

The Northern Illinois Conference OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

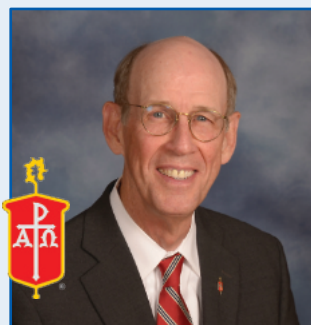
Reporter

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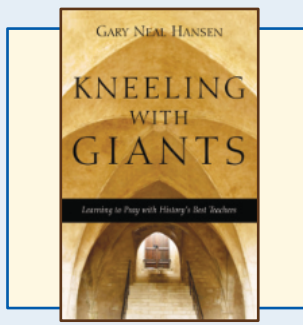
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Preserving Black church history

By Jim Patterson, UMNS

“Persons who are depressed and oppressed have a tendency not to tell their story,” said retired Bishop Forrest Stith, who played a pivotal role in founding the African American Methodist Heritage Center in 2001 to document the history of Black Methodists.

Without the center, “the story of Methodism is told by those who are in a better position,” he added, “which leaves an incomplete story.”

The heritage center exists to preserve and tell the story of African American Methodists. Its leaders would like to add to its collection and make it more accessible, but major fundraising is needed after a fallow period caused mostly by the coronavirus pandemic. There’s also been a tightening of finances in the denomination as leaders anticipate a split over sexuality policies.

While there are financial impediments to preserving their legacy, Black churches face more immediate issues such as maintenance of church buildings and the need to pay pastors what they’re worth, said Stith, president emeritus of the center’s board of trustees.

The stakes are high for Black churches, he believes. “When churches lose their tradition and history, they lose their reason for being and ... they have no motivation to push forward,” he said.

Ashley Boggan Dreff is the top executive of United Methodist Archives and History, which houses and preserves the African American Methodist Heritage Center’s artifacts and files at its facilities at Drew

University in Madison, New Jersey. She said that African Americans have been “pushed to the margins” for much of United Methodist history.

“Their histories, faiths and contributions have been subsumed under whiteness,” she said. “The African American Methodist Heritage Center corrects this. It places United Methodist African Americans at the foreground and ensures that their histories, faiths and contributions to our larger narratives are collected, preserved and promoted.”

Black Methodists for Church Renewal, the Black caucus of The United Methodist Church, conceived the center. Stith was asked to lead the effort and he established a task force that organized the new organization as a standalone not-for-profit entity.

“We sent out the request to all 2,000-something of our churches that we had addresses for, and asked them for information,” Stith said. “Probably hundreds have sent in journals and pictures and all kinds of stuff that reflect their story.”

Some churches maintain their own exhibits of their history, he said. But the facilities at Drew are a good option to preserve artifacts and documents indefinitely.

The heritage center’s collection includes 33 artifacts, documents from Asbury United Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., and the papers of Methodists including the Rev. Marion O. Ballard, the Rev. David DeWitt Turpeau, social worker



Students work in the chemistry laboratory at Wiley College, in Marshall, Texas, one of the 11 historically Black colleges and universities related to The United Methodist Church. The African American Methodist Heritage Center, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2021, preserves the history of Black Methodists. Photo © United Methodist Commission on Archives and History.



The congregation of East Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church gathers for worship in Philadelphia. Photo © United Methodist Commission on Archives and History.

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From Your Bishop:

Lessons on generosity from my childhood

As I review the year-end local church reports of my first year as your interim bishop, I give thanks for every member

and pastor who has generously supported the church during the COVID -19 pandemic. At our Annual Conference session last July, I shared that too many churches are struggling to balance their budget, pay salaries, and apportionments. In response, you have been generous. In less than six months, many of our churches have stepped up their giving to strengthen our mission and ministry together.

The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, mentions generosity as a trait of Christian discipleship. I think it is also a measure of the witness of a local church. That is, a church that gives beyond its own needs to support the work of Christ around the world teaches its members how to be generous. Is your church teaching generosity in response to God's abundant blessings? How did you learn about money and giving to others?

My understanding of money started when I was five or six and my grandmother opened her little black silk coin purse and gave me five cents to buy candy at the local market. It was always a major decision whether to buy something good but did not last very long or buy something that might not be as good and lasts longer. For example, should I buy Malted Milk Balls or Kit candies? Of course, if I

could afford a Slow Poke with caramel on a stick, I could have both! In any case, here are some lessons from my childhood.

"Love is something if you give it away, give it away, give it away. Love is something if you give it away; it comes back giving more." This simple children's song reminds us that generosity multiplies our blessings and restores our sense of abundance. Interestingly, the song does not place any conditions on who we give to or what we give because the blessings are always ours more than the one who receives the gift.

"You are blessed to be a blessing." When we live in gratitude for what we have received through the grace of God, we understand that we have a responsibility to pass our blessings along to others. In short, we did not get what we have by our own merits but by the graciousness of God. As God has blessed us, we are to bless others.

"When the praises go up, the blessings come down!" One of the biggest challenges in life is to see abundance where others see a deficit. Christians begin each day in praise of God for the joy that lies ahead. When we see someone living a life of joy while carrying a heavy burden, their courage inspires us. Jesus often talked about those with "eyes to see and ears to hear" can recognize God's new kingdom amid the kingdoms of this world.

"Don't give a dollar to the church—until you give your heart to Jesus Christ!" When I first heard this challenge, I realized there is a relationship between what we give to and who we love. Of course, it is

possible to give your way into loving, but when you love your way into giving, you experience a joy that no one can take away from you. On a deeper level, there is a relationship between knowing we are loved and giving. Once you comprehend what God has done for you in Jesus Christ—you feel loved in the depth of your soul—everything you have belongs to God.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Mt. 6:21) Jesus makes the connection between generosity and loving. If our security is found in our ability to store up treasure for ourselves, we find our heart shrinks. When we place our heart—and eternal security—on the things of God, our little treasury is nothing. Be careful about what you value and where you find your sense of meaning.

My grandmother let me make decisions about money early in life. Little did I know that those decisions were more important than what candy I would buy. Generosity is far more than how we spend our money. It is a way of praising God and sharing our blessings with others.

Those churches that face a challenge paying apportionments, please join me in thanking those churches that contribute to make up the shortfall. Our connection works when everyone does their part to strengthen our witness and service. Thank you for being generous in the work of Jesus and his Church!



Apportionment receipts exceed expectations

Despite challenging times putting a strain on church finances because of the ongoing pandemic, apportionment receipts for 2021 far exceeded

expectations and will allow the Conference to pay 100 percent General Church apportionments for the first time in a decade.

The Conference Council on Finance and Administration (CCFA) gives thanks to all the churches that faithfully paid their apportionments, which totaled nearly \$5.6 million for the Conference budget and General Church funds.

NIC Treasurer Lonnie Chafin says this year's numbers improved \$900,000 (19%) over 2020's results.

"These are numbers we haven't seen since 2018," said Chafin. "While CCFA reduced the Conference budget by making steep reductions in expenditures (more than 15% lower than 2015 levels) and local church apportionments were \$200,000 less in 2021 than 2020, churches have shown remarkable resilience through the pandemic and stepped up to meet their obligations."

CCFA Chair Rev. Tammy Scott says the Council set its expectations for 2021 with hopes of local church giving improving, but not nearly at this level. She says it's a cause for celebration.

"This would not be possible without all of our Northern Illinois churches coming together to support our local and global ministry connections"
~ CCFA Chair Tammy Scott

"While the pandemic continues to affect how we gather for worship and what our ministry looks like, our congregations have blown me away with their commitment to our connectional ministry through their apportionment payments," said Rev. Scott. "Meeting our Annual Conference budget obligations and being able to pay our General Church apportionments at 100% calls for celebration any time it happens. But to be able to do this in a year when our churches are still adjusting to life and ministry in a pandemic is absolutely amazing!"

The General Council on Finance and Administration says the NIC is one of only seven annual conferences to pay in full this year. NIC's Director of Connectional Ministries Rev. Arlene Christopherson says she was overjoyed to learn the NIC will pay 100 percent and shows the Conference's commitment to both global and local ministries.

"The work of our connectional system is stronger with our commitment," said Rev. Christopherson. "Through these gifts, we engage in ways we could never do alone. Missionaries, Africa University, the Black College Fund are just a few of the ways we witness. Our presence is known in 136 countries because you have shared faithfully."

Chafin said CCFA is mindful of the uncertainty the pandemic continues to create and has set a very careful financial course.

"The Conference structure is very thin, as a consequence. That has made it possible for full support of the ministries throughout the world," said Chafin. "We send the General Church funds out with a blessing that Christ might be known in transformative ways."

For more info on apportionments, visit umcnic.org/apportionments.



2022 Annual Conference connects us together

After two years of gathering virtually, the Annual Conference Committee is preparing to bring us back together in person for the 183rd session of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference from June 8-10, 2022. The Conference will return to the Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center at 1551 N. Thoreau Dr., Schaumburg, Ill.

While many of us long to be together in fellowship again, the Committee will continue to monitor all state and local health and safety guidelines on large gatherings, including mask-wearing, social distancing and Cook County vaccination requirements.

"The Annual Conference Committee looks forward to being together this year in person, but we will continue to make necessary adjustments and arrangements to make sure that all participants feel safe and protected," said Deborah Dangerfield, Chair of the Annual Conference Committee.

Bishop John L. Hopkins has chosen a two-year theme

focusing on our core elements of our Christian faith – the sacraments. This year's theme is "Connected in Christ: Come to the Water" and 2023's is "Connected in Christ: Come to the Table."

"For 2022, the core of our connection to one another is through our baptism. Baptism is our primary entry point as individuals into the Christian community universal. Water symbolizes this action and becomes a powerful visual for the work of living in Christ," said Hopkins. "Choosing the sacraments as our focal point draws us into community, connects us to our roots and calls us into our mission."

The Conference will open with the Memorial Service on June 8 and close with the Ordination Service on June 10. The AC worship committee is also planning a retirement service and Bible study. The conference will be longer this year to include mandated legislative sections which were passed by a resolution in 2021. The Clergy Session will be held May 24.



The 2022 Northern Illinois Annual Conference returns to the Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center.

The Committee has also determined due to limitations brought on by the pandemic and concern for everyone's health, no on-site childcare will be offered this year. Clergy and lay members are encouraged to begin thinking of alternative plans for their children. If lay members feel they can no longer participate, they should notify their pastor so either they can send the alternate lay member or elect someone new.

Online registration will open in April. Look for updates and details in the coming months through the Conference eNews and website at umcnic.org/AC2022.

Annual conferences to raise funds for BSA Survivor Trust Fund

Pending court approval of a settlement agreement in the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) bankruptcy case, United Methodists have agreed to contribute \$30 million to a \$3 billion Survivor Trust Fund that will receive contributions from the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), insurance companies and charter organizations. The agreement asks every annual conference to raise funds to contribute toward the \$30 million. The Northern Illinois Annual Conference's calculated contribution is \$754,348 toward the Survivor Trust Fund.

The fund will be used to compensate persons alleged to have experienced abuse while in Scouting. The BSA filed for bankruptcy as it faces more than 80,000 claims for alleged child sexual abuse over the last 80 years. United Methodist congregations sponsor more than 6,000 Boy Scout troops and Cub packs.

NIC Interim Bishop John L. Hopkins says he's grateful to the United Methodist Ad Hoc Committee that worked diligently to come to this point in the process that works toward helping the victims and protects local churches who may face liability for a chartered BSA troop.

"Not only have we witnessed connectionalism at its best, but we have also worked to ensure that all BSA chartered organizations receive a release for Boy Scout-related claims," said Bishop Hopkins. "Our United Methodist mediators also advocated for small community nonprofits, other denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church and many other chartered organizations not represented in the mediation process, which left them vulnerable to future lawsuits. This inclusion will help make certain that today's Scouts will be able to continue in the future."

United Methodists participated in the bankruptcy mediation process with five goals.

1. Healing and support for survivors.
2. Releases from claims related to sexual abuse for United Methodist congregations that chartered Boy Scout troops and Cub packs.
3. Releases for all charter organizations.
4. Preservation of congregations' and annual conferences' insurance.
5. A fair and just financial settlement.

The settlement agreement meets each goal, but the cornerstone of the United Methodist settlement was the healing and support for survivors.

The United Methodist Church does not tolerate sexual abuse of any kind and has consistently worked to keep young people safe. Most of the 80,000 claims occurred in



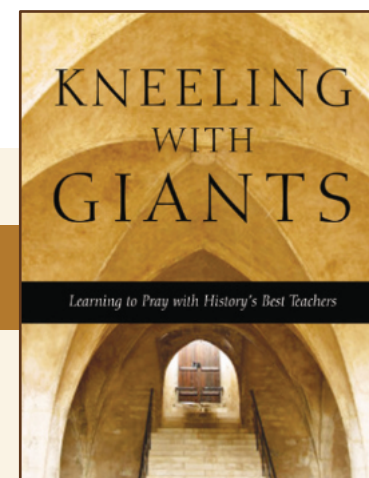
the 1950s through the 1970s. Since that time, the BSA and UMC have put new practices and policies in place, which have dramatically decreased cases of child sexual abuse. For United Methodists, only 1 percent of all claims alleged to have taken place in and through United Methodist Scouting programs occurred in the last 20 years. While that is a dramatic reduction, even one case is too many.

In addition to a financial contribution, United Methodists and the Northern Illinois Conference are committing to the following:

1. Train leaders to meet with and hear the experience and hopes of any survivor who participated in Scouting activities connected with a United Methodist congregation.
2. Review all Safe Sanctuaries/Ministry Safe policies and update as necessary.
3. Develop a series of articles about how to ensure safe youth programming.
4. Participate in a survivors' justice and healing working group formed by survivors who filed claims.

"Our conference leadership through the work of Treasurer Lonnie Chafin, the Board of Trustees, and the Committee on Finance and Administration have given their full attention to the welfare of churches in our conference," said Bishop Hopkins. "They have approved the NIC's contribution commitment to the survivor's trust fund and will be working in the coming months on funding options, awaiting final approval of the settlement."

The settlement hearing is scheduled for the end of February.



Join the Conference Book Club this Lenten Season

What kind of experience do you have in your prayer life? Is it full of joy or does it fall flat? Gary Neal Hansen, author of the Discipleship Task Force's first selection for the NIC Book Club, suggests if your experience is the latter, conceivably you haven't found a prayer method that you really connect with.

In his book, "Kneeling with Giants," Hansen offers a wide range of approaches to prayer that are all classics. What better time than Lent to search out a deeper relationship with the God who so loved the world...?

The Discipleship Task Force has arranged four recorded sessions from a pilot group of NIC members with Hansen to help guide your reading of the book. You may use these videos with a group from your church, cluster, or individually. Conference groups will also be available to join.

For some mysterious reason, God's work does not get done without our prayers. Join the Discipleship Task Force in dropping to our knees.

Visit umcnic.org/Discipleship/NICBookClub to sign up.



Anti-Racism Task Force taps consultant

The Northern Illinois Conference Anti-Racism Task Force is pleased to announce North Central College professor emeritus Dr. Richard Guzman is coming on board as a consultant.

Guzman taught and still occasionally teaches courses in writing, literature, race and ethnicity and leadership for social change. He has been a speaker and consultant on issues of writing and diversity in many organizations and corporations and was honored by the State of Illinois for developing a diversity plan for one of its major school districts.

He is a member of Friendship United Methodist

Church in Bolingbrook where he has chaired the Church Council, is coordinator of its Daybreak homeless shelter program, and occasionally preaches and plays keyboard in the worship band. He is active in several of the Northern Illinois Conference's anti-racism projects, including chairing the committee that developed its anti-racism workshop "Becoming the Beloved Community." He was one of the four panelists for the Laity Convocation in 2020 addressing systemic racism.

NIC Shepherding Team Project Manager Amania Drane said Guzman will work to provide academically-supported strategies for addressing systemic racism that are Biblically grounded and Wesleyan-rooted.

"In addition, his 40+ years as an author, professor, and expert on racial matters, he will provide visionary and

insightful advice to help with implementing the Task Force's strategic goals," said Drane.

Shepherding Team Co-Chair Rev. Myron McCoy welcomes Guzman to the team. "We look forward to Richard joining us in seeking to lead and guide the Anti-Racism Task Force's efforts in addressing the unfinished agenda in our churches and communities," said Rev. McCoy.

Guzman says he's ready to get to work. "We need endurance, courage and a sense of oneness with each other and our God to keep up the long fight against racism," said Guzman. "I hope to help in any way I can to encourage these qualities to flourish among us."

To find out more on the Anti-Racism Task Force, visit umcnic.org/antiracism.

General and Jurisdictional Delegation update

By Rev. Alka Lyall, Delegation Chair



As the year 2022 starts, and another variant of COVID-19 results in more infections and even more breakthroughs diagnosed, we, as delegates, continue to live with the uncertainty of when the 2020 General Conference might be convened.

Towards the end of 2021, the General Commission on General Conference (GCGC) had shared that they will look into the situation closely and share their decision with us in the first quarter of 2022. We await that announcement from the commission, however your delegation has continued to meet and has participated, around the connection, in many

ways throughout these past two years. We are preparing a more detailed video report to share with you soon.

We know this uncertainty is not helpful, so we ask you to please continue to hold your delegation and members of the GCGC in your prayers. In the meantime if you desire to reach out to us or have specific questions for any of us, please feel free to email us at 2020-nic-delegation@googlegroups.com.

Thank you for your faithful support for the church, and for your patience in the midst of this pandemic.

Through it all . . . A word from your NIC Co-Lay Leaders

Well, we finally made it through another busy and demanding season. Advent, Christmas, New Year's and Epiphany, just to name a few. We also made it through two years of the COVID pandemic while facing the delta and omicron variants. Unprecedented violence continues to rise across the country with shootings, murders and carjackings. Racism, partisan politics, attacks on voting rights and other injustice appears to be at an all-time high. It would be so easy to lose faith or to give up hope.

But your Conference Co-Lay Leaders want to remind you of the words from a song by Andre Crouch, "Through it All." Some of the lyrics are as follows: "I thank God for the mountains and I thank Him for the valleys; and I

thank him for the storms He brought me through. For if I never had a problem, I wouldn't know that God could solve them, I'd never know what faith in God could do."

To that end, your Co-Lay Leaders offer for your reflection, Romans 8:16-39. Paraphrasing verses 16-17 tells us that the Spirit bears witness that we are children of God. In fact, we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. Verse 28 tells us that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

Verse 35 asks, who (what) shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Verses 37-39 tells us that we are more than conquerors; that neither death,

nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present or to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Yes, THROUGH IT ALL we must continue to hold to God's unchanging hand. Your Co-Lay Leaders and Board of Laity encourages you to let nothing separate us from the love of Christ as we work together to strengthen relationships and build trust and respect while serving God. Amen

**Connie Augsburg, Mark Manzi and Eugene Williams serve as the NIC Co-Lay Leaders. To reach them, email ConfLayLeader@umcnic.org.*

From the Cover

Marie Copher and activist Thelma Marcella Randall Simms.

In 2017, the General Conference, which had provided \$100,000 per year in funding for two quadrennia, stopped allocating money to the center. COVID-19 was also a blow, since the center's most effective fundraisers have been in-person events.

Stith does not anticipate getting any money from the General Conference in the near future.

"They're looking for ways to cut — not ways to raise — and that's unfortunate," he said. "We did our best work when we had support from them. We did workshops all across the country."

Memberships sell for \$25/year. There have been larger donations occasionally, such as a \$10,000 gift from the Holston Foundation in March.

"We have to ensure the longevity of such an important center if we are ever to fully atone for the racist sins of our past and seek more equitable futures," Dreff said. "I've been so lucky to get to know those who work at the AAMHC to ensure its importance and survival. (Archives and History) will continue to

support the AAMHC in any way that we can and I challenge the denomination to join us in this effort."

A name change is a possibility down the road, said Mollie Stewart, a longtime denomination leader and president of the center's board of trustees.

"When you say 'Heritage Center,' what does that mean to you?" she said. "If you've never heard of it, you think that we have a center somewhere."

In fact, the AAMHC doesn't even have an office, she pointed out.

"We're going to let (the name change idea) rest right now," Stewart said. "Because unless we find some funding, (the AAMHC) is not going to be there."

One exciting project that has made good progress is an oral history collection. Interviews with bishops and their wives who served in the old Central Jurisdiction are on file and waiting on a method of dissemination, Stith said.

The Central Jurisdiction was formed in 1939 because Southern churches wanted a separate jurisdiction for African Americans. It was abolished in 1968 when the merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical

United Brethren Church created The United Methodist Church. Today's "central conferences" in the church refer to conferences outside the U.S.

Getting younger people interested in the history of Black churches is the key to the future, Stith and Stewart said.

"I'm 82 years old and I have a little technology, but not like these young folk who grew up with all this in their brain," Stewart said. "We need a better website and number two, a better marketing plan."

It's important to remember that "our history is as important as any other history," Stewart said.

"We're not just stepchildren here. We are full-fledged family," she added. "Family needs to be protected. It needs to be preserved."

How to Help

Give to the African American Heritage Center through UM Global Ministries Advance #3020514 at advance.umcmission.org.

Jim Patterson is a UM News reporter in Nashville, Tennessee.

Local Church News

Churches face another test with omicron

By Anne Marie Gerhardt, NIC Dir. of Communications

The high-speed surge of the omicron coronavirus variant over the last few months presented another pandemic challenge to United Methodist churches, prompting some to put the pause on in-person gatherings, with others making more modest changes.

Urban Village Church (UVC) cancelled all in-person, indoor gatherings during January at its six locations in Chicago and River Forest because of the rise in COVID cases and moved to online streaming on Facebook and YouTube.

But the Rev. Christian Coon, who leads the ministry partnership of UVC-West and River Forest UMC, found a creative way to still be together and be the church.

"Just because we're not worshiping in the sanctuary doesn't mean we can't be creative and still gather...even outside in January!" said Rev. Coon.

On Jan. 16, church members met at the Hampton House in Maywood, the childhood home of political activist Fred Hampton Jr., to partner with the non-profit organization Suburban Unity Alliance (SUA) and fill their community fridge.

"This was a great way for us to build our connection with SUA, which works to raise discrimination awareness," said Coon. "As part of UVC's commitment to anti-racism, each of our sites is encouraged to connect with an organization that is led by and primarily services communities of color. The community fridge is for anyone experiencing food insecurity, and they can take what they need."

The congregation stocked the fridge and more. Rev. Coon said they had too much food, so the extra donations went to the SUA's other community fridges housed at Euclid UMC in Oak Park.

Though early studies showed omicron to be milder than other variants, it's highly transmissible, leading to an alarming rise in cases and hospitalizations in much of the U.S., as well as disruptions in some school systems and workplaces.

At the beginning of January, NIC Interim Bishop John L. Hopkins and the cabinet issued a letter thanking churches for continuing to exercise caution and care for the health and wellbeing of their congregations and the community.

"While the new variant, omicron, has not been as severe as last summer's delta variant, especially for

those who are vaccinated, the State of Illinois is struggling with increased numbers of infections and our hospitals are once again strained to the limit," said Bishop Hopkins. "Follow state and local health department guidelines and work with your church health team to make decisions that are best for your context."

Pastor Rolland Hayag, who serves Shirland UMC and Pecatonica UMC, moved services online after COVID-19 cases started rising in his communities impacting not only his congregations but him personally.

"My whole family tested positive and more and more members also were feeling sick and quarantining," said Hayag. "That's what prompted us to do an online worship to avoid infecting more members, especially those who are not vaccinated."

Hayag said they're continuing with health and safety protocols such as sanitizing the church building. And while not in person, Hayag continues to make sure members know they're not alone.

"We have been communicating and making calls to care and pray for members," said Hayag. "We hope to be back to in-person worship soon."

Some United Methodist seminaries and United Methodist-related colleges also adapted policies since omicron emerged.

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary employees worked remotely for several weeks and returned to the office on Jan. 24. The spring semester started Jan. 31 and in-person classes are still meeting on campus.

"We will continue to monitor the situation and use the CDC, local and state government, and Northwestern University as guides for our decision making," said Garrett Chief Marketing and Communications Officer Shane Nichols. "Before the fall 2021 semester, all faculty, staff, and students were required to be vaccinated. Now the seminary is requiring all faculty, staff, and students to get the booster by Mar. 1, 2022."

Other churches across the Northern Illinois Conference reinstated temperature checks, pew dividers for social distancing, and some required reservations for Christmas Eve services asking for vaccination status.

Central UMC in Skokie bases worship decisions on positivity rates in the community.

"We made the call to stick with Zoom-only worship through January as positivity rates hit eight percent and will take it one week at a time in February," said Central UMC's Rev. Tim Biel.

As the omicron variant lingers, many United Methodist churches are part of the public health response.

Several Northern Illinois UMC churches have partnered with the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan of Chicago's (CRLMC) grant program to deliver vaccinations to 1,000 people this winter. CRLMC is part of the Chicago Vaccine Partnership which is mobilizing community members to ensure equitable vaccine access.

"Our research and our discussions with faith leaders during the pandemic confirm that people are much more likely to listen to people they know and trust within their own congregations," said CRLMC President Barbara Abrajano. "They also are more comfortable with vaccination appointments that they can attend in a familiar place."

Englewood-Rust UMC held a clinic on Dec. 19 and will hold a second one on March 20. Others who are participating include Olivet UMC and South Shore UMC. Good Samaritan UMC in Addison has also held four vaccination clinics in partnership with the Illinois Department of Public Health and is planning more.

"For all the downsides of the pandemic (and there have been many), it's also moved us to think creatively about how we can worship and how we can serve our communities," said Rev. Coon. "Our effort to gather and fill the community fridges (and others we've tried to do) is just another reminder, as the old hymn says, that the church is not a steeple, the church is the people. And I mean that broadly: our neighbors and non-church folks, too!"

As news that the omicron surge is slowing and possibly peaking, Bishop Hopkins encourages churches to remain vigilant as we move forward and keep all those impacted by the virus in our prayers.

"We pray for those who have lost loved ones to COVID and those who work on the front lines providing us with care and essential services in this challenging time," said Hopkins.

**Sam Hodges with UMNS contributed to this report.*



Members of Urban Village Church gathered outside on a cold January Sunday to be in community service together since the rise in omicron cases cancelled in-person worship.



Church members stocked the community fridge organized by the Suburban Unity Alliance with food that's free to anyone in need.



Town and Rural grant applications open

It's grant application season again for the Keagy/Town and Rural Committee. If you are a small town or rural congregation in need of financial assistance for ministry opportunities, we encourage you to apply for a Keagy/Town and Rural Committee grant. If your ministry is in need of minor funding (\$300-\$500,) be sure to apply to the PACK application. If you have a more expensive ministry in mind (\$500-\$3,000,) then the Keagy application is the one you need. Applications must be completed online by March 15.

Applications are available at umcnic.org/grants.

◀In 2021 the NIC Keagy/Town and Rural Committee awarded 14 grants totaling \$13,400 to small-town and rural congregations for ministry and outreach purposes. These churches used their grants to provide fire safety education and smoke detector batteries, Vacation Bible Schools, feeding ministries, art and music programs, accessibility remodels, community improvement projects, and much more.

Back on the CodeRed church trail

By Rev. Harriette Cross

After nearly six years on hiatus, representatives from each district of the Northern Illinois Conference returned to the CodeRed (Congregational Development and Redevelopment Committee) Church Trail, visiting potential new church sites and redevelopment areas across the conference over two days last November.

The itinerary included churches that housed several ministries and empty farm fields that held potential. The group listened to the church's story at each site, prayed with the pastor, and witnessed ministries in action.

"It has been a rewarding experience to restart the annual CodeRed Church Trail," Director of Congregational Development and Redevelopment Rev. Martin Lee said.

The group visited St. Mark UMC and Trinity UMC in the Lake South District. Rev. P. Devon Brown pastors St. Mark, a historic African American congregation in Chatham. The church has played an important part in the history of African Americans in the Northern Illinois Conference. Many prominent pastors and bishops have served the church. Today it faces cultural changes in the community as many members are moving to the south suburbs. The church hopes to continue its history of social action and meet the present community's needs.

Trinity UMC is located in Chicago's Beverly neighborhood. Rev. Dennis Langdon is the pastor. The shrinking congregation takes pride in maintaining its historic building and providing space to local artists.

The tour continued to St. Matthew UMC and Franklin Park UMC in the Lake North District. St. Matthew UMC is located in the area where the former Cabrini Green Homes stood. In a once impoverished community, St. Matthew was a prominent meeting place for the community. Today the church plans to keep serving amid massive gentrification. Pastor Rodney Walker is working on a plan for a new church inside a multi-story building that would include much-needed multi-income housing.

Pastor Jesus Molina serves Franklin Park UMC. He visions an organic multiplication movement. As a licensed local pastor, he mentors several other Lay Missioners to lead new faith communities. Several churches worship in this one building.

In Prairie Central District, the group visited Crossroads UMC in Bolingbrook. This unique church started in 2000, worshipping in a tent. Today Pastor Mike Hickok is working to create a permanent building.

The group prayed over a farm field in Shorewood that organizers are developing into a worship and community space.

The Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer, the district superintendent in the Prairie North District, joined the tour in this western part of the conference. First, they

prayed and visited Pastor Heewon Kim at the former Hilltop Ministry Center. Pastor Kim is in a discernment process with Harlem UMC, Evans UMC and New Life UMC.

Next, the group visited Brook Road UMC in Rockford. Rev. Violet Johnicker is leading the congregation to raise awareness of the social justice issues in the community. The church hosts both a Hispanic congregation and an African Swahili community. Martin Lee said, "The Swahili congregation is already gathering between 40-50 people. There is a population of more than 5,000 Swahili-only speaking people in the Rockford area." All three congregations work together in ministry.

The trip ended in the Prairie South District at 15 acres of farmland purchased by DeKalb First United Methodist Church to build a new building. The congregation will be moving out of a downtown building to a space closer to Northern Illinois University and the growing community of DeKalb. The Rev. Jonathon Crail said, "We are excited to build a facility that is adaptable, flexible and connected to the community. Martin Lee said there are great possibilities and the church is dreaming for the future.

Rev. Crail is also the chairperson of the CodeRed team. "What a blessing to tour churches and locations around the conference that hold so much possibility and potential for impactful ministry as we adapt to the new realities that surround us," said Crail. He went on to say, "I look forward to the new things God is doing among us."

As Martin Lee reflected on the tour, he said, "When I asked the group about what they heard from the visit in one word, it was 'Hope!' Yes, we experienced a sign of hope in the midst of the pandemic, seeing pastors being creative doing ministries in their unique context."

As members of the committee reflected on the ministries that they saw and prayed for, they all had a feeling of hope for the conference's future. Despite the many challenges of ministry, the pastors and congregations in all areas of the conference are following God's plan and stepping out on faith to



The CodeRed Team circles around Rev. Dennis Langdon praying for his church Trinity UMC in Chicago's Beverly neighborhood.

develop new and exciting ministries.

Robert Butler, church planter and Lead Pastor of the Center in Itasca, reflected on the trip and said,

"As a part of the tour, I was overwhelmed at the possibilities of bringing a little heaven to the neighborhoods we serve. I was reminded of all those saints who came before us and wondered why their dreams faded," Butler said. "I wonder about the churches moving from being the 'sent people of God' to becoming the people of a place. Did that move stifle the mission?" He went on to say, "I am keenly aware of our responsibility to apprentice, disciple and share God's vision."

The theme of the trip was prayer. The group prayed E.M. Bound's Power through Prayer – a prayer to ask the Holy Spirit to work through the people in ministry at each site.

Martin Lee summed up the importance of the trip. "As we all know, without planting new churches, the life span of our denomination will be drastically shorter," he said. "In my opinion, we must keep this in mind even as we face outcries about empty pews in existing congregations. We have to reimagine and refocus on evangelism to reach out to new people, more people, and more diverse people for the kingdom of God."

Eight people participated in the church trail: David Lagos Fonseca, Robert Butler, Harriette Cross, Jonathon Crail, Jarrod Severing, Keri Rainsberger, Victor Melad, and Martin Lee.

Need a coach by your side?

These last two years have been some of the hardest that any church leader has ever experienced. We've all tried to find different ways to get support – perhaps a clergy coach may be for you.

A grassroots group of NIC clergy has been meeting the last couple of years to discern how we can support our colleagues and coaching is one thing that has consistently come up. The group is working with the NIC Office of Congregational Development to create a prototype coaching ministry. We are intentionally starting small and

have a group of seven clergy who have gone through some initial training on how to be a coach.

Coaching is different from consulting, counseling or spiritual direction (as important as all of those are!). Here is one definition that may be helpful: "Coaching is a method of achieving set goals. The coach through dialogue helps the coachee (client) to correctly set a goal, to find the best way to achieve the goal and reveal hidden inner potential in a person. The coach does not say how to achieve success, but asks questions through which the client himself finds the solution to (their) own tasks."

If you're interested in having a coach and would like to apply and/or learn more about the commitment, let Christian Coon know, christian@urbanvillagechurch.org. It should be noted that these clergy are not certified coaches. They have done some initial training, but are volunteering their time to help and walk alongside and support their colleagues.

It's an understatement to say these are challenging times. Having someone ask supportive and thought-provoking questions as a way to guide your ministry may be a key for you to navigate a path.

March Events

12 NIC UMM Annual Meeting

8:30 a.m. Breakfast
9:30 a.m. Meeting/Worship/Communion
Location: Grace UMC, 3555 McFarland Rd., Rockford, IL. In person and livestreamed. Face masks required.

Guest Speaker Greg Arnold, United Methodist Men's new General Secretary.

Cost \$10. Free for pastors.



Please contact the church to reserve your spot at 815-637-4561.

19 Vital Partnerships Workshop

9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Registration fee: \$20 - lunch box provided

Location: First United Methodist Church, 503 N. Lily Creek Rd., Freeport, IL.

Speaker: Dirk Elliott, Director of Congregational Vibrancy and Leadership Development for the Michigan Conference

Churches come in all forms of health: some are healthy and growing, others are maintaining the status quo, and some are declining. But they all have one thing in common - they want to be fruitful and healthy. One way this can happen is through partnerships or mergers. Attend this workshop and explore new ways your church might become healthier through a merger.

Sponsored by the Office of Congregational Development and Redevelopment.

To register, visit umcnic.org/calendar/vital-partnership-workshop.

20 Five Day Academy for Spiritual Formation



EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION

Event date October 2-7.

Location: Siena Retreat Center
 5637 Erie Street Racine, WI 53402

Register Early. Enrollment is limited.

\$625.00 per person if you register before **March 20, 2022** - this includes tuition, private room and bath, and all meals.

Registration cost after that date is \$700.00 per person - \$100 non-refundable deposit is required with registration.

All registrations and payments are due by **July 15, 2022**.

Clergy and laity may qualify for limited scholarship funds.

To register visit, umcnic.org/calendar/five-day-academy.

2021 HOLIDAY GIFT DRIVE RECAP

1400

Kids and Youth Received Holiday Gifts

120

Volunteers

96

Individual Donors

27

Faith Donors

21

Corporate Donors

7

Community Donors

Thanks for giving to Kids Above All Holiday Gift Drive

Kids Above All's 2021 Holiday Gift Drive was a HUGE success thanks to our fabulous mission partners in the Northern Illinois Conference. Your generosity and kindness is truly the BEST gift of all. Our kids were beautifully blessed this Christmas through your stepping up to celebrate joy and hope this season. God bless you.

To volunteer, contact Deaconess Catherine Inserra, cinserra@kidsaboveall.org or 847-224-2870.



Get news from your district

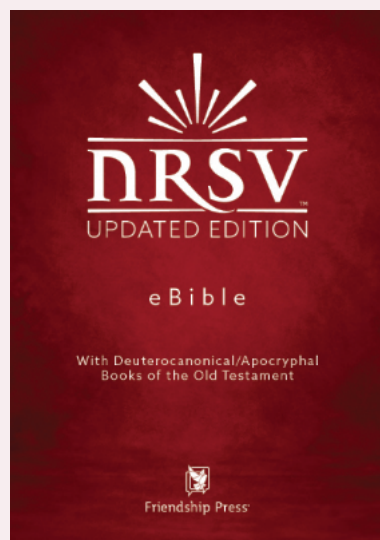
The NIC Communications team has updated the delivery of District eNewsletters and moved over to the Constant Contact email management program. What this means is that you can now manage your profile in Constant Contact to get both the weekly NIC eNews and the bi-weekly District eNews. You can also encourage others who might like to receive news and events from their district to sign up! You can choose your areas of interest and which email lists to join.

We strive not to bombard your inbox and hope to be sending you only timely and important information.

Please note, if you're also on the NIC eNews list and click "Unsubscribe," you will no longer receive, messages from the Bishop's office, the weekly eNews, Appointment Announcements or Sympathy Notices.

Visit umcnic.org/newslettersignup to sign up. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact us at communications@umcnic.org.

Update aims to make Bible translation more accurate



The NRSVue, or the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition Bible, is now available digitally after an extensive four year revision process.

The New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition eBible (NRSVue) is now available for purchase as an electronic version through the Word@Hand app. With new textual evidence, historical insights, and philological understandings, the NRSVue brings greater precision in interpreting Scripture today, according to Friendship Press.

With modern scholarship applied to ancient texts, the NRSVue Updated Edition is designed to help readers explore the meanings of ancient texts in light of the cultures that produced them with unprecedented readability, accessibility, and inclusivity.

The NRSVue makes about 12,000 substantive edits and 20,000 total changes in the Bible translation, which includes alterations in grammar and punctuation, according to Friendship Press. It is not a new translation, which would be a more extensive project.

"It's an update to the translation, so

that they could take care of things like making sure the grammar, tenses and punctuation are correct," said the Rev. Jean Hawxhurst, ecumenical staff officer for the United Methodist Council of Bishops. "And things like capitalizing Jewish holidays when that's appropriate. ... Then there's this other category of the updates that are philological, that have more to do with the meaning of words and how they change over time."

The NRSVue project, done in partnership by the National Council of Churches and Society of Biblical Literature, is intended for a mainstream audience, but also scholars. It's approved for Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. The NRSV Updated Edition will be available in hardcopy by a variety of publishers this May. Visit friendshippress.org for more information.



DYK

DID YOU KNOW?

The work is never done

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

It was a bright spring Sunday morning. As my family arrived for worship, I ran to the church kitchen on an errand. Turning to leave the room, our church custodian appeared in the doorway. I knew him as a gentle person and a good friend of my grandfather. Greeting him, he smiled, stepped forward and assaulted me. As quickly as he appeared, he was gone. I stood there shaken. As a teenager, I was confused, frightened, uncertain. What just happened. Who do I tell? Who would believe me? Would I be in trouble? The incident would break my grandfather's heart. I could hardly believe it myself.

My story is not unique. In 2021, 80,000 former Boy Scouts shared their stories of harassment and abuse, spanning 70 years of the program. The stories took place at camps, schools, churches, and community centers. These numbers are jarring, spanning decades of activity, serving as a sobering reminder that our work is never done.

For United Methodists, the work of providing Safe Sanctuaries (our denominational title for this focus) began in earnest in the 1990s. At that time, clergy began participating in mandated ethics and boundary training. By 2000 the annual conference began

encouraging background checks for lay volunteers and offering workshops on best practices. At the same time, churches were required to develop Safe Sanctuaries policies. By the 2010s, all churches had policies, and we advanced to using online tools for training and background checks. In 2016 the conference endorsed using the "Safe Gatherings" program to screen and train individual volunteers.

Over the years, our congregations and leadership have woven much of the best practices for protecting our children and youth into their routines. For many, the safeguards are now second nature. The two-adult rule (no adult alone with a minor), windows in classroom doors, background checks and volunteer training are all standard across our churches. Our work of providing "Safe Sanctuaries" has become part of the landscape, perhaps moving too far into the background. We have entered a decade of renewed awareness. Over the next few years, there will be an increasing emphasis on this work as we experience the deep scars of those now telling their stories.

In 2021 all clergy and assigned pastoral leaders of local churches participated in mandated clergy ethics and boundary training. More than 325 pastoral

leaders refreshed their roles and responsibilities, as they do every four years.

Surveys and tracking practices reveal there are more than 1,300 trained lay and staff volunteers in our local churches. Two hundred fifty-four of our churches are served by clergy trained through Safe Gatherings for volunteer work with children and youth. Additionally, 230 churches utilize Safe Gatherings for laity training and have one or more volunteers trained.

So what did I do on that sunny spring day? I stood in the church kitchen for a long-time playing the event over in my mind, trying to grasp the options and trying to understand what had just happened. From my vantage point, there wasn't much I could do. Share my experience with someone and risk not being believed or be believed and shatter our tight-knit community? I remained silent, as so many others have before me and after.

We are doing better. We talk about abuse. We train and screen, and openly address this evil. However, our work is never done. The year 2022 dawns as a season to renew and strengthen our efforts to be a place of safety for all those who trust us as we care for them.

Clergy Appointments and Retirements

Bishop John L. Hopkins announces the following clergy appointments and retirements for the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church, effective July 1, 2022 (unless otherwise noted):

Fall 2021

Kwan Sung Lim (Elder) to Leave of Absence. Effective September 15.

Hysang Shin (District Superintendent Supply) to Capron/Chemung (Prairie North). Effective August 1.

Megan Thompson (Elder) to Marseilles/Seneca: First (Prairie South District). Effective October 1.

Il Han You (Licensed Local Pastor) to Creston/Steward (Prairie South District). Effective October 15.

Bonny S. Roth (Full Deacon) to retirement from Evanston: First (Lake North District). Bonny became a Provisional Deacon in 2012 and Full Deacon in 2014. She served at Evanston: First as Pastor of Pastoral Care and Faith Formation. Effective November 17, 2021.

Reuel Talapian (Full Elder) to retirement from Evanston: Hemenway (Lake North District). Reuel transferred from the Philippine Conference and became a Full Elder in the Northern Illinois Conference in 2011. During his ministry, he served at Oak Park: St. John's, Chicago: West Ridge, Chicago: St. Matthew (Assoc.), and Evanston: Hemenway. Effective January 1.

Dawn Gardner (Licensed Local Pastor) to serve interim at Evanston: Hemenway (Lake North District) while remaining at Chicago: Mandell. Jan 1.

Carmen and Jizael Morales (District Superintendent Supply) to serve at Franklin Park: Living Waters NFC (Lake North District). Effective Jan. 1

Gerado Rodriguez (District Superintendent Supply) to serve at Franklin Park: Living Waters NFC Northside (Lake North District). Effective Jan. 1

January 2022

Max Kuecker (District Superintendent Supply) to serve interim at Chicago: Epworth/Granville (Lake North District). Max follows Don Guest who returns to retirement. Effective Feb. 1

Ivan Sarabia (District Superintendent Supply) to serve at Belvedere: Emerge (Prairie North District). Ivan follows Cris who has concluded his service. Effective Feb. 1

Jackie Moreno (District Superintendent Supply) to serve as a Lay Missioner to Franklin Park: Living Waters NFC O'Hare (Lake North District). Effective Feb 1.

Robert Campbell (Full Elder) to retirement from extension ministry as the Co-Director of Willow Wellness (Park Ridge, IL). Robert became a Probationary Elder in 1995 and a Full Elder in 1997. During his ministry, he served at Mokena, Freeport: First, Chicago: New Hope, and the Willow Wellness Center. Effective March 15.

Richard Fassig (Local Pastor) to retirement from

Millington/Harding/Norway/Serena (Prairie South). Richard became a Local Pastor in 2007. During his ministry, he served Chana, Rock Falls, Serena, Sheridan, Norway, Harding and Millington. Effective July 1.

Sharon Engert (Local Pastor) to retirement from Millbrook (Prairie South District). Sharon became a Local Pastor in 2009. During her ministry, she served at Lockport: Christ and Millbrook. Effective July 1.

Teri Lafferty (Local Pastor) to retirement from Plainfield: Sharon (Prairie Central District). Teri became a Local Pastor in 2010. During her ministry, she served at Mount Carroll, Rockford: Evans and Plainfield: Sharon. Effective July 1.

Catiana McKay (Full Elder) to retirement from Galena (Prairie North District). Catiana became a Probationary Elder in 2003 and Full Elder in 2007. During her ministry, she served at Addison: Good Samaritan, Chicago: United Church of Rogers Park and Galena. Effective July 1.

Pam Rossmiller (Full Elder) to retirement from Rockford: Grace (Prairie North District). Pam became a Provisional Elder in 2010 and Full Elder in 2012. During her ministry, she served at Kirkland: First and Rockford: Grace. Effective July 1.

Jonathan Singleton (Full Elder) to retirement from Stockton: Calvary (Prairie North District). Jonathan transferred from the North

Indiana Conference and became a Full Elder in the Northern Illinois Conference in 1998. During his ministry, he served at Mendota: Zion, Sterling: Trinity, Winthrop Harbor: North Prairie, Freeport: Embury, Sandwich and Stockton: Calvary. Effective July 1.

Cheri Stewart (Local Pastor) to retirement from Ottawa: First (Prairie South District). Cheri became a Local Pastor in 2006. During her ministry, she served at Suydam, Cortland, Earlville, the LETS Connection (Leland, Earlville, Triumph, Suydam), Prophetstown and Ottawa: First. Effective July 1.

Michael Jones (Full Elder) to retirement from extension ministry as Director of Church Properties Re-Imagined (Chicago, IL). Michael became a Probationary Elder in 2007 and Full Elder in 2010. During his ministry, he served at Stockton: Wesley, Kent, Willow, Dixon: First, Shannon: Bethel and Church Properties Re-Imagined where he will continue to serve in retirement. Effective August 1.

Seamus Enright (Provisional Elder) to Ottawa: First (Prairie South District) from Reynolds (Prairie South District). Seamus follows Cheri Stewart, who is retiring.

Job Openings

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

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How to Contact Us

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 Communications staff.

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