

Interim Bishop John L. Hopkins and a handful of annual conference committee members, staff and production crew stand by behind the scenes for the 182nd Northern Illinois Annual Conference held virtually through a Zoom webinar.

2021 Annual Conference makes a way through virtual experience

By Anne Marie Gerhardt, Dir. of Communications

From the comfort of home, coffee shop, office, or church, many of the more than 600 participants of the 182nd session of the Northern Annual Illinois Conference, with the theme "Jesus Makes a Way," made their way onto Zoom to take part in two days of business, voting, reports, Bible study, and worship services from July 16-17, 2021. For the second year, COVID-19 restrictions restricted in-person meetings, making it necessary to meet virtually. A special thanks to GNTV for production assistance and Barrington UMC for hosting all those behind the scenes.

This was the first time presiding in the Northern Illinois Annual Conference for Bishop John L. Hopkins, who came out of retirement to serve as interim bishop. He started January 1 in the middle of the pandemic and became accustomed to meeting via Zoom from his home in Indianapolis, Ind.

"I feel close to many of you because you have Zoomed your way into my heart," said Bishop Hopkins. "Amazingly, I have met with many of you in meetings, conference events, district gatherings, and small groups. I have had the opportunity to learn about you and your churches; listen to the stories you tell about the heart and soul of this Conference; and feel your love of Jesus and some of your anxiety about the future."

Hopkins delivered his Episcopal Address in two parts, focusing on what he's perceived as the Conference's strengths and challenges. "Most of the realities I have discovered are incredibly positive. For example, we have gifted and dedicated clergy and laity, we take a strong stand for equity and justice with full inclusion of everyone, our local churches are doing amazing frontline ministry, the conference's new structure under the Annual Conference Shepherding Team is streamlined

and productive, and we continue to have a devotion to missions (the Northern Illinois Conference gave \$418,199 and supported 18 missionaries through the Advance in 2020)."

Bishop Hopkins addressed the reality of a continual decline in apportionment payments, concern about jurisdictional realignment of conferences (if we share a bishop, the Northern Illinois Conference will not "merge" with another conference – at some future date two conferences can vote to merge if they desire), and concern about a significant shift in the denomination.

"The Church needs to be unified and empowered," said Hopkins. "The Church also needs to be clear about its mission: to make disciples; to love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves." Hopkins said it's important to equip local churches and ministry settings to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

"Our need to focus resources on the local church is not only about conference programs, budget, and strategy. It is about us," Hopkins concluded. "Can we focus our attention on the people in our communities who need to know about the God we serve? That is the shift we need to make. And that focus cannot be given over to a conference committee or task force. Each of us is responsible!"

Legislation

The Annual Conference voted virtually on several pieces of legislation including support for marginalized communities negatively impacted by COVID-19, advocating for the rights of Palestinian children and families, humanizing criminal justice, reorganization and streamlining of the program areas in the Conference, and a revision of the standing rules to reinstate legislative sections at

Annual Conference beginning in 2022. We lifted the following eight church closings in prayer: Beach Park; York House, Northbrook; Glenbrook Korean, Ringwood, Wood Dale; Community, Chicago; Fernwood, Lisle; Faith, Alfolkey; Bethel, and Elkhorn (note: these closings are not all from one year as the pandemic delayed action on some).

Laity Session

The NIC's three Co-Lay Leaders hosted an evening Zoom meeting on July 15 to kick off Annual Conference, which included a time for conversation and learning. Several local churches from around the Conference highlighted their new and creative ministries and a tour of the NIC website with tips on finding relevant information. To watch the recording and for presentations, visit umcnic.org/laity.

Bible Study

Bishop Julius C. Trimble from the Indiana Conference, who at one point donned a Chicago Cubs hat as a nod to his Northern Illinois roots, led two Bible study sessions encouraging an "attitude of gratitude." He helped us reflect on this year's scripture verse, Matthew 14:13-21 and Jesus feeding the 5,000. The recordings are available to watch and download at umcnic.org/AC2021.

Worship Services

Bishop Hee-Soo Jung from the Wisconsin Conference, and former NIC Bishop, delivered the message titled, "A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership" during the Memorial Service as we remembered clergy, spouses, and laity who have passed in the last year, including the more than 600,000 of our fellow Americans and more than 3.5 million of our brothers and sisters worldwide who died from the Coronavirus. The Retirement

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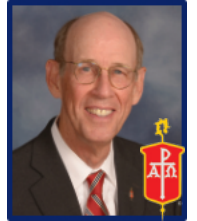
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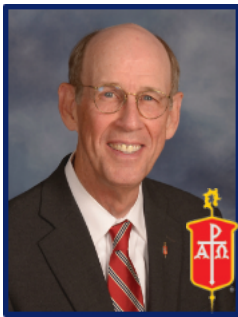
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Photo Credit: World Triathlon

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FROM THE BISHOP:

Questions about the future of The United Methodist Church

Through this column over several months, I want to discuss some crucial bedrock issues that will determine the future of our church at every level. In each issue of *The Reporter* the last several months, I have been presenting key questions that each of us must understand to help us move forward together in ministry. Each question has more history than I can tell and more nuances than I can explore. I simply want to engage you in understanding the importance of these questions and let you make your own decisions as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Question 1: "Is the Church a Movement or an Institution?"

Question 2: "Is the Church a Covenant Community or a Voluntary Association?"

Question 3: "Is our mission focus Geographical or Generational?"

Question 4: "Is our emphasis on Clergy or Lay Ministry?"

"He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. His purpose was to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ. until we all reach the unity of faith and knowledge of God's son. God's goal is for us to become mature adults—to be fully grown, measured by the standard of the fullness of Christ." Ephesians 4:11-13 (CEB)

In the early years of the United Methodist movement, clergy were itinerant. They traveled from place to place, taking the good news of Jesus Christ to people, baptizing converts, identifying local leaders, organizing small groups of disciples, and moving on with the assurance they would return for more preaching and teaching. Our annual United Methodist Charge Conference is a remnant of the Quarterly Conference held when a circuit rider would come back to preach, teach, and check on how the local leaders were doing.

What happened when the pastor left to travel to another village? The local lay leadership started organizing and running the church until the pastor returned. They were inspired, equipped, and empowered by the pastor who had served among them. They took responsibility for sharing the faith, forming new disciples, and overseeing the church. When the pastor returned, they were expected to report on what God was doing among them.

In my assignment to the East Ohio Conference in 2004, I discovered a church that dropped so much in attendance that a previous bishop appointed a pastor to them who was also appointed to three other churches. That meant they did not have a pastor at their church except once a month. The church members were not happy.

For almost a year, people did not do much except show up when the pastor came. One day some members decided they did not need a pastor to have singing, prayer, Bible study, and Sunday School. A few people took responsibility for reaching out to people in the community and leading the small groups. Eventually, the church started to grow so much they requested a full-time pastor to be appointed. However, the church requested the bishop appoint a pastor who would teach and inspire them but not take away the effective leadership of the members that had grown the church.

Do you think our emphasis should be on clergy or lay ministry? How do we "equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ"?

Over the last century, we have increasingly become a specialized society. From medicine to manufacturing to education, we have people who know more about their area than the general public. Most of us today are specialized in our studies and our employment. The downside of this specialization is that we have given over responsibility to specialists. We have given health over to medicine, education over to schooling, and spiritual formation over to church programs.

Clergy are expected to make things happen, show results, and be held accountable for their work in a church. Most clergy work hard to take responsibility and work to make the church run well. Unfortunately, church members sometimes drop their children off at programs and are reluctant to serve their church because they are so busy with whatever they specialize in. If a church hires a youth director, they expect that person to grow the youth group when their actual job is to help the members grow the youth work. Consequently, members often defer to clergy to lead. Likewise, clergy leaders want to do well and sometimes micromanage work they could delegate to

the members.

About 15 years ago, I was flying out of the small international airport in Rochester, Minnesota, where the Mayo Clinic is located. The plane was small and only going to the big airport in Minneapolis-St. Paul. I struck up a conversation with the woman next to me who happened to be a Mayo nurse and active in a Roman Catholic Church. When she found out I was a United Methodist bishop, I learned most Catholics hold their bishops in high esteem.

I asked about her church, and she said it was going just great. Then she added, "We have a new, older priest." I joked that many of our churches want a young pastor with a family who has 40 years of experience. Then she said something that touched me personally. She said, "We had a couple of young priests who saw our parish as a project to climb up the church ladder. Our new priest is non-anxious, allows us to participate more, and teaches us how to take responsibility for our faith."

The demand for clergy to succeed in growing the church can impede their ability to encourage church members to initiate ministries. It also can reduce a church's ministry to the programs it offers and inadvertently encourage members to be consumers of ministry rather than producers of ministry. The church becomes the focus rather than the ministries of its members.

When I ask people about their ministry, they often tell me about some committee they're serving on at church. Then I ask them what they are doing for Jesus beyond their church work. Usually, I get a puzzled look. I believe clergy are gifted, called, trained, and appointed to "equip the saints" for their ministries. The church is the base camp for each of us to be in ministry every day—lay and clergy!



Donations overflow the mission truck

By Larry Dunlap-Berg, Conference Board of Global Ministries

Wow! After driving more than 600 miles in two days to pick up over 14,400 pounds of the most-needed items for the Midwest Mission Distribution Center (MMDC), driver Ramon Ortiz, MMDC's Operations Assistant, turned around and picked up another truckload of medical equipment! Isn't it amazing what we can accomplish when we have a common vision, share our stories about serving in mission and unite in working together?

The Conference Board of Global Ministries is grateful for the dedication, enthusiasm and energy the MMDC staff brings during our annual conference Fill-the-Truck Mission Challenge each year. We are fortunate and thank them for our partnership to share God's love and compassion through missional outreach with those in need, locally and globally.

In addition, we offer a special thank you to the churches in each district that served as the 16 collection sites, to the staff members and volunteers at those sites who went the "extra mile" to make everything work, and to everyone who participated by donating items to nearly triple our goal for this year's challenge.

Just one example, Rochelle UMC reported that their area collected more than 12 boxes/bags filled with items, medical supplies (including a wheelchair, walkers, and a bath chair), fabric, sewing machines, and much more.

To watch a thank you video from MMDC, visit umcnic.org/2021missionchallenge.



▲ Lanark UMC volunteers loaded donated supplies from the area on the Midwest Mission truck on July 6.

Donations poured into Rochelle UMC including 12 plus boxes/bags, medical supplies (including a wheelchair, walkers, and a bath chair), fabric, sewing machines and much more. ▶

Churches organize do-it-yourself rallies against racism

By Anne Marie Gerhardt, Dir. of Communications



Members of First UMC in Oak Park gather on the church's front steps to participate in the first conference-wide DIY Rally Against Racism event on July 18 following the Northern Illinois Annual Conference.



First UMC in Mendota offers free treats and sandwiches and collected donations for the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race at its Sunday rally in the town square.

Stepping outside their church buildings with signs and noisemakers, many United Methodists across the Northern Illinois Conference participated in the first-ever DIY Rally Against Racism conference-wide campaign on Sunday, July 18, and several others are planning events later this summer.

First UMC in Oak Park reported that 30 people rallied after Sunday's worship service outside on the church steps and then lined the sidewalks. In addition to the purchased signs reading, "United Methodists Stand Against Racism," they displayed homemade signs reading, "HONK for Racial Justice," "Praying for Racial Justice," and "LOVE your neighbor as yourself; ALL your neighbors."

This rally was not the church's first demonstration against racism in this community. Still, organizers say it was a special opportunity to join with all the Northern Illinois Conference in a joint UMC witness.

"Lines of cars on Oak Park Avenue slowed, honked, gave a thumbs up, and one passenger even blew us a kiss," said Liz Gracie, First UMC member. "Before we left, the newly appointed Rev. Adonna Reid challenged us to start planning a follow-up activity."

Members at First UMC in Mendota also rallied after Sunday worship at the town square Veteran's Park and raised nearly \$400 for the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race.

"We wanted to be part of the denominational effort to raise awareness of the sin of racism," said Rev. Mary Bohall. "Because we are a rural community, we knew it was important to design an event that suited our context. We wanted it to be educational, motivating, and low-risk because it was our first time as a church directly addressing matters of race. We believe that loving our neighbors the way we're called to do so means learning to hear the cry of our neighbors, hold ourselves accountable, and work compassionately to participate in bringing them justice."

Around 40 members of First UMC in Elmhurst gathered on the church lawn on July 18, located on a busy street in town, to rally against racism.

"With our United Methodists Stand Against Racism banners proudly and prominently displayed, we joined together to sing songs, listen to speakers, and sign the United Methodists Stand Against Racism pledge," said Lisa Rogers, First UMC's Dir. of Youth Ministries. "Our speakers covered topics including the history of racism in the UMC, an overview of the anti-racism initiatives of the Northern Illinois Conference and our congregation, next steps, and local election information."

In addition, organizers set up a children's table with crafts promoting peace, justice, and anti-racism along with a library and resource table offering anti-racism materials that anyone could check out. "The event was an excellent opportunity for members of our congregation and community to recognize the great work United Methodists are doing and to recommit to Standing Against Racism," said Rogers.

Other churches that participated included North Shore UMC in Glencoe and Friendship UMC in Bolingbrook, which reported that quite a few cars blew horns during their rally. Someone suggested the church do this every second Sunday after church.

Grace UMC in Lake Bluff held their rally Sunday morning on July 18 after their morning worship service with about 13 people in attendance. "We held an open discussion, heard a report on the church's major initiative to assist our neighbor communities, discussed news topics concerning race and what we might do in the future to combat race," said Grace UMC member Len Gusafson. St. Andrew UMC in Carol Stream is planning a future event.

If your church would still like to participate, visit umcnic.org/rallyagainstracism for more details.

From the Cover (continued from page 1)

Service celebrated those clergy and local pastors who have been a gift to the church, offering leadership to congregations and ministries beyond the church. Combined, this class has served 362 years.

Bishop's Appeal Offering

This year's special Bishop's Appeal offering totaled more than \$25,000 and went toward the United Methodist Committee on Relief's COVID-19 relief efforts worldwide.

Statistics

During an unprecedented year affected by shutdowns, the Northern Illinois Conference saw 2020's membership drop to 74,030. This is down 2,432 from 2019's numbers of 76,462. While in-person worship was impossible most of the year, churches reported more than 26,607 people joined them for online worship. During the first three months of the year, when the pandemic was spreading, but shutdowns were not in place, they reported 17,406 in-person worshippers. Professions of faith and

reaffirmations totaled 605, down from 858 in 2019. Most churches halted small groups and missionary teams due to the social distancing and health safety measures. During the periods when these could occur, the number of adults and young adults in small groups was at 19,332, down from 24,567. Sunday School attendance dropped from 5,814 to 3,629, while worshippers engaged in mission dropped from 15,594 to 10,103.

Upcoming Dates

Keep on your calendar October 1 for the 2021 Service of Ordination and Commissioning (limited in-person, also livestreamed) and the October 2 business session (held via Zoom) to address the budget, nominations, and the United Methodist Foundation of the NIC's annual meeting. The 2022 Annual Conference will be held June 8-9 and return in person at the Renaissance Schaumburg Hotel and Convention Center.

For updates and more on the October session, visit umcnic.org/AC2021.

In Memoriam Active Clergy

Joseph T. Kim

Retired Clergy

Robert E. Ash
Aaron Louis Johnson
William Blomberg
George Ewing Ogle
Linda Lou Bacon Eller
Mason E. Scholl
Barbara Diane Gillham
Raymond Thomas Vosburgh
Seymour Halford
Thomas John Walker
Roland Harkleroad
James McKendree Wall

Retired Clergy Spouses

Priscilla Darby Lovell
Brenda F. Dye

Surviving Spouses

Eleanor Jane L. Rogers
Ruth C. Brown
Helen Naumann
Anna Hergert

NIC Staff

Woody Bedell

Lay Members of the Conference

Gerald Hayes
Deji (Aydodeji) Sanyaolu

Retiring Class of 2021 (Years of Service)

Timothy J. Biel Sr. (11)
Sherrie Lowly (22.25)
Young Eun Choi (35)
Chung-Nam Kwak (32)
Richard S. Darr (23)
Terry McDorman (6)
Judith Marie Giese (32)
Darneather Murph-Heath (25)
Barbara L. Good (34)
Becky Nicol (8.5)
Donna C. Hoffman (9.5)
Pastor Janice G. Shaulis (7.75)
Christine S. Hoffmeyer (38.5)
Dwight A. Stewart (41.5)
Michael Scott Stoner (36.5)

2021 Commissioning and Ordination Class

Commissioned Elder

Ji Eun (Mori) Siegel
Elizabeth Rutherford

Full Deacon

Elizabeth Evans
Grant Swanson
Christine Hides

Full Elder

Violet Johnicker
Juyeon Jeon
Hope Chernich
Sun Ah Kang

The Service for Ordination and Commissioning will be held October 1, 2021 at 6 p.m. at Barrington UMC with limited attendance. It will be livestreamed on the NIC Facebook page and YouTube channel.

Johnicker begins new role with Rockford Urban Ministries



Rev. Violet Johnicker, senior pastor at Brooke Road UMC, leads a prayer and reflection at a vigil calling for an end to gun violence in Rockford on July 25. She is serving as the part-time Associate Director of Rockford Urban Ministries.

The Rev. Violet Johnicker, pastor at Brooke Road United Methodist Church in Rockford, became the new part-time Associate Director of Rockford Urban Ministries (RUM) in July. She will stay 3/4 time at the church and 1/4 time at RUM where she will focus on organizational development and broadening RUM's impact in the community. "Thanks to the support of generous donors, we will ensure that Rockford Urban Ministries can continue to reach new generations and new regions with our longtime commitment to social justice work," said RUM's Executive Director Stanley Campbell, who will stay on full time.

Rev. Johnicker has a Master of Divinity from McCormick Seminary as well as a Master of Public Policy from Adler and a BA in nonprofit management and is trained in community organizing. Before serving Brooke Road UMC she was at St. Pauls UCC in Chicago and has experience as an executive director of community and economic development nonprofits in Kenosha, Wisconsin and her hometown of Waukegan, Illinois. She is presently a board member of the Rockford Arts Council, Bridge Ministries,

Remedies, and the United Methodist Foundation of the Northern Illinois Conference.

"People of faith have a strong tradition of world-changing justice work, and it's a joy and an honor to be part of Rockford Urban Ministries who has been a leader in this movement since 1962. My calling is to work with those most impacted by injustice as we embody the good news that a better world is not only possible, but promised to us as we work alongside God to build love for neighbor into our public policies," said Rev. Johnicker.

Johnicker has already hit the ground running. On July 25, she joined Rockford Urban Ministries supporters and churches from across Rockford for a prayer vigil calling for an end to gun violence and advocating for policies that fund peace. Johnicker led the prayer and reflection with calls to action. For more information, visit rockfordurbanmin.org or find RUM on social media at [@RockfordUM](https://www.facebook.com/RockfordUM).

Faith-based movie premieres at Elgin church

By Amanda Marrazzo*

In the newly released movie "For Prophet," Damen Fisher is continually criticized, told he "sucks" at just about everything, and called an "idiot" by a relentless demon toting a video camera.

The light of the scene softens as Fisher is greeted with a loving and cheerful "God morning, Prophet" from his personally assigned-from-God Archangel Raphael.

The very much relatable Fisher experiences an array of human emotions. At the same time, his spirit is pulled between good and evil in his all-too-common human struggles to save his marriage, his business, and a homeless shelter at the fictional St. Raphael's Crisis Center in Mt. Zion, Illinois.

The movie, written, directed, and produced by Mark Stewart Iverson and his company MSI Films, was screened publicly for the first time by about 250 audience members Sunday, July 18, at the First United Methodist Church in Elgin.

Iverson chose First UMC in Elgin for the premiere because he shot several movie scenes in various rooms of the church and at locations throughout the city during the summer of 2019.

The audience laughed at the quirky personality of the Archangel Raphael as she (or "they" as the angel says "they" are non-binary) blissfully appeared and reappeared – each time agitating the demon and making him disappear. Because Archangel Raphael only speaks the language of love, the audience chuckled as she fumbled her way through the human language, expressed her love for the smell of gas and oil, and the amazement of tears and laughter.

In the struggle to win Fisher's faith and his surrender to "the Most High," the archangel questions why it is so easy for humans to believe the thoughts and feelings the demon spews but not the loving word of God.

"God is love," the archangel tells Fisher, repeatedly insisting, "Hear with your ears."

As the movie unfolds, to the demon's enjoyment, Fisher

agonizes over all the bad things in life, including a corrupt city council trying to shut down the crisis center and the death of his father, a doctor who sought to cure cancer only to die from the disease himself. The demon tells Fisher God is not good and that he does not love him.

Throughout the movie, which includes original music scores, local actors, and beautiful shots of Elgin, the battle of good and evil continues engaging the audience with very true-to-life, faith-testing scenarios.

Ultimately, the audience sees God and Fisher win, and the demon and his camera drop to the ground in agony.

Iverson lives in Arizona with his wife but grew up in Hoffman Estates, Ill., and attended Our Saviour's UMC in Schaumburg. He said he wanted to write a movie that is a good, character-driven movie first, that also carries a message of faith. He said God put the idea for this movie in his heart and led him to Elgin to film it.

He wants to show people it is OK to laugh while also experiencing the message of faith and Spirit. He hopes to appeal to audiences that "love God and love laughter."

Iverson, 34, is currently searching for a distributor for the film, which he hopes to see carve out a sub-genre for moviegoers. Sadly, at least one distributor told him they don't put faith and comedy together.

The job of a Christian is to evangelize to all people, but especially to those who are not in the church, he said.

"First and foremost is to tell the stories in my heart and hope that brings people to Spirit," he said.

Longtime church member and treasurer Duane Werth said the use of humor to share a story of faith is not a problem for him.

"We are built in God's image," Werth said. "God has a sense



Mark Stewart Iverson takes questions from the audience who came to see the premiere of his movie "For Prophet" at First UMC in Elgin on July 18. The movie was mainly filmed in Elgin and at the church in 2019. Photo credit: Gil Feliciano

of humor. There is nothing wrong with having some fun."

First UMC Pastor Rev. Felicia LaBoy said Iverson's film teaches the church it must "evangelize to the world, not just other Christians."

LaBoy said Iverson's movie does everything right in that it shows Archangel Raphael never gives up on Fisher no matter how frustrated and angry he gets and how hard the demon pushes his influence over him. She noted how not one time did a pastor encounter Fisher on his journey. Iverson's characters were regular people, including a drug addict who helped lead Fisher to faith. The movie shows "God will use anybody" to bring someone to Him, she said.

"How many people today are struggling with 'what am I doing?'" she said. "Especially, after the year we just had. It takes 33 touches to bring someone to Christ, and (referring to the movie) what a wonderful way to touch."

To access the trailer, visit forprophetfilm.com.

*Amanda Marrazzo is a freelance journalist who lives in the northwest suburb of Algonquin. She's been a professional writer/reporter for 25-plus years with 17 of those years as a reporter for the Chicago Tribune.

Clergy peer program grows this fall

Anti-Racism work is difficult and sometimes lonely work. Clergy find themselves in a unique situation when it comes to encountering congregations, friends, and family who have varying degrees of involvement or understanding around this sensitive topic. This, in part, is the reason for the the NIC Anti-Racism Task Force's development of CPRES, or the Clergy Peer Reflection and Engagement Series.

In Fall of 2020, the CPRES program was piloted to a smaller group and held all sessions online through Zoom. Some participants continue to meet as an accountability group, offering support. In fall of 2021, we will roll out the full version of this program with some improvements. This will still be a time of deep discussion, healing, and relationship building as we meet together and online.

The program will begin with a 3-day, 2-night retreat at the Loyola Ecology Retreat Center in Woodstock, Ill., followed by subsequent sessions through the Zoom platform. For the other sessions, you will be able to choose from either Tuesdays from 10:30 a.m. -12 p.m., or Thursdays from 3-4:30 p.m. We will have discussions on various topics as well

continued on page 7, see Peer Program

High school students spend summer in Justice Camp

Organizers for the first Northern Illinois Conference Justice Camp (JC) say it's been an amazing experience for United Methodist high school students from across the denomination this summer to learn about racial justice from different perspectives. The last day for JC is Aug. 8 with a time for reflection and discussion about ways to move forward. Students have virtually visited Chicago, Montgomery, AL, and Tulsa, OK.

The camp kicked off June 13 with a visit to the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago. Dr. Kim Dulaney, DuSable Museum's Director of Education and Programs, walked virtual and in-person participants around the museum and focused on its history as well as what students can do to "stand up against racism." She talked about the lives of the founder, Dr. Margaret Burroughs, Mayor Harold Washington, Zora Neal Hurston, and many others sharing the importance of using our collective voices to speak up against racism.

"The participants have been enriched and empowered in their faith walk to have discussions as it relates to their faith and how to think through some of these challenging questions around racism," said Annual Conference Shepherding Team Project Manager Amania Drane.

In partnership with United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) and the UMC Native American Comprehensive Plan (NACP), the NIC Anti-racism Task Force has not only reached students but has had students participating from New York, Pennsylvania, and the Chickasaw and Comanche nations in Oklahoma. To watch a video that was prepared for the JC students to better understand and connect with Indigenous students, visit umcnic.org/justicecamp.

Should you have questions about participating in Justice Camp in 2022, please contact Amania Drane at adrane@umcnic.org.



Justice Camp kicked off in June at the DuSable Museum in Chicago for the only in-person visit. Students from across the country participated in other virtual trips throughout the summer to Montgomery, Alabama and Tulsa, Oklahoma.



Dr. Kim Dulaney, DuSable Museum's Education Director, gives a tour of the exhibits to both in-person and virtual participants focusing on how students can "stand up against racism."



Kevin McDowell realizes his dream of competing in the Olympics on the USA Triathlon team. Photo credit: World Triathlon

Local triathlete takes sixth in Olympics

By Anne Marie Gerhardt, NIC Dir. of Communications

First-time U.S. Olympian Kevin McDowell is a hometown champion after making history at the Summer Olympics coming in sixth place in the men's individual triathlon on July 26 in Tokyo, earning the highest-ever finish in this event by a U.S. man at the Olympic Games.

McDowell, 29, is from Geneva, Ill., and started attending Flowing Forth UMC in Aurora (formerly Flowing Grace UMC) when he was in high school, said his former pastor and Prairie Central District Superintendent Rev. Jeffrey Bross.

"He came on his own to church as a high school kid and at the time was the number one rated triathlete in the world," said Bross. "He was faithful and went around telling his story about faith and God's work in his life. His family followed him and started coming to church, so he evangelized."

The McDowell family later moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado where Kevin attended college and

currently trains, but Bross says Kevin often visits when he's back home.

Road to Olympics

A cancer diagnosis ten years ago nearly sidelined the triathlete, who had won numerous medals and was named USA Triathlon Junior Athlete of the Year in 2009 and 2010.

"I remember asking the doctors 'am I going to live and what's the prognosis?'" McDowell shared in a video feature of Tokyo Athletes. "When I learned it was Hodgkin's lymphoma, we had a little celebration because it's one of the most curable cancers."

Despite the difficult chemotherapy treatments that were taking a toll on his body, McDowell fought back and continued to train with support from his family, church connections, and a cancer charity called Cal's Angels, which grants wishes, raises awareness, and funds research to help kids fighting cancer.

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BACK TO SCHOOL BACKPACK DRIVE



JULY-SEPTEMBER

Kids Above All's Back-to-School Backpack Drive is here! Each year Kids Above All partners with members of the community, as well as our faith, corporate and community partners to make sure the school-aged kids in our programs have what they need to succeed this upcoming year. Donations will be collected through September 1, 2021. In-person donations are welcome and for volunteer opportunities, contact Deaconess Catherine Inserra, cinserra@kidsabovall.org.

For more information, visit kidsabovall.org.

North Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops calls special session

In accordance with ¶521.1 and ¶521.3 of *The Book of Discipline* of The United Methodist Church, the North Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops will convene a special session of the North Central Jurisdictional Conference November 11-13, 2021 in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The conference is expected to begin on Thursday morning and conclude by noon on Saturday.

In accordance with ¶521.3 “the delegates to a special session of the jurisdictional conference shall be the delegates last elected by each annual conference.” The delegates to this special session will be those who were elected to attend the regular session of the jurisdictional conference scheduled for 2020 but now postponed to 2022.

The College of Bishops is calling this special session of the jurisdictional conference for the following purposes:

- To worship and pray together;
- To hold a memorial service remembering those bishops and bishops’ spouses who have died since our last session of the jurisdictional conference;

- To celebrate the retirements of Bishop Bruce Ough and Bishop Sally Dyck;
- To receive an episcopal address;
- To receive reports on work being done in our jurisdiction and annual conferences on dismantling racism and to consider how we might further this essential work in our jurisdiction and its annual conferences;
- To utilize the processes being developed by the Connectional Table and other denominational leaders, including jurisdictional leaders, to discuss the future of The UMC, such discussion could include the development of a covenant for living together as The United Methodist Church in the coming months, regionalization in the future of The United Methodist Church, the future of jurisdictions in The United Methodist Church, and the future work of the North Central Jurisdiction;
- To receive reports from the NCJ Committee on the Episcopacy, the NCJ Episcopal Leadership Task Force

and other appropriate persons on the future shape of episcopal leadership including episcopal areas, and to engage in a conversation about the future deployment of bishops and the role of bishops in The United Methodist Church.

In accordance with ¶521.4, “a called session of the jurisdictional conference cannot transact any other business than that indicated in the call.” The jurisdictional conference will not be organized so as to receive petitions submitted in advance. Resolutions may develop from the work done in the specified conversations convened during the special session. Any petitions or resolutions proposed during the special session will be voted upon in accordance with the rules of procedure of the North Central Jurisdiction and Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised 12th Edition.

In calling this special session of the North Central Jurisdictional Conference the College of Bishops hopes that we might engage in robust, thoughtful, grace-filled and prayerful conversations about our denomination and its future.



“Raising Our Voices” for Illinois Families and Children

United Voices for Children (UVC) will host “Raising Our Voices,” an online event on August 11 to celebrate agency partners, honor Northern Illinois Conference child advocates, and thank their supporters. Organizers also will highlight how supporters can get involved through advocacy, financial support and working with lawmakers to protect the most vulnerable of their constituents.

As part of the event, UVC has set a goal of raising \$7,000 around the event to help care for the children. Visit giveumc.org anytime to donate and support the heroes at Kids Above All, MYSI Inc. and Rosecrance, as well as the advocacy work of United Voices for Children. You may also mail a check to: United Voices for Children, 77 W. Washington Street, Suite 1820, Chicago, IL 60602. Be sure to write “Raising Our Voices” in the memo line.

Recognize advocates with annual awards

In addition to thanking donors and the churches who support UVC through Fifth Sunday offerings, “Raising Our Voices” will also honor the annual award winners who were nominated for their extraordinary work in advocating for children and families in Illinois.

The **2021 Rev. Margaret Ann Williams Award**, named for the former Associate Executive of Church Relations at Marcy Newberry who served on the UVC Board of Directors for 33 years, goes to Carol Risenhoover and Minju

Cindy Oh. Risenhoover, a member of Rockford: Centennial has volunteered for 27 years at the church’s Saturday Kids Club, serving as the coordinator and teaching, nurturing and advocating for the welfare and well-being of children in the community. Oh, a member of DeKalb: First, is a junior at Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy in Aurora and has dedicated nearly five years to serving children, youth and families in her community. Her work includes two years as a high school writing tutor and as a tutor for low income families, three years as a Crop Hunger Walk participant raising funds and working to end poverty in poor families, and two years supporting the Gordon Foundation collecting holiday gifts for children in Chicago area foster families.

The **2021 Bishop Jesse DeWitt Award**, is named for the NIC bishop from 1980 to 1988 whose greatest passion was to educate and inform local churches about legislation and issues impacting the lives of children. This year’s award goes to co-winners Rev. Jeremiah Lee (Naperville: Community) and four young adult leaders of NIC’s Justice Generation, a racial justice learning and action program of the NIC Anti-Racism Task Force: Nura Zaki, Emma Trevor, Jenny Kirkpatrick and Emerson Jordan-Wood.

Deaconess Catherine Inserra, Kids Above All Manager of Faith and Community Relations, said these awards can be life changing. “When I received my UVC award in 2019, it confirmed God’s calling in my life and where I wanted to

devote my energies and skills,” she said.

Inspiring speakers headlining the event

Four heroic leaders will also join UVC on August 11 to share their insights for advocacy moving forward. Deacon Kathy Wellman (Naperville: Wesley) from the Northern Illinois Conference Disabilities Ministry will inspire with her efforts to meet the needs of ability-challenged individuals during the pandemic. Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer, Prairie North District Superintendent, will discuss the needs of children in agencies as we transition from a full-on pandemic and creating a new normal. We also welcome David Gomel, President and CEO of Rosecrance Health Network, to share his perspective on what the future looks like for the children served by his organization. Finally, Rev. Norval Brown (Cary UMC) will inspire attendees to take action and join with agencies, partners and UVC to serve the children!

UVC board members will also share their passion for the board’s work and inspiring all attendees to engage in advocacy for children in accordance with their gifts and skills. Finally, the UVC Board is excited to reveal their new logo that captures their mission and vision in a fresh, new way.

To learn more about the event and this year’s award winners, visit unitedvoicesforchildren.org.

Triathlete (continued from page 5)

He returned to elite competition, making his senior-level World Cup debut. He would go on to win gold at the 2014 FISU World University Triathlon Championships, and silver at the Pan American Games Toronto 2015, according to his USA Triathlon bio. McDowell is now a seven-time World Triathlon Cup medalist and recently celebrated 10 years cancer-free.

His Olympic dream that he’s had since age 11 finally came true when he was selected by USA Triathlon to compete in this summer’s games.

“I wanted to race like that little Kevin who has always had this fire and grit,” McDowell said. “I wanted to race with no regrets and just be proud out there. Everyone has been saying how proud they were, so I was thinking, ‘Let me give back to what everyone has given to me through this

journey.’ I just want to go and put on a show and make everyone proud. I went out and gave it all I had.”

The race was exciting to watch. McDowell exited the swim in 47th place, fifth from the back, but used a strong bike to ride his way into contention. He clocked a time of 1 hour, 45 minutes, 54 seconds. His sixth-place finish is one better than four-time U.S. Olympian Hunter Kemper’s seventh-place showing at the Beijing 2008 Games, according to USA Triathlon.

After his race he gave credit to all those who’ve supported him along the journey. “The support system around me has been incredible,” McDowell said. “I got an overwhelming amount of messages and letters sent from home. I read my last three from both my parents, my sister and my grandparents. It meant the world to me to read those last

ones and remember where I came from. Ten years ago, I was so sick. I didn’t know what would happen, but I was so passionate about this sport. To be up here being in contention at the Olympic Games, I’m living the dream right now.”

Bross cheered on McDowell wearing a t-shirt with “Team Kevin - Tokyo 2020” on the front while watching the livestream on his TV and couldn’t be more proud of his former congregant, who also won a silver medal with his teammates in the first Olympic Triathlon Mixed Relay event.

“He’s a cancer survivor but more than that he’s a believer,” said Bross. “He’s an amazing young man. He overcame cancer and made his dream a reality. He is humble, faithful and inspiring. We are so proud of you!”

**USA Triathlon contributed to this article.*

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER CALENDAR EVENTS



Launch Generosity - Stewardship Workshop

August 21, 10 a.m. to 12 noon

Location: Online via Zoom

Cost: \$10

Learn how to relaunch generosity in your church through 10 Practical Steps to Advance Generosity.

Special Guest Speaker: Carla Maxwell Ray

Carla Maxwell Ray's goal as a Generosity Specialist is to empower churches and nonprofits to achieve, advance, and fund their vision. She is the author of "Five Pillars of a First Class Life" and the accompanying Bible study "Thrive."

To register, visit umcnic.org/calendar/relaunch-generosity.

Community Anti-Racism workshop: Becoming the Beloved

September 11, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Location: Friendship United Methodist Church, 305 E. Boughton Road., Bolingbrook, IL

Cost: \$40 (includes meals and materials)

The Anti-racism Task Force will kick-off a newly created workshop called, "Becoming the Beloved Community," focusing on a conversation about why racism persists and what can be done to address it.

Space is limited; however, future workshops will be held. This is scheduled to be an in-person event held at Friendship United Methodist Church. To register, visit umcnic.org/calendar/anti-racism-workshop.



Renewable Energy Summit September 11, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Location: Euclid Ave UMC, 405 S. Euclid Ave., Oak Park
Sponsored by Conference Board of Global Ministries and Wespeth

On Earth Day, April 22, 2021, nearly a dozen general agencies of The United Methodist Church pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. This summit will address what is net-zero emissions and what we can all do to be environmentally aware.

Speakers include: Rev. Jenny Phillips, Senior Technical Advisor for Environmental Sustainability at Global Ministries, and Jake Barnett from Wespeth Benefits and Investments with opening words from Bishop Hopkins.

The day will also include solar and geothermal tours, resource tables, and a lunch.

For reservations, visit umcnic.org/calendar/solar-summit. For questions email Richard Alton at Richard.alton@gmail.com, Northern Illinois Conference Co-Chair Eco-Sustainability Task Force.

UMM Virtual National Gathering

August 28, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

This year's United Methodist Men's national gathering will be held virtually. The keynote speakers will be the Rev. Dr. Ron Bell, senior pastor of Camphor Memorial UMC in St. Paul, Minn., and the Rev. Tom Albin, the Executive Director of the United Christian Ashrams and President of Albin Consulting. The topics will be "Combating and Healing the Trauma of Racism" and "Evangelism & Discipleship."

Registration for the gathering is required.

To register and for more information, visit gcomm.org. If you have questions, please call 615-620-7277 or email rvance@gcomm.org.



The church Lay Leader, church council, youth, and children's representatives surrounded Pastor Kim's family and prayed while every worshipper raised their blessing hands towards them at his farewell service on July 4, 2021.

This I Celebrate - Pastors in Transition

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

At his farewell worship service at Mendota Zion UMC on July 4, 2021, Pastor Hogun Kim reflected on his first Sunday worship six years ago. On that occasion, only one child came up for children's time and that was Pastor Kim's own daughter. At the farewell service, he called out dozens of names of children and youth sitting in the congregation with their families.

Early in their ministry, Pastor Kim's wife Shinae made a bold commitment to build the church's children's ministry. She became a volunteer Sunday school teacher and Sunday school superintendent. The program grew from one child to 20 children and 20 youth under her leadership. She led efforts to reach out to the community as well. During Vacation Bible School (VBS), more than 100 children joined in the fun and experienced the love of God. At the farewell worship service, I met a VBS volunteer who is actually a member of a neighboring congregation but came to say goodbye to the Kims.

Often, with a cross-cultural appointment, the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) members may worry whether their pastor will speak English well enough. My response to that inquiry is that ministry is not solely about spoken language, but the language of the heart. Pastor Kim took one of the ordination questions, "Will you visit house to house?" very

seriously. His wife bought a portable keyboard so that when they visited homebound members she could play hymns. Through these musical visits, they built new relationships with congregants and trust in the community.

Many of the church members were in tears at the farewell service. I asked one of them what was the one thing she would miss most about her pastor. She replied that in every sermon Pastor Kim preached about Jesus.

According to [Umdata.org](https://umdata.org), during Pastor Kim's ministry over the last six years, attendance grew 70% (from 50 to 85) and membership grew 108% (from 88 to 183). Today's ministry is very challenging, however, people are yearning for God's love and God's grace.

During the service the church Lay Leader, church council, youth, and children's representatives surrounded Pastor Kim's family and prayed while every worshipper raised their blessing hands towards them.

After the farewell worship, every person received a gift of a hand towel from Pastor Kim's family. This was an eloquent statement reminding members of the servanthood that Jesus called his disciples to at the Last Supper.

Together we can make a difference!

This I celebrate!

Peer Program *(continued from page 4)*

as worship together, spend some time in spiritual renewal, and build relationships. We will have some talks around the book "The Color of Compromise" by Jemar Tisby, who offers some valuable insight into the history of racism within the Church.

The program will cost \$250 per person, which includes accommodations, meals, and program materials for the retreat and subsequent sessions. Clergy are encouraged to take advantage of the accountable reimbursement if they have it. Otherwise, there are some funds available through the Board of Ordained Ministry and we can help you with information. We are also excited to be able to offer CEU's for this program through Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. More details will come as we receive them. We also envision this program as a qualifying training opportunity for the clergy training as required by the Annual Conference.

Space is limited so you will want to register as quickly as possible. We are already planning another session for 2022, just in case you missed the remaining openings for this session. Any questions may be submitted to Rev. Jarrod Severing at jarrod.severing@gmail.com.

DYK???



Jesus Makes a Way in 2021

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

The first session of our 2021 Annual Conference is now behind us as we live into the theme "Jesus Makes a Way."

We will meet again on October 1 and 2 for ordination and additional business. Evaluations are still coming in, but again we adapted to our circumstances, making the best of our pandemic limitations. From virtual worship services and Bible Study to electronic voting, the annual conference committee and staff found ways to help us connect, converse and move forward.

Our work included:

- Approving our Mission Links sites.
- Updating the list of laity who can vote at conference sessions.
- Reorganization of program areas.
- The addition of legislative sections for annual conference beginning in 2022.
- Support for the UMCOR COVID-19 response.

Throughout the session, our strong commitment to

missions was evident.

With the arrival of July, the Northern Illinois Conference moved to a new district structure with five districts. Implementing this transition has been a major undertaking for administration, communications, finance, and district superintendents. The opportunity to reset, refresh and refocus our commitment to strengthening the local church is at the forefront for the new districts as they craft their goals and form their leadership.

As we look to the 2021–2022 year, the work of our strategic task forces continues to unite us with a common purpose and enrich us by developing stronger foundations for the life of our churches.

The Vital Congregations Task Force continues to work with a pilot project to strengthen the ministry of churches while also helping struggling congregations enter into discernment concerning their future.

The Discipleship Ministries Task Force is resourcing intentional discipleship system programs in local

churches and will sponsor an all-conference worship event on November 14 as we anticipate seeing one another again face-to-face.

The Anti-Racism Task Force will launch a Clergy Peer Reflection and Engagement (CPRES) program to build the clergy's capacity to offer leadership in anti-racism. Soon, they will also unveil new curriculum for local churches as we grow and learn together.

To see stories and reports on this work, I encourage you to watch the NIC Today News first released during the annual conference session. You can find it on our website at umcnic.org/AC2021.

Meanwhile, Bishop Hopkins completes his first six months as our interim bishop and has learned much about our conference's strengths and challenges. He shared his insights and recommendations during the Annual Conference session. His presentation can be found at umcnic.org/AC2021docs.

We begin the 2021-2022 annual conference year with hope and anticipation.

June/July 2021 Appointments

Bishop John Hopkins announces the following clergy appointments for the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church, effective July 1, 2021 (unless otherwise noted):

Dawn Gardner (Local Pastor) to Chicago: Mandell (1/4th time) (Lake North District). Dawn has been serving as interim at Mandell.

Ronald DeBaun (District Superintendent Supply) to Joliet: Hope (1/4 time) (Prairie Central District). Ron follows Linny Hartzell who is appointed to Homewood: St. Andrews (Lake South District).

Chanje Woo (Local Pastors License Pending) to Arlington Heights: Church of the Incarnation (Lake North District) as a student local pastor. C.J. follows Eun Bae Doh who is appointed to Channahon (Prairie South District).

Becky Nicol (Retired Elder) to Bartlett (Prairie Central District), (½ time). Becky will follow Megan Tabola who is appointed to Naperville: Wesley.

Yoon Ki Kim (Elder) to Elmhurst: Faith Evangelical (Prairie Central District) from Flossmoor: South Suburban Korean (Lake South District). Yoon Ki follows Eun Young Ko who has accepted an appointment in the Desert Southwest Conference at Tuscan: First.

Hogun Kim (Elder) to Flossmoor: South Suburban Korean (Lake South District) from Mendota: Zion (Prairie South District). Hogun follows Yoon Ki Kim who is appointed to Elmhurst: Faith Evangelical.

Jeffrey Brace (Local Pastor) to Mendota: Zion (Prairie South District) from Capron and Chemung (Prairie North District). Jeff follows Hogun Kim who is appointed to Flossmoor: South Suburban Korean. Effective August 1.

Young Eun Choi (Elder) to retirement from Medical Leave. Effective July 1.

For the 2021 Appointment Book, visit umcnic.org/appointments.

Job Openings

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

Stay Connected

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

Visit www.umcnic.org and scroll down and click on "Sign up for our Newsletter" to enter your name and email.

Time to Go Home

COME HOME FOR CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SERIES



Advent Worship Resources from United Methodist Discipleship Ministries

Advent is an invitation. For many, it is the invitation to get into that Christmas spirit, to count down the days to the grand celebration, and let the holiday transform everything around us.

We're not all about Christmas, the holiday, about December 25 with all the jingle bells and tinsel. The invitation this Advent season to your church and the world is "Come Home for Christmas." United Methodist Discipleship Ministries has prepared free worship resources that include preaching notes, liturgical resources, hymn suggestions, small group guidance and much more.

Access resources at umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/come-home-for-christmas.

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.

Submissions

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