often been both/and."

But she also sees liminal time as a time for hope, a time that leads to something new, though we know not what it is or when it will arrive.

She finds inspiration in Isaiah 43:19:

I'm about to do a new thing
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.

That "new thing" for the NIC may take longer than we hope it will, she said. "We may not exactly see a highway in the wilderness. In our own lifetime, we may not live to see the rivers in the desert."

Still, God is about to do a new thing, she said.

"Can we be part of the resurrection story of Jesus Christ? I believe so!" she concluded.

To watch a video of the Annual Conference Shepherding Team report, visit vimeo.com/836912920.



Members of the Annual Conference Shepherding Team model the "Urgency is Not Enough" shirts that were provided to all conference attendees.



2023 Award Winners

One Matters Discipleship Awards

These awards were created by United Methodist Discipleship Ministries to honor churches that have moved from 0 baptisms and 0 professions of faith into adding at least one in both of those categories. The Northern Illinois Conference grants an award to a church in each district.

Lake North: Urban Village Church

Lake South: First United Methodist Church, Downers Grove

Prairie Central: Wellspring New Faith Community, Oswego

Prairie North: First United Methodist Church, Belvidere

Prairie South: Paw Paw United Methodist Church

Northern Illinois Conference HIV/AIDS Committee Award

Silvia Jo Oglesby

Silvia Jo Oglesby, a member of Ingleside Whitfield United Methodist Church, is the founder of the Clergy and Lay Leadership Summit for HIV/AIDS Community Outreach for the African American Church.

Mission Links Awards

Philip Otterbein Award for Highest Total Mission Link Giving

\$34,020 United Methodist Church of Libertyville

Also of note:
\$29,713 Christ United Methodist Church, Rockford
\$28,899 Kingswood United Methodist Church, Buffalo Grove
\$24,382 First United Methodist Church, Arlington Heights
\$23,321 New Lenox United Methodist Church

John Wesley Award: Highest Mission Link Giving Per Member

74% Evans United Methodist Church, Rockford

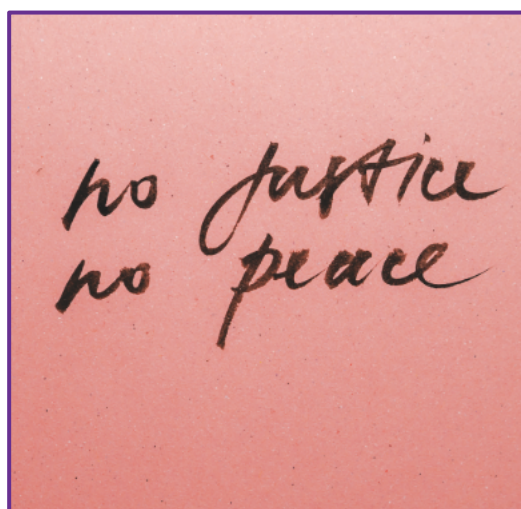
Also of note:
45% Kingswood United Methodist Church, Buffalo Grove
40% First United Methodist Church, Lockwood
39% Earlville United Methodist Church
39% Grace United Methodist Church, Rockford

Giving to Bishop's Appeal for Migrant Needs (as of June 27):

\$32,195.53

In-kind donations to Midwest Mission: 7,000 pounds

Grants for Churches Now Available



Church and Society

The United Methodist Board of Church and Society is accepting applications for the 2023 grant funding cycle.

The agency awards grants to United Methodist congregations and groups related to The United Methodist Church through the Ethnic Local Church, Human Relations Day, and Peace with Justice programs. Awards range from \$2,000 to \$5,000.

Ethnic Local Church Grants focus on the self-identified needs of ethnic local churches and persons as they address one or more chronic social issues or concerns.

Human Relations Day Grants support advocacy and community engagement aimed at uplifting the right of all God's children to realize their potential in right relationship with one another.

Peace with Justice Grants support programs and projects that witness to God's demands for a faithful, just, disarmed, and secure world.

Completed applications must be submitted by 4 p.m. Central Time on July 24. For information visit umcjustice.org/news-and-stories/online-grant-award-process-for-2023-begins-today-june-12-2023-1782.

Midwest Methodist Foundation

The foundation's grants program annually offers awards up to \$2,000 to several local churches and church-related organizations as they develop new or expanded creative ministries. A "church-related organization" is any organization within our conference area that partners with a local United Methodist church and/or members of the United Methodist Church in the Northern Illinois conference. Applications are due Sept. 15. Find more information and a grant application at their website: midwestmethodist.org/grants/.



Bishop Urges Lay and Clergy: Ministry Takes Wisdom, Courage, Imagination

By Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communications



Recalling the words of the hymn “God of Grace and God of Glory,” Bishop Dan Schwerin admonished those transitioning into new forms of ministry that imagination takes courage, and wisdom should precede courage. “Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,” the hymn petitions God.

“We who are in Christ, have cause for hope,” Bishop Schwerin preached at the Celebration of Ministry on

June 6. “But let’s be clear: it takes courage to imagine.”

He found these lessons in Luke 11:1-8, in which Jesus tells a story of a person needing bread to serve a visitor. So this host goes to a friend’s home—at midnight—and asks for three loaves of bread. The friend, however, is awakened in the middle of the night by pounding at the door. “My door is already locked and my kids are trying to sleep,” the man says. It’s an inconvenient time. Jesus says that friendship may not be enough, but persistence will get the person the bread he needs.

“It takes courage to imagine,” Bishop Schwerin said. “Three times in the text this evening, Jesus uses the word imagine—imagine in the imperative.

“Imagine with me if you will, there is bread in the community and all we face is a distribution problem. The bread is here. It’s just in somebody’s house. Here we have a protagonist who dares to live in hopeful imagination that bread and neighborliness is possible.”

Wisdom came first for the protagonist, the bishop observed. He suggests that the protagonist is thinking, “Although it is midnight, if I knock knowing there is bread in this town, my friend might say yes. “But if not, I could

wake the whole town until someone throws bread at me.” It takes courage to imagine, Bishop Schwerin said. “It takes courage to integrate ministry with prayer and the one who calls, wisdom first, courage second.”

Hopeful imagination came to the bishop in the form of a man named José, a waiter who served him at a restaurant.

Looking at the bishop’s pin of the bishop’s crest, José asked the bishop what he did for a living, and the bishop who told him.

José said, “I’m glad you’re not a priest.”

Bishop Schwerin answered, “I am, too. Why do you ask?” “It’s a long story,” he said. “I’ve got time,” the bishop answered.

Jose told of having to get a divorce, against his will, and now his parish priest would have nothing to do with him. “But you haven’t given up on God?” the bishop asked.

“No,” he said. “Bishop I am proof of the existence of God.”

“Now, I have studied the proofs of the existence of God—the ontological proofs, the teleological proofs, and cosmological proofs, but none of them mentioned José,” Bishop Schwerin said in an aside to the conference members.

José explained that in his village in Mexico, drug dealers were after the young men of his age. He had to join them and die young, or leave. So José chose to leave.

He, some friends, and their families sold everything they had to pay a coyote to transport them across the border. However, the coyote took them some distance and then abandoned them in the desert.

“In the morning, it was brutally hot,” he said. “We were walking and passed all these bones: long skeletons, little skeletons; some skeletons holding another skeleton. One skeleton had a pink shirt and little blue jeans.”

José looked the bishop in the eye and asked, “I wonder if you can imagine it.”

“After the skeletons, I woke up, and it was night,” José

continued. “I had passed out and my three friends carried me. Now it was night, and we were out of water and in the desert. Bishop, I stood up and I prayed, ‘God, make it rain. We are all out of water and we are thirsty. Please make it rain!’

“My friends laughed at me and mocked me, ‘Please make it rain.’

“Bishop, you know what happened?”

It rained.

“It rained. It rained in the desert, Bishop. We filled our bottles and filled our mouths. We laughed and we cried. Bishop, I’m proof of the existence of God and now with my life, I’m just trying to make things right. I just go around and try to make things right.

Bishop Schwerin said to José, “You have a lot to give a church.”

José answered, “I have a lot to give everywhere.”

“You who are sent by means of our baptism: laity, deaconesses, local pastors, missionaries, deacons and elders: imagine kinship and mutual benefit,” Bishop Schwerin continued in his sermon. “Imagine bread and community. Then proceed wisdom first, courage second.”

It may be midnight in our world, but it’s not too late to imagine governance that serves the whole and not the few, the bishop said.

“It may be midnight but it’s not too late to imagine responsible care for the planet; that all people are of sacred worth; that the people of Jesus can model and witness racial justice and radical inclusion; comprehensive immigration reform, and bread for all who eat,” the bishop urged.

“I believe love endures,” he said. “I believe ministry is wisdom first and courage second. I believe it takes courage to imagine—and it’s not too late to imagine.”

To watch a video of the celebration of ministry, visit vimeo.com/833888719.



Dr. Rolf Nolasco challenged conference members to see Jesus in society’s most vulnerable, least valued people.

Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary in Evanston, Ill., proposed that if Jesus is God in human flesh, Jesus identifies with the most disdained in society. This includes those who identify as being part of the LGBTQ+ community.

The interaction of the tangible and the spiritual was a central understanding in this two-part study. Spiritual development prepares us to live in the manner of Christ.

“The parable of the great banquet highlights the theme of honor (or God’s display of overflowing generosity toward those considered by the world as unworthy and undeserving) and shame (of God’s indictment of those overtaken by worldly preoccupations and chained in their perceived and enacted power and privilege),” Dr. Nolasco said.

In the parable, the invitation to the banquet was declined by the “haves,” who came up with weak excuses not to attend. Next, the host invited the “have-nots”—those without influence and power, those pushed to the margins, those ostracized and undeserving of honor by the world’s

Conference Bible Study: We Come to the Table Together, Connected in Christ

By Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communications

In his Bible study on the great banquet in Luke 14, Dr. Rolf Nolasco reminded Northern Illinois Annual Conference members on June 7 that Jesus’s banquet includes everyone—and gives those of lower social status places of honor at the table.

Dr. Nolasco, Rueben P. Job Professor of Spiritual Formation and Pastoral

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In the parable, the invitation to the banquet was declined by the “haves,” who came up with weak excuses not to attend. Next, the host invited the “have-nots”—those without influence and power, those pushed to the margins, those ostracized and undeserving of honor by the world’s

standards (v. 21). The poor who were never invited to parties, the blind who did not go out to examine the field, the lame who could not test oxen, and the maimed who did not get married (all excuses of those who turned down the invitation) became the guests of honor.

“The message is clear,” Dr. Nolasco said: “attendance at the banquet is solely based on the response to the invitation, not on who receives it.”

It is Jesus who extends the invitation to the undeserving and bestows honor on them for their acceptance, he explained.

Dr. Nolasco reminded the conference that those marginalized by church and society on the basis of skin pigmentation, accents, ability, sexuality, class, citizenship, subversive theologies, and evolving spiritualities always have their names on the invitation list for God’s banqueting table. “A table was reserved for us long before we realized our true sacred worth and long after the self-proclaimed keepers of God’s kingdom realize their grave mistake,” he said.

He added that acceptance of the invitation involves three movements and intentions: first, going inward with the intention to nurture a life of interiority; second, going outward with the intention to further God’s work of inclusion; and third, going upward with the intention to live the demands of discipleship.

It’s not respectability that earns us a place at the table. It’s a willingness to follow the way of Christ and to promote the kin-dom of God. “Like everyone else, we too are in need of God’s forgiveness, which God has lavishly offered to us long before we have come to our senses,” Dr. Nolasco said, referring to Romans 5:7-8.

“God has come to us with unconditional expression of

compassionate love and forgiveness and is renewing our very being daily so as to bear the fruit of love (1 Cor 13:1-3) that embraces all,” he added.

Building on the theme “come to the table,” Dr. Nolasco offered conference members with a provocative idea: If Jesus became one of the poor and left out, would this not include his identifying with the LGBTQ+ community?

Dr. Nolasco pointed to Philippians 2:6-8. In verse seven, the passage says, “by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness,” which shows Christ’s overflowing generosity and deep compassion for all of humanity. He became poor so that we can become rich (2 Cor. 8:9) and took the form of a slave so that we can be freed from the bondage of oppression and death (Rom. 8:2).

It might follow that Jesus also means to embrace and lift up the queer community.

“But what does it mean to imagine Jesus Christ as queer in the first place?” Dr. Nolasco asked. “We need not look further than the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels who ‘lived and loved out loud’ in radical ways.

“The Jesus we encounter in the Gospel narratives is one who was unapologetically out and about with ordinary folk, dined with the so-called sinners and tax collectors, and stood beside a woman caught in adultery.”

Dr. Nolasco added this: “Jesus’s focus on destabilizing and disrupting power structures and the relations that keep them entrenched is at the heart of what it means to be queer—the very foundation that will keep us grounded and anchored. We must allow this out-Jesus to queer and query other versions of Jesus that have come down to us to see if they align with or distort the divine liberation that God has for us.”

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Pilgrims to U.S./Mexico Border Observe Danger and Hope

By Rev. Hwa Young Chong



The Northern Illinois pilgrims walked in "Ambos Nogales"—both the northern city, in the U.S., and the southern city, in Mexico.



NIC's Rev. Noemi Meza, who is bilingual, encourages migrants who gathered in the chapel of a shelter where they would spend the night. She also led them in prayer.

Meeting and speaking with those who are crossing or live near the U.S./Mexico border, seven lay people and three clergy from the Northern Illinois Conference saw up close the hardship and courage of those who migrate between the two countries.

The group took a pilgrimage to Nogales from March 20 to 24 to learn about the migrant experience. Nogales—a city divided by the international border—is located 60 miles south of Tucson. Participants crossed the border several times, visiting churches, migrant shelters, and nonprofit organizations.

Migrants come to Nogales from all over Central and South America, fleeing from dangerous life situations. Casa Misericordia, a migrant shelter on the Mexico side of Nogales, hosted the group over one night. One pilgrim, Rev. Jonathan Crail, says he was “inspired by the place and sanctuary and refuge created by this shelter for migrant families who have experienced incredible hardship and trauma on their journey to a better life.”

Rev. Noemi Meza was especially touched by the resilience of migrant women. In her native tongue of Spanish, she prayed for the women who were staying at a shelter.

The group also spent a significant time in the territories of the Tohono O’odham nation, near Tucson, learning about the life-threatening harm against Native American communities along the border.

Rev. Hwa-Young Chong, who at the time was pastor

of Community United Methodist Church in Naperville, finds a painful parallel between the border that divides Nogales and the one that divides North and South Korea. “These borders are in different continents, created by unrelated socio-political backgrounds,” she said. “Yet people’s suffering from divided families, cities, and nations bear heartbreaking similarities.”

A life-transforming experience, the journey reminded pilgrims of biblical stories about migration, such as those about Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar; the Exodus, Exile, and Deportation; and the holy family’s flight to Egypt.

“Christ’s presence in the suffering of migrants was evident at every step of the journey,” Rev. Chong said. “Christ’s call for compassion will always empower and challenge them.”

The trip was organized by Community UMC and hosted by Border Community Alliance in Tucson. BCA aims to bridge the border and foster community through education, collaboration, and cultural exchange.

Consider donating to the Bishop’s Appeal for Migrant Needs. The funds that we raise together through the Bishop’s Appeal will go to organizations providing immediate needs like hygiene kits, temporary shelter, and food, and longer-term needs like employment, housing, medical care, and legal assistance. Visit umcnic.org/bishopsappeal2023 for information.

Leading^{the} Laity

By Eugene Williams and Connie Augsburger, Northern Illinois Conference Co-Lay Leaders

Greetings on behalf of your conference co-lay leaders and the entire Board of Laity. Annual Conference 2023 has come and gone with its many memories. It was a blessing to see our siblings; many of whom we had not seen since last year. We are especially grateful for all who attended the Laity Session that kicked things off for the 184th session. It was a wonderful time in the Lord that was filled with warmth, love, and sincere dialogue. The primary focus of our time during Laity Session was to facilitate courageous Christian-like conversations that show love and respect for the thoughts and opinions of others. It was a huge success as evident by all of the breakout groups that were still engaged in meaningful discussions as we ran out of time. The Board of Laity has agreed to continue this effort in all of our future events and we will ensure that it is part of our Laity Convocation for 2024.

We acknowledged the servant ministry and leadership of Co-Lay Leader Mark Manzi, who has faithfully served the Board of Laity for many years, but will now be moving on to serve as co-chair of the Annual Conference Shepherding Team. We also celebrated the many years of service by Karen Bonnell as she transitions from serving as lay leader for the Prairie South District and co-chair of Discipleship Task Force to work with the Renovare Institute.

Bishop Scherwin officiated his first Northern Illinois Conference session. We celebrated a fresh crop of ordinands, who were sent forth to preach the gospel. We celebrated the hundreds of years of service by clergy and laity in their retirement. We also remembered those who have gone on to glory. We considered the legislation before us and we acknowledged the hurt caused by the disaffiliation decisions. We reflected on the civil-rights pilgrimage and the prayers for peace by our Korean siblings.

Indeed, there are so many memories and matters to reflect upon coming out of annual conference session.

And just when you thought it was safe to go back into the water, we need to look forward with inspiration for the work that lies ahead. The work of the church has always been difficult and often times very messy. But by the grace of God, the church has persevered, despite breakups, splits, fractures, and disagreements. We will continue to not only survive, but even, dare I say, to thrive.

Uncertainty and questions on what the future holds meet us every day as our feet hit the floor. And 2024 is lurking right around the corner with even more changes. But we are Easter people! We know who we are and whose we are. God did not bring us this far on our faith journey to abandon us now. God is not through with us and we give thanks that God didn’t leave us where He found us. Let us aspire to the words from “God Is,” by Rev. James Cleveland, so we can be an inspiration to others that they might also know what it means to be Easter people:

God removes all pain, misery and strife.
He promised to keep us and never leave us,
and He’s never, ever come short of His word.
Just fast and pray; stay in the narrow way;
keep our life clean every day;
then we can go with him when he comes back.
We’ve come too far and we will never turn back.
Because God is our all and all.
As Laity and Clergy of the Northern Illinois Conference, let us be inspired to do the work that lies ahead. Let us do so in Christian love and respect for one another while we keep our hearts and minds stayed on Christ Jesus! May God continue to bless each of us.

2023 Back to School Backpack Drive

June 20 - August 11

Kids Above All invites everyone to step up this summer for the school-aged kids in our care to ensure they have the school supplies they need for the new school year!

KIDS ABOVE ALL
Contact our Faith & Community Relations Manager, Catherine Inserra, at cinserra@kidsabovell.org, or at (847) 224-2870, for more details!



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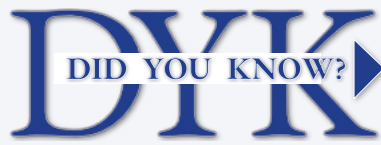
This returns us back to Christ’s table, Dr Nolasco said. “The Christian life is marked, among other things, by a communal gathering around the table, where Christ is both host-priest and sacrifice,” he said.

“The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ now symbolized in the eucharistic elements of bread and cup (Rom 5:8) captures this prevenient grace, the coming to creation by someone outside of creation, made available to all, without conditions or hidden violent agenda,” he explained.

We serve others not out of a sense of duty but out of deep commitment to God, he says, who calls us to pursue unity and love. It with a self-emptying love in which we honor Christ.

“The focus remains outward to others and upward to God, and the motive power lies in the fact that we are ‘united or connected in Christ,’” Dr. Nolasco concluded.

To watch videos of the two Bible study sessions, visit vimeo.com/835655109 and vimeo.com/835655084.



UMs on the Move

Rev. Arlene Christopherson, Asst. to the Bishop/Dir. of Connectional Ministries

It happens every year like clockwork. Appointments are made, annual conference ends, and the clergy moves begin.

This year is no different. Clergy are on the move as appointments take effect over the summer.

We have come a long way in the process of clergy deployment. Even today, retired clergy reminisce about the days when they would pack up their household before attending annual conference and wait with anticipation until the closing remarks of the annual conference session, when the Bishop would finally announce the appointments for clergy in the coming year. This was how you learned who your new pastor would be. This was how you learned where you would be serving a few weeks later.

Clergy families waited back home in anticipation. Will we stay or will we go? Over the course of the subsequent two weeks, churches would say goodbye to their pastors and pastors would be prepared for a new ministry site. No introductions, no visit to the new community. If you look at the history of clergy appointments over the course of our 184 years as a conference, you can see that churches received a new pastor, on average, every two years in the

early days of Methodism.

We have come a long way in our work of clergy deployment. We have learned that good transitions make for good ministry. Matches are made based on missional gifts and church goals. Time is given to say goodbye and emphasis is given to orientation in a new site with exiting pastors and entering pastors meeting and planning together.

This year, over the course of June and July, moving trucks will be packed and unloaded. First sermons will be delivered. Pastors will find their way around a new church and community. Congregations will size up their new pastor and begin to build a new relationship.

There are some best practices for this time of change. The moving process can be seen in three stages: Endings, Neutral Zone, and New Beginnings (William Bridges' Transition Model). It is a logical progression but sometimes we only see one part of this spectrum and forget to take into account the full journey.

Endings are important. Sending your pastor off in love, celebrating relationships and accomplishments, all help others prepare for what is next. It gives us time to grieve as we say goodbye and offers time to reminisce.

The Neutral Zone gives us time to explore. Explore the community, the church, the new congregation, the pastor. This is a good time for welcome, hospitality and acceptance. It is the beginning as we establish relationships.

Once the basics are established, we move to New Beginnings, the work of crafting ministry together as pastor and congregation.

The NIC Cabinet hosts a Transitions Workshop for clergy and congregational leadership each year. If you were not able to attend or attended and want a refresher, visit <https://vimeo.com/711408547>. This recording of our Transitions Workshop will be a good reminder of all the ways in which we can work to make this transition a success. This recording was done during COVID when we weren't able to gather face-to-face.

So, when you see a moving truck on the road this summer say a little prayer for those who are facing change. The truck could contain a UM pastor's earthly possession. Change is hard and good transitions take attention. Blessings to all those UM pastors on the move.

Clergy Appointments and Retirements

Bishop Dan Schwerin announces the following clergy appointments and retirements for the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church, effective July 1, 2023 (unless otherwise noted):

Charles Straight (Licensed Local Pastor) to Chicago: Eastside (1/4 time) (Lake South District) from Dolton: Faith (Lake South District). Charles follows Josiah Montgomery who is appointed to Chicago: Hartzell Memorial (Lake South District).

Sun Hyung Jo (Full Elder) to Wheeling: First Korean (Lake North District) from Skokie: Jesus Love (Lake North District). Sun Hyung follows Sung Ja Lee Moon and Soong-In (Steve) Moon who are serving as interim.

Daniel Davis (Retired Elder) to Waukegan: New Hope (1/2 time) (Lake North District). Dan follows Rick Carlson who is appointed interim to Arlington Heights: First (Lake North District).

Hope Chernich (Full Elder) to Des Plaines: First (Lake North District) from Chicago: Northside Co-Op churches—Grace Logan Square, Big Shoulders, Ravenswood Fellowship and United Church of Rogers Park (Lake North District). Hope follows Audrea Nanabray who is appointed to the Lake South Superintendency. Effective August 1.

Michael Mitchell (Licensed Local Pastor) to Maple Park (1/4th time) while remaining at New Gresham (1/4 time) (Lake South District). Michael follows Jeannette Wilson whose ministry has concluded.

Joey Garcea (Full Elder) to Leon (1/2 time) while remaining at Prophetstown (1/2 time) (Prairie South District). Joey follows Kicheon Ahn who is appointed to Millidgeville/Coleta (Prairie South District).

Tennille Power (District Superintendent Supply) transferring her candidacy to East Ohio from Hazel Crest Community (Lake South District).

Daniel Diss (Full Elder) to Los Gatos (California Nevada) from Glen Ellyn: First (Prairie Central District)

Wes Dorr (Full Deacon) to Evanston Township High School (Appointment Beyond the Local Church) from Oak Park: First (Lake North District).

Hannah Kardon (Full Elder) to Interfaith America (Extension Ministry) while also assigned as interim for the newly created 1/2 Associate Pastor position at Oak Park: St John's and Chicago: Edison Park (Lake North District) from Sabbatical.

David Price (Full Elder) to Glen Ellyn: First (Prairie Central District) from Lansing: First (Lake South District). David follows Daniel Diss who is appointed to Los Gatos (California Nevada Conference)

Lisa Teloman (Full Elder) First UMC of Redondo Beach (California Pacific Conference) from Geneva Associate (Prairie Central District)

Clayton Edwards (Provisional Elder) to full time Site Pastor (Associate) for Deerfield: Kingswood as Buffalo Grove: Kingswood adopts and merges with: Deerfield Christ to create a multi-site ministry (Lake North District).

Dave Burestetta (346.2) to Minooka (3/4 time) (Prairie South) and Shorewood NFC (1/4 time) (Prairie Central District). Dave follows Sarah Hong who is appointed to Rockford: Aldersgate and Beth Eden (Prairie North District).

Debra Tinsley Taylor (Retired Elder) to Manhattan (1/4 time) (Lake South District). Debra follows Melwyn Alagodi who is appointed to Lena and Stockton: Wesley (Prairie North District).

Jarrod Severing (Full Elder) to Bartlett: Journey of Hope as Elgin: Journey of Hope (Prairie Central District) adopts and merges with the congregation to create a multi-site ministry. Jarrod follows Darrien Atkins whose ministry is concluded.

Kari Lindholm-Johnson (346.2) to (interim) Chicago: Urban Village Church (Lake North District). Kari follows Chan-Ik Choi who is appointed to Carol Stream: St. Andrews (Prairie Central District).

Sandra Gullede (District Superintendent Supply) to Dolton: Faith (Lake South District) (1/2 time). Sandra follows Charles Straight who is appointed to Chicago: Eastside (Lake South District).

Kimberly Davis (Full Deacon) to Riverside: Woodside (1/4th time) (Lake South District). Kimberly follows Debra Tinsley Taylor who is appointed to 1/4 Manhattan (Lake South District) and continues to serve in her appointment beyond the local church.

Valorie Tatum (District Superintendent Supply) to Hazel Crest Community (1/4 time) (Lake South District). Valorie follows Tennille Powers who is transferring her candidacy to East Ohio.

Harlene Harden (Retired Elder) to Franklin Park: First (1/4 time) (Lake North District) from retirement. Harlene follows Fernando Siaba who has been serving as an interim.

Seongwoog Hwang (346.1) to Skokie: Jesus Love (Lake North District) from Nashville Korean (TN Annual Conference). Seongwoog follows Sun Hyung Jo who is appointed to Wheeling: First Korean (Lake North District).



We Need YOU!

DISCIPLESHIP

Task Force of the Northern Illinois Conference

Leaders wanted

The conference Discipleship Task Force has open leadership roles in a few areas of ministry, for either laity or clergy: the NIC Prayer Network, NIC Prayer Team, and newly developing positions in DNA (Disciple Nurturing Aptitude, which concerns nutrition, mental health, and physical health, partnering with Advocate's Faith and Health Companion program). Please contact Rev. Caleb Hong (pastorcalebhong@gmail.com) for more information.

Join an NIC Book Club

The NIC Discipleship Task Force's Book Club invites you to register for its third season. This fall's groups will read and discuss *Living Our Beliefs: The United Methodist Way*, by retired UMC Bishop Kenneth L. Carder. Starting in September, groups will meet throughout the conference, via Zoom, in person, and hybrid for five to six weeks. Space is limited, so register now. Learn more at the Discipleship Task Force website, umcnic.org/Discipleship/NICBookClub.

Job Openings

For the latest job openings in the Northern Illinois Conference and across the connection, visit umcnic.org/jobs.

Stay Connected

Sign up for the weekly NIC eNews, Appointment Announcements and Sympathy notices. Visit umcnic.org and scroll down and click on "Sign up for our Newsletter" to enter your name and email.

Submissions

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. Submissions will be edited at the discretion of the Communications staff.

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