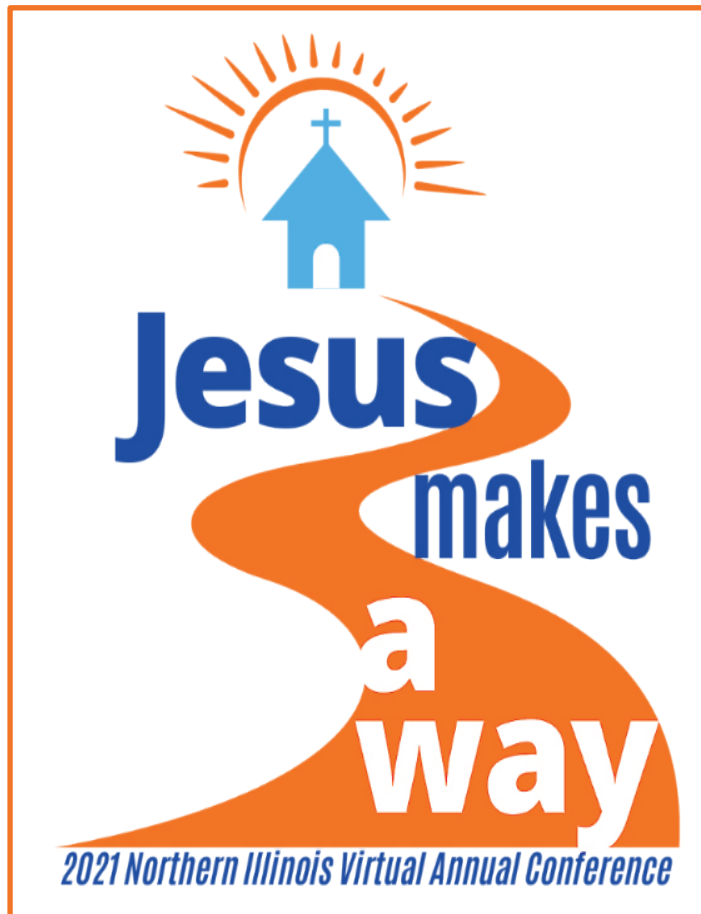


2021 Annual Conference theme announced

Plans are coming together for the 182nd Northern Illinois Annual Conference which will be held virtually July 16-17 through a Zoom webinar. The theme is "Jesus Makes a Way." The scripture focus is Matthew 14:13-21 and the "feeding of the five thousand." We are reminded through this compassionate miracle that no matter how big the obstacle or challenge we face, Jesus will provide and make a way. Jesus told the disciples about the crowd gathered, "They need not go away" and in the end through the five loaves of bread and two fish "all ate and were filled."

Important Dates:

- Legislation and historical documents are due **May 3** (no exceptions) to Rev. Katie Voigt, Chair of Daily Proceedings, at ACdocuments@umcnic.org. All legislative documents must be in the Action/Rationale format with a maximum of 500 words for the rationale and must be submitted as a Microsoft Word document. The legislation and documents will be posted on the NIC website by June 16 (30 days prior to the conference).
- The Clergy Session will be held **June 28** via a Zoom meeting.
- Ordination for the 2020 class will be held **April 24 at 3 p.m.** at Barrington United Methodist Church with limited attendance (invite only) following all COVID-19 safety guidelines. It will be livestreamed on the NIC's YouTube channel and Facebook page. Bishop Sally Dyck will return to co-officiate with Bishop Hopkins.
- The Bible study leader will be Bishop Julius C. Trimble from the Indiana Conference. The session times are still being determined. The Memorial Service preacher will be Bishop Hee-Soo Jung of the Wisconsin Conference. The days and times of the Memorial and Retirement services are still under consideration.
- An Ordination Service for the 2021 class is scheduled for **Oct. 1**, likely with limited in-person participation and will be livestreamed. Bishop Tracy S. Malone from the East Ohio Conference will be the preacher.
- A fall session to consider the budget and other agenda items will be held **Oct. 2** and will be held virtually as well.



- Online registration will open **June 1** and close **June 30**, and the cost will be \$30. It will cover both the July and October sessions as well as the production costs and other administrative expenses.

More details to come. Stay up to date on news and announcements at umcnic.org/AC2021.



Stand against Asian hate

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed.
(Isaiah 1:17, NIV)

NIC Interim Bishop John Hopkins signed on to a statement with ecumenical partners the Rev. Paula E. Clark, Bishop-Elect of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago, and the Rev. Yehiel Curry, Bishop of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, to condemn the shootings in Atlanta on March 16 that left eight people dead and one injured.

"We recognize that these shootings were not a random attack as six of the eight people killed were Asian American women," the statement read. "In the wake of this most recent tragedy, we must learn more about the particular challenges facing our Asian American siblings so that together we can work to combat the forces of evil and hate that provoke unspeakable acts of violence like the one we now mourn."

The Bishops note that the shootings are "the product of a culture of violence, misogyny, and hatred against Asian American people—particularly Asian women—that has intensified over the last year" especially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to a recent report by the national coalition, Stop AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islanders) Hate, Asian Americans have

Continued on page 2, see From the Cover: Stop Hate

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INSIDE THE ISSUE

From the Bishop:
Questions About
Church's Future
... 2



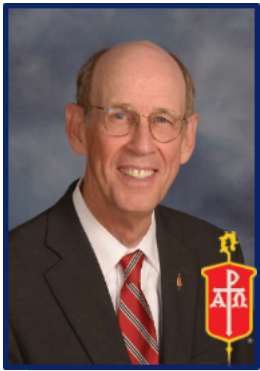
Hybrid Worship Strategies ... 3



Face Masks Distributed ... 5



Summer Camp Update ... 6



FROM THE BISHOP:

Questions about the Future of The United Methodist Church

Over the next few months, I want to discuss some crucial bedrock issues that will determine the future of our church at every level. In the coming issues of the Reporter, I will present 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.

Let me be clear from the beginning. The questions I propose require more than a mental choice. You will need to answer each question with your daily decisions as a follower of Jesus Christ. They are your choices to make considering what you understand about Jesus and his Church. How you live out your choices will determine the future of The United Methodist Church.

The first question is: “Is the Church a Movement or an Institution?”

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church...” (Matthew 16:18). In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus proclaims his intention to establish the church following Peter’s confession of faith. The church, called the Body of Christ by Paul, is the institution that will carry on the message and ministry of Jesus.”

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 28:19). Following his death, the resurrected Jesus commissions his disciples to be a movement to make disciples and baptize them into the church and the saving message and ministry it offers to the world.

Jesus and the church are bound together; you cannot have one without the other. This ecclesiology is reflected and preserved in the Methodist Book of Worship. “Dearly beloved, the Church is of God, and will be preserved to the end of time, for the conduct of worship and the due administration of his (sic) Word and Sacraments, the maintenance of Christian fellowship and discipline, the edification of believers, and the conversion of the world. All, of every age and station, stand in need of the means of grace which it alone

supplies.” (The Book of Worship for Church and Home, The Methodist Publishing House, 1964, 1965)

Our history is that we are a movement that created institutions. Our missionary movement to “spread scriptural holiness” led to new converts, class meetings, new congregations, church buildings, schools, colleges, hospitals and homes for children and seniors all over the world. Our ability to organize, raise money, establish endowments and set up an episcopal and democratic form of church governance has been remarkable. All these accomplishments were based on a spiritual movement that empowered countless individuals to take responsibility for sharing the gospel in words and deeds.

Nathan O. Hatch, a Presbyterian and a Methodist scholar, wrote:

“...Methodism in America transcended class barriers and empowered common people to make religion their own. Unlike Calvinism, which emphasized human corruption, divine initiative, the authority of the educated clergymen, and inherited ecclesiastical structures, the Methodists proclaim the breathtaking message of individual freedom, autonomy, responsibility, and achievement.

More African Americans became Christians in ten years of Methodist preaching than in a century of Anglican influence. Methodism did not suppress the impulses of popular religion, dreams and visions, ecstasy, unrestrained emotional release, preaching by blacks, by women, by anyone who felt the call. It was under Methodist auspices that religious folk music—white and black spirituals—prospered.”¹

Every United Methodist has a pastor, a lay leader, a district superintendent and a bishop. Pastoral care and accountability are primary. We are layered with local church, district, annual conference, jurisdictional (or central) conference and general church structures. All these institutional manifestations of our movement have served us well for a long time.

However, in the last couple of decades, there is more criticism and expectation of the institutional church at the same time. Do you really think the institution is responsible for the movement? Or is the movement responsible for the institution? Consequently, we spend

an inordinate amount of time trying to change the institution with money, organizing, political action and legislation while the movement languishes. This is certainly true at the general church level, where caucus groups want to determine the future of the church with a legislative or judicial decision. I have found manifestations of this approach at the local church as well.

When I served as pastor of The Methodist Temple UMC across the street from the University of Evansville in Indiana, I remember a day when two lay members came into my office, one after the other. The first lay member was a businessman working on a personal ministry to help people in poverty get a start in business. He was full of excitement as he told how he gathered a group of members from several churches to provide practical and spiritual support to a female plumber to start her own business. His energy and story were contagious. I wanted to be a part of his project, although he did not need anything but a prayer with me.

Less than 10 minutes later, another lay member came into my office who had some concerns about how our church welcomed visitors. Apparently, the pew pads did not collect the right information and were not straightened properly between services. As usual, I asked if she had spoken with the person responsible for the pew pads and if she would like to volunteer to help with the improvement. “No,” she said. “I just wanted to let you know so you can fix it.” She had a legitimate concern and thought she was doing ministry but had no personal commitment. I made a note of her concern and passed it on, but my energy was low.

A pastor once told me, “You cannot row a boat and rock it at the same time!” My experience is that if the boat is stuck, some rocking can help. However, if you stop rowing, you just sit there going nowhere. I like to think that the boat is like an institution and the rower creates the movement. There are times when a local church or perhaps a global denomination needs to be rocked to change its course. We just cannot stop rowing!

¹Nathan O. Hatch, “The Puzzle of American Methodism”, *Church History*, Volume 63, Issue 2, June 1994, pp. 175 – 189

From the Cover: Stop Hate

experienced a 150% increase in hate crimes in major cities over the last year, and “Asian American women reported harassment incidents 2.3 times more often than their male counterparts.”

“We acknowledge that this most recent event is another chapter in a long history of violence and hate directed at Asian American people, and we grieve the pain, fear and anger it has engendered,” said the Bishops. “Our thoughts and prayers are with the families, friends and neighbors of all whose lives were touched by the shootings, but we acknowledge that we are called on to do more than think and pray.”

The bishops encourage others to join them to commit to stand up and speak out against violence, hate, gender and sexual bias, economic discrimination, and racism of all types and to give whatever support and sustenance we can to our Asian American friends and neighbors.

“In the wake of this most recent tragedy, we must learn

more about the particular challenges facing our Asian American siblings so that together we can work to combat the forces of evil and hate that provoke unspeakable acts of violence like the one we now mourn,” the statement read.

The Asian American Bishops of the United Methodist Church, the New Federation of Asian American United Methodists, the Asian American Language Ministry Plan, along with other Asian American leaders and academics of The United Methodist Church, released a statement days before the Atlanta shooting strongly condemning the surge in xenophobic violence against Asian Americans and especially violence against the Asian American elderly.

“As we continue our journey through this Lenten Season and move from darkness to light, we are reminded that these acts of violence against Asian Americans have their origins in the darkness,” the statement read. “Moving to the light of God will require that all us condemn acts of racist hatred and move beyond intolerance toward love, equity

and justice; all of which Jesus modeled in his life, death and resurrection.” Read more at nfaaum.org.

The Rev. Martin Lee, NIC Dir. of Congregational Development and Redevelopment, welcomed Rev. Jesse Jackson to First Korean UMC in Wheeling for worship on Sunday, March 21. Lee gave testimony how the anti-Asian racism is impacting him and his family and how his wife is afraid to even go to the grocery store. Lee said it is well past time to reject the notion that any of us or any ethnic communities are independent.

“We are all interrelated,” said Lee. “The wellbeing of any one group affects the wellbeing of all groups. God created every human being in his image to reflect the uniqueness of human potential for participating in the whole creation.”

Read his full statement at umcnic.org/antiracism.

Bishops cancel May 8 Special General Conference

By Heather Hahn, UMNS*



Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey is the Council of Bishops president and leader of the Louisiana Conference.

The United Methodist Council of Bishops has canceled its call for a special virtual General Conference on May 8. Last month, the bishops called the special one-day session on the same day the Commission on the General Conference announced that COVID-19's threat had forced the postponement of the global denomination's top lawmaking assembly a second time. The full General Conference, originally set for May 2020, is now set for Aug. 29-Sept. 6, 2022. The meeting venue is still Minneapolis.

The bishops also announced that they plan to use their regularly scheduled April meeting to discuss results of listening sessions and discern a possible new timeline.

"Much has been learned over the past few weeks and the extended timeline will allow for even deeper listening by the bishops at the general church level but also in our residential settings," Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, Council of Bishops president and leader of the Louisiana Conference, said in a press statement.

The commission appointed a technology study team to consider ways to hold the global conference virtually while ensuring full participation of the nearly 900 voting delegates from four continents.

Ultimately, the team concluded and the commission agreed that no virtual solution could overcome barriers that include a 16-hour time difference across the denomination, inequities in internet access and the need for vote security.

The bishops had planned for the May 8 General Conference only to be long enough for a quorum of

delegates to suspend the rules so delegates could vote by mail on 12 legislative items. The items mostly dealt with administrative functioning amid the General Conference delay, and the bishops planned to announce the results of the votes on July 13. Not on the agenda were any proposals to split the denomination along theological lines. Those proposals, including the much-endorsed Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation, will be before the full General Conference in 2022.

The decision to cancel the one-day meeting means that plans to retire U.S. bishops and elect new bishops in the central conferences — church regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines — also are on hold for now. Harvey said the Book of Discipline, the denomination's law book, does not allow for bishop retirements or elections until after General Conference.

"It's to be continued," she told United Methodist News.

Plans for a virtual one-day meeting faced some of the same logistical challenges the General Conference commission identified in considering a virtual 10-day gathering.

Of the 862 delegates elected to the coming General Conference, 55.9% come from the U.S., 32% from Africa, 6% from the Philippines, 4.6% from Europe and the remainder from concordat churches that have close ties to The United Methodist Church.

The bishops' plan for a special General Conference already was facing pushback across the denomination, including from delegates concerned they would be cut out of the deliberation process.

The advocacy group the Africa Initiative sent questions to the Council of Bishops citing the General Conference commission's finding that internet and even electricity is not readily available in some areas where United Methodists are located.

"This is absolutely true for us here in Africa. How can we have this Special Called Session without delegates from Africa being disenfranchised?" asked the Rev. Jerry P. Kulah, Africa Initiative's general coordinator, in a letter to bishops. Kulah is also a General Conference delegate from Liberia.

Meanwhile, a group of U.S. delegates also raised concerns about the special General Conference session similar to what the Africa Initiative raised, including that the virtual session would prevent Christian conferencing. Seven U.S. delegations — from the California-Nevada, Greater New Jersey, Iowa, Michigan, New England, Northern Illinois and Oregon-Idaho conferences — have endorsed the document "Christian Conferencing: Discerning United Methodism's Path through a Pandemic."

As the bishops were meeting March 22, the denomination's top court also released a decision that could help church leaders on one matter before the special General Conference.

The first of the bishops' 12 pieces of legislation proposed an amendment to church law to comply with a decision of the Judicial Council. On March 22, the church court issued a memo clarifying how annual conferences — church regions — can comply with the ruling related to clergy due process even before General Conference is able to meet.

For now, planning for when delegates can meet to deliberate on the denomination's future remains a work in progress.

"We are thankful for the collaboration fostered with the Commission on General Conference and especially grateful for the work that had already begun in the planning for the special session," Harvey said in the press statement.

*Hahn is assistant news editor for UM News.



Intentional Discipleship trainers available

DISCIPLESHIP
Task Force of the Northern Illinois Conference

Intentional Discipleship Systems (IDS) are valuable in carrying out our mission as members of the United Methodist Church. The NIC Discipleship Task Force has developed trained Resource Teams for each district to support churches that want to develop and maintain an Intentional Discipleship System. They met in early March to share ideas are standing by ready to help. Find out more about IDS and see a list of trainers by visiting umcnic.org/discipleship.

Here is a message from trainer and pastor Charles Straight at Faith UMC in Dolton:

At Faith Church, intentionally developing disciples also means incorporating our social principles that teach us to "improve the lives of those who suffered from debilitating conditions such as poverty, starvation, illiteracy, imprisonment, addictions, and disease".

We have a responsibility to innovate, sponsor, and evaluate new forms of community that will encourage the development of the fullest potential in individuals in the place where we serve. That commitment to justice and to the community of Dolton has lead us to create a year-long project to make our church a center of community life and

a public resource shared by and accessible to people in Dolton. We will create a more sustainable plan for Faith Church to engage with and serve our community, invite partners to use our space, and identify new sources of revenue consistent with our mission. We believe that every step towards the goal of loving community demonstrates our commitment to love God and makes us better disciples.

"Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals." - Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Strategies to hybrid worship

By Doreen Gosmire and Karla Hovde*



"Online worship has allowed us to reach people that would have never walked into our church doors," said author and creative worship coach Jason Moore. "The question the pandemic leaves us with is: How do we worship both in-person and online without leaving anyone out?"

Moore recently taught more than 100 participants across the Dakotas-Minnesota Area how to maximize hybrid worship experiences for both online and in-person audiences.

"We will lose the momentum we have gained if we are not careful as we move into this next season of ministry," said Moore,

founder and owner of Midnight Oil Productions. "One of the hardest things that we have learned during the pandemic is that we need to make connections even though we may not see people in our church buildings."

Many churches that offered online worship before the COVID-19 pandemic merely put a camera at the back of a sanctuary and broadcast through an online platform. Those worshipping online were not considered the primary audience. Then, when COVID-19 hit, remote attendees all of a sudden became the primary audience.

Continued on page 4, see Online Worship

Justice Camp coming this summer

When Jeremiah said, "I'm only a child." The Lord responded, "Don't say, 'I'm only a child. Where I send you, you must go; what I tell you, you must say.'"

The NIC Anti-Racism Task Force Justice Generation is not only shepherding our conference high school students to learn, grow, question and engage with other youth about racial justice; they are leading an effort called "Justice Camp" around the United States.

Justice Generation will be partnering with United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) offices across the U.S. to host

Justice Camp, a virtual tour starting in Chicago at the DuSable Museum and going to Montgomery, AL and Tulsa, OK.

United Methodist high school students from around the U.S. will be invited to participate in the four events on Sundays in June, July and August. Space is limited. Watch your weekly eNews and District eNews for additional details and registration beginning in April.

Thank You from Northern Illinois Food Bank by Jenny Ackerman, Northern Illinois Food Bank



Volunteers sort donations at the Northern Illinois Food Bank warehouse in Geneva.

Northern Illinois Food Bank, a member of Feeding America, is the source of nutritious food, innovative feeding programs, and hope for neighbors in our 13-county service area.

In spring 2020, the United Methodist Foundation of the Northern Illinois Conference challenged congregations to raise funds to support the three Food Banks serving their conference. The match began as a \$50,000 challenge, but because of generous support was increased to \$75,000. In total gifts of more than \$150,000 were made to support feeding neighbors.

The generous support of the matching challenge meant F.I.S.H. Food Pantry in Carpentersville did not have to write a check to the Northern Illinois Food

Bank for three months. This continued and enhanced the strong relationship between, F.I.S.H. Food Pantry and Barrington United Methodist Church that already existed.

Barrington United Methodist has provided volunteer support, produce from their congregational garden and financial support to F.I.S.H. amongst their other congregation missions.

If your congregation is interested in learning more about the Food Bank please reach out to me, Jenny Ackerman at jackerman@northernilfoodbank.org. In the meantime, please feel free to share this story with your congregation and thanks for your tremendous generosity.



Jason Moore is an author and creative worship coach and founder of Midnight Oil Productions.

Online Worship (continued from page 3)

As congregations begin to plan to go back to in-person worship, it would be a mistake to turn the in-person worship experience into a studio audience and give our attention solely to the camera. It would be an equally big mistake to focus on the in-person worshippers and forget about the people online.

hybrid experience is the new mindset we need to embrace. Cohesion and connection are essential. People viewing online will leave to find another, more meaningful virtual service if the experience is disjointed.

Three strategies

Moore presented three approaches to providing worship experiences in-person and online. One of these approaches will be best for your context.

1. Pre-Both/And Worship: In this scenario, there are different experiences for online and in-person worshippers. Online is pre-recorded, exclusively for those people who worship online. Separate in-person worship happens for those who come to the building. This strategy does not involve live streaming.

This strategy requires human resources to record, editing software, and equipment for recording. Consider a pre-recorded online worship service of 25-30 minutes—no more than 40 minutes. Shorten the amount of music and the length of the sermon. The call to action should be included and presented differently to those viewing online.

Provide hospitality for online viewers with an online worship host. The host connects to those who are commenting and walks the viewer through the service for things like giving and the call to action.

2. Real-Time Both/And Worship: This strategy allows worshippers to simultaneously watch a service live online and to attend the in-person service. Worship is designed in such a way that attention is given to both audiences. This may include a combination of live and pre-recorded elements for the online viewer.

In this scenario, the online service should be shorter than in-person, perhaps with a staggered approach. For example, in-person starts at 10 a.m. with several songs, and online starts at 10:10 a.m., during the last song of the opening. After the sermon, the online service cuts away to

announcements or closing that are either pre-recorded or led by the online host, leaving in-person worship to continue with a longer ending to the service.

3. Post Both/And Worship: For this approach, worship is offered in real-time for the in-person audience. The service is recorded, edited, and repurposed for the online audience. The recording is available online for viewing at a later time.

One consideration with this strategy is developing engagement and participation processes for the online viewing audience. Build a digital hospitality team and appoint a chat host, who can create engagement by posting statements, asking questions that reinforce the sermon, and inviting participants to the call-to-action. To assist the digital hospitality team, prepare a document ahead of time with links and key points.

Audit your worship service

As churches move forward with creating hybrid online and in-person worship experiences, quality is key. As you plan worship, ask yourself:

- What is the purpose of this aspect of worship, and does it translate to all audiences?
- Does this moment belong in both worship experiences?
- Is there a participatory or interactive way of doing this?
- Is this element too short or too long for the audience?
- How does this translate on-screen at home, and do we need an alternate moment?
- Does this need additional contextualization for either audience?
- How will a first-time viewer or in-person guest receive this?

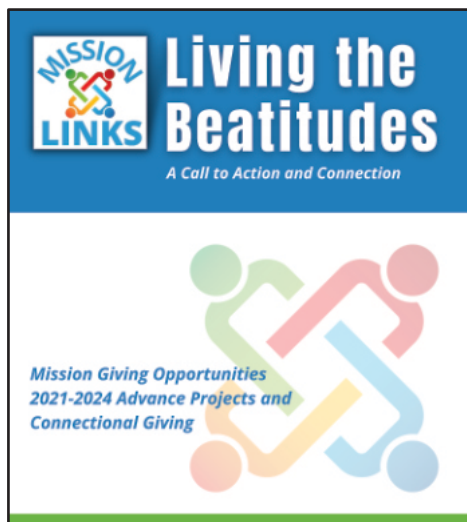
"There is a pretty dramatic shift happening. Begin to think about how you will make the shift and invite more people to Christ," said Moore.

**Doreen Gosmire is director of communications for the Dakotas Conference of the United Methodist Church. Karla Hovde is the communications specialist for the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.*

Reimagine worship

Moore suggested that we have to reimagine worship in four ways:

1. Consolidate the experience: The average in-person worship experience is about one hour. However, Facebook analytics reveal that viewers will watch online for 25-30 minutes, maybe 40-minutes max.
2. Adapt what you do: Be aware that most people viewing online do not sing along with hymns. Moore recommends showing both the musician and the lyrics to online viewers, and reducing the number of hymns that online viewers see in order to keep them engaged. Other worship elements that need adaptation for online audiences are communion, offering, and announcement time. Move announcements to the end of your worship for online worshippers and treat announcements as giving people a way to live out what they learned in worship.
3. Iterate and innovate: Make the worship experience fresh and inviting. Tweak one or two things in your order of worship or how you offer hybrid worship in each sermon series or season. Whatever you do, don't try to recreate pre-COVID worship.
4. Properly prepare: Walk through the service with all worship leaders beforehand, and plan the transitions and flow. Reimagining worship into a meaningful



Rainbow Covenant book revamp

The Conference Committee on Global Missions announces the publication of "Mission Links: Living the Beatitudes." This booklet, with its call to action and connection, updates and replaces the Rainbow Covenant manual that served as a resource for several quadrenniums. The booklet is available in PDF format or as a digital magazine format at umcnic.org/missionlinks.

In Matthew 5:1-12, Jesus offers a portrait of the ways in which it is possible to be a good person with respect to others - a description of the various forms human goodness can take -

within the eight categories of the beatitudes. Projects and ministries described in Mission Links are matched with a beatitude that allows the church to "advance" the cause of Christ and work for the public good.

Your congregation, mission committee or small group can use this resource to learn about apportioned funds through connectional giving, give to Advances in a specific category or learn about the missionaries our Annual Conference supports. Mission Links will help you live out the beatitudes and be a blessing for projects around the block and around the world.

Central Illinois Pastor sends masks to Northern Illinois churches



Rev. Deborah Jungmi Kang, Associate Pastor at Wesley UMC in Urbana.

Jesus speaks to us: "Live in this place where you take up your cross and follow me. Don't ever quit." Jesus constantly calls out to us to live with our crosses and to follow him wherever we are. For one United Methodist pastor serving in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference, following Jesus Christ during the global pandemic led to active participation in distributing thousands of face masks beyond her community.

The Rev. Deborah Jungmi Kang, who was ordained in the Northern Illinois Conference, is currently the Associate Pastor at Wesley United Methodist Church in Urbana. When one of her church members, Kiyun Lee, a CEO at a South Korean company that manufactures masks, donated 10,000 face coverings, Kang began looking for ways to distribute them in Illinois.

Kang and her husband, Rev. Chiyong Oh first gave 2,000 masks to the Wesley Food Pantry, the Cunningham Children's home in Urbana and saved the rest for pastoral purposes. When Kang suggested that Lee donate the rest of the masks to churches in big cities to address the

challenges of having in-person worship without full vaccinations, he agreed. Kang contacted her friends in the Northern Illinois Conference for a list of African American, Hispanic/Latino and multi-cultural churches who would benefit from the donated masks and with the help of her church's Discipleship/Family Committee paying for the cost of shipping, they were able to send 3,100 masks to 14 urban churches in the Chicago area and beyond.

Unfortunately, when Kang and Oh arrived at the local post office with 50 boxes of masks, their shipment was initially rejected. "The post office clerk humiliated us and treated us badly," said Kang. "Even though I told her her hatred due to English was racial discrimination, she didn't accept it. In light of the hate crime incident in Atlanta, I share this story showing it is not easy for Asians or Asian-Americans to live fairly." Kang and her husband took the 50 boxes to another post office, where they were shipped without incident.

While following Jesus Christ, Kang appreciates anything she can do to encourage churches and their ministries during the global pandemic. In her case, it meant distributing donated masks to churches who needed them the most.



Rev. Chiyong Oh and Kiyun Lee box up thousands of face masks to send to urban churches in the Northern Illinois Conference.

NIC Churches distribution list:

- Chicago: African Community
- Melrose Park: Red Door NFC
- Chicago: The Redeemer of Calvary
- Chicago: Olivet
- Chicago: Gorham
- Chicago: New Gresham
- Chicago: Ingleside-Whitfield
- Chicago: Wesley
- Maple Park
- Beach Park: San Pablo
- Rockford: Centennial Multicultural
- Maywood: Neighborhood
- Chicago: Emanuel
- Chicago: Urban Village

This I Celebrate! By Rev. Martin Lee, Dir. of Congregational Development and Redevelopment



Rev. Martin Lee

One cold early morning, I had the opportunity to have a cup of coffee with David Quinn, the NIC Apportionment Administrator for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic. David has many gifts, including being a professional photographer. We had a wonderful – albeit socially distanced – conversation.

One of the stories David shared came from something that happened while he was running an errand in Skokie. On his way, he saw a man standing outside of his car almost in tears because his car had a flat tire. David stopped and helped him replace the flat tire. Before he left the man, David said, "I'm David, and I work at the

Methodist Conference in Chicago. If you need anything, please let me know." David wanted him to know that he is a Methodist and, as such, he offered the helping hands of Christ in the midst of Chicago's miserably cold winter. When I shared this story with my wife Grace, she reminded me that once when she was coming home from voice lessons—traveling from Evanston to Freeport—someone else once helped her when her car got a flat tire on Route 20.

Some years ago, Pastor Eric Blachford (Harvard: First) noticed a man at Walmart struggling with decisions about what to buy for him and his son on a limited budget. Pastor Eric approached the man and asked, "Are you okay? Anything I can help with?" Then the man shared his name—Tom Reese—and confessed that his family did not have enough money to buy food. Pastor

Eric helped Tom get what his family needed. Some years later, Tom and his son came to Harvard: First. Tom joined the church and became a generous giver. During his first visit, Tom gave his testimony about how he met Pastor Eric. Tom has since passed away, but while he was a member of Harvard, he was one of the most beloved and generous of the church members.

As we are now facing more challenges than ever before, let us remember that every person is a child of God and needs a community of faith. Let God use each one of us to be God's instrument for the channel of God's love in every challenging corner of the world that we see.

This I celebrate in the midst of a socially distancing world!

Mom and Me Drive KIDS ABOVE ALL

Each and every year, and especially during the pandemic, Kids Above All (formerly ChildServ) families have identified diapers and wipes as a major area of need. Therefore, in time for Mother's Day, the agency is launching their first annual Mom and Me Drive from **April 15 - May 17**.

They are collecting donated diapers (of all sizes) and wipes so their parents, caregivers, babies, and toddlers have the essentials they need for a happy and healthy start to their lives together.

They've created an Amazon Wish List with items that our families need to make the selection process easier. Use the QR code to access the link.

Drop off location: 8765 W. Higgins Rd., Suite 450 Chicago, IL 60631, Monday - Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. To schedule a drop off time for your donations, contact Manager of Faith and Community Relations, Catherine Inserra, at 847-224-2870, or at cinserra@kidsaboveall.org.

APRIL/MAY CALENDAR EVENTS

25th Anniversary of UM Deacons

April 13, 17 and 24

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary is celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Order of Deacon in The United Methodist Church with three events and a service of worship in April. All events will be held online via Zoom.

To learn more and register, visit garrett.edu.

Native American Ministries Sunday

April 18

This Special Sunday offering helps to develop and strengthen Native American ministries in the Annual Conferences, Native American rural, urban, reservation ministries and communities relating to the General Board of Global Ministries. It also provides scholarships for Native Americans attending United Methodist schools of theology.

For resources and to donate, visit resourceumc.org/churchwide/umcgiving/special-sundays.

Training series equip communications

April 20-21

Cost: \$50

This two-day event offers 20+ learning opportunities to help church leaders focus on leveraging a variety of communication tools such as social media, digital ministry, and news writing to share their church's story with the members and seekers in their communities.

To register and for other trainings, visit umctraining.org. Each offers professional instruction with the added benefit of convenience to accommodate busy schedules.

Youth Symposium focuses on discipleship

May 1

Time: 9 - 11:30 a.m.

Cost: \$10

Purpose: Helping youth leaders strengthen connections with one another and resources, which ultimately will help them with strengthening connections with youth, God, and the church.

Symposium Speaker: Rev. Dr. Heather Lear, Teaching and Research Fellow, The Foundation for Evangelism. Rev. Lear is an ordained elder in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church and served local churches in Raleigh-Durham and Rocky Mount areas.

Bible theme: Luke 14:28-30 (NIV)

"But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it?"

Sponsored by the NIC Discipleship Task Force

Register at umcnic.org/calendar/youth-leader-symposium.

Outdoor and Retreat Ministries News



Camps reopen to in-person attendance

By Jeff Casey, Dir. of Outdoor and Retreat Ministries

Praise the Lord! While the State of Wisconsin allowed overnight camps to resume operations last August, the State of Illinois will allow overnight camps to open and run this summer!

The safety of our campers, volunteers and staff is of utmost importance to us. Both camps will comply with all health department regulations, which means that we'll be rearranging beds and seating throughout camp, but **we will camp together in person this summer!**

The following camps and dates are final. They will be held at Camp Reynoldswood in Dixon, Ill. We are finalizing health regulations and will then open online registration by April 2. Prices are to be determined. For registration information, visit niccamp.org.

June 20-26, 2021

J.O.Y. CAMP (Grades 7-13)

J.O.Y. Camp is designed to challenge and encourage youth in their faith journey. J.O.Y. is an acronym that stands for **Jesus, Others, and You**. This year we are focusing on the **"O" for Others**.

July 7-9, 2021

TOTAL CAMP (Grades Entering: 2-6)

Total Camp offers a camp experience at Reynoldswood for the younger crowd. Fun-filled days include archery, campfires, Bible studies, crafts and a Talent Show! Of course, Gaga Ball, Volleyball, 9-Square-In-The-Air, hiking trails, and slip-n-slide are available to all.

July 25-30, 2021

WOODLAND (Grades Entering: 7-13)

Woodland offers something for everyone: from sleeping in tree houses in the forests of Reynoldswood to canoeing, games and archery. Evenings include campfires, fun activities and a Talent Show. Daily crafts and Bible Studies help us experience Jesus in a Christian community.

Total and Woodland Camps will explore **Creation Speaks!**

In the beginning, God created. God is still creating now. What do God and creation have to teach us about how to live today? **Creation Speaks** invites us to look to God's creation, including each other, as we listen for God's voice in the world today. By looking anew at the creation story, campers will imagine what each part might teach us about God and our place in the world. Light, water, earth, seasons, animals, humans and even a day of rest will invite campers to listen for God, who is still speaking to them today.

Through our new understanding of the interdependence of all creatures and responding to our call as caretakers of creation, we are moved to awe and wonder at the gift of creation and the Creator. If the people of God stop and listen to creation, what might we hear? Shhhh, listen. Creation speaks!



Boubacar, the Survivor

By Laura Sonnenmark, National Justice for Our Neighbors

He had ceased to live a long time ago. Now he could only survive. His body was forever marked by deep grooves of scars, his mind equally wounded. He had survived the torture. He had survived the loss of his country, his ancestral lands, and the death of his cousin, father, and eldest son.

He fled to the United States, where he lived quietly, leaving his home only for his job in a hotel kitchen. He was fearful of loud noises, men in uniform, and being sent back to his tormentors. But eventually, he put aside his fears and found the courage to ask for asylum. Then he found an attorney willing and able to take his case.

And now Jenny Grobelski, supervisory attorney for Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors (NIJFON), sat beside him as the judge made his ruling.

Boubacar lowered his head in his hands and began to weep.

“Do you understand what the judge is saying?” Jenny asked in a low voice, feeling a bit unsteady herself. She hadn’t had a decent night’s sleep in over a month. There had been far too much riding on this case.

“This is good news,” she told him, smiling. “Do you understand?”

“Yes,” said Boubacar, finally raising his head. “I understand.”

Why are you so stubborn?

Boubacar (name changed for privacy) is a member of the Fulani, an ethnic minority found throughout Central and—most particularly—West Africa. Historically, the Fulani are renowned as nomadic herdsman, but Boubacar and his family were among the many Fulani crop and livestock farmers of the region.

Boubacar, who began working in the fields when he was 8 years old, had little time or opportunity for formal education. But he was a natural-born leader, his opinion respected in his small community, and recognized by the government as a troublemaker when they began confiscating Fulani land.

“The police would come after lunch dressed in military uniforms,” he remembers. “I had seen the police in my village and on TV, so I knew what they looked like.”

‘If you refuse to leave, we will kill you, one by one,’ the men in uniforms threatened.

“But how could we leave?” Boubacar asks, who was then a husband and the father of four young children.

“This was our entire livelihood,” he explains. “These had been our ancestral lands for generations upon generations.”

Boubacar began organizing, unifying the community and holding a large anti-government protest. Judgment against them was swift; Boubacar and others, including his cousin, were arrested and taken to prison.

The torture inflicted in that desolate space took all the usual and horrific forms. Boubacar was beaten, electrocuted, and hanged until near death. And the torture continued, three times a day, sometimes more. The guards told him it was his fault, because he wouldn’t give in, because he was so stubborn.

“Only the very strongest survive the torture in prison,” Boubacar says bitterly. When his cousin died in front of him, screaming in pain, Boubacar knew he would be next. The only way to avoid death was escape, and there was no way to escape.

Then came the night—2 o’clock in the morning—when a guard suddenly woke Boubacar from a restless sleep. The guard took him out of his cell...alone. Confused, terrified, Boubacar didn’t know what was happening. Would it be more torture? Was it his time to die?

The guard stopped at the exit. “Go,” he told his prisoner. “Leave now.”

Boubacar’s father was waiting outside with a change of clothing. While his son was in prison, he had contacted a relative who was a policeman in another region. They had worked together to get him out.

Boubacar’s relief and joy was immense, although tempered by his worry for those still in prison. And then his father told him the family had lost everything. The government militia had destroyed the farm, burned their livestock, and forced his parents, his wife, and children off the land.

“You need to be brave now,” his father told him. “You have to think of your family.”

Boubacar fled to the Ivory Coast, a country in chaos from civil war. There would be no permanent safety in such a place. An uncle worked instead to secure him a visa to the United States. Boubacar was still waiting for the visa when he learned that militia members, angry because of his escape, had beaten his father to death. His eldest son, always frail and sickly, had died shortly thereafter.

Boubacar pauses as he recounts these events. He grips his hands tightly to stop their trembling. “I don’t like to

remember my son’s death,” he says.

Anyone seeking asylum in the United States has to apply within one year of their arrival, and Boubacar had already been here for several years before he formally applied.

“It was the hardest thing about this case,” explains Jenny. “The deadline is usually an insurmountable barrier. It’s there to prevent fraud, but it can impose unfair restrictions in some cases. Boubacar was too traumatized to even ask for help.”

“It was all too much for me to handle,”

Boubacar agrees quietly. “I could not eat. I could not sleep. I could not trust people. And I could *not* speak about it.”

Most evenings, when Boubacar finished work at the hotel, he would head back to his solitary rooms and share messages with his mother and three remaining children. His wife had divorced him years ago and now had a new family with another man. His mother was getting older, and his children were growing up. Boubacar was an undocumented kitchen worker; the money he managed to send home was not enough.

A member of Chicago’s West African community finally helped Boubacar find an attorney to help him apply for asylum. The attorney then became ill and retired suddenly, leaving Boubacar alone in court and scrambling to get his file back. He was unsure of what to do next. It seemed no one wanted to take his case. It was problematic and the chances of winning were too slim.

In other words, it was just the sort of case for Jenny and staff at Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors.

“She was very compassionate and very patient,” says Boubacar. “She helped me be comfortable. She worked so hard and took time to do everything *right*.”

It was hard; Jenny and her staff—NIJFON staff attorney Hanoch Kanhai-Zamora and paralegal Agueda Garcia—would need to put in massive hours of research and preparation for his case.

For his part, Boubacar had to undergo a medical exam for a physician to affirm the evidence of the torture. He also underwent an extensive psychological evaluation, citing horrific trauma and PTSD as the reason for both his delay in requesting asylum and for his fear of returning to his home country.

And he had to talk about it—over and over again.

Finally, the day arrived, and Jenny was concerned. The

“He was one of the most traumatized people I’ve ever met. I knew we had to do everything we could to help him.”



Boubacar (3rd from left) with his team (pre-pandemic). Left to right, NIJFON staff attorney Hanoch Kanhai-Zamora, NIJFON supervisory attorney Jenny Grobelski, Dr. Vivien Eisenberg (his psychiatrist), Dr. Nora Rowley (forensic medical exam) and NIJFON paralegal Agueda Garcia. Not pictured: student intern Jacqueline Thanh.

presiding judge was new to immigration court—all his previous experience had been with workers’ compensation cases. How would he react to Boubacar’s case?

“He had never heard of this level of torture,” says Jenny. “In the end, the corroborating evidence, the medical and psychological evaluations, the consistency of Boubacar’s story—it was just overwhelming, and it convinced the judge.”

In the court that day, Boubacar was trying to collect himself together, but there were still tears on his face.

“Are you okay?” Jenny asked.

“Yes, I am very happy,” he answered, nodding. He turned to her and smiled. “Thank you.”

And then he immediately messaged his mother and children to share the good news.

Boubacar—like so many others—lost his job at the hotel due to the pandemic. In the interim, he has been working as a tailor at West African fabric store. He made the office staff a bevy of masks using traditional West African designs.

Boubacar is also a very good cook. “He brings us a lot of food,” Jenny says happily, “rice with lamb, and this amazing peanut stew. He is *always* looking for ways to say thank you.”

Ultimately, however, it is Boubacar who made this happy outcome possible. It was his stubborn will to survive that delivered him to this kinder shore, and has given him a chance to, one day, be reunited with his children.

“Everything is good,” Boubacar agrees, smiling with his eyes. “I am moving forward at last. I experience every day with hope for the future.”

More Justice, More Love - Celebrating NIJFON 10th Anniversary

The Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors is celebrating its 10 year anniversary reminiscing on the progress made and looking to the future with a new fundraising campaign, “More Justice and More Love.” The first NIJFON clinic was held in April 2011 at Fourth Street UMC in Aurora. A kickoff to the celebrations was held virtually on Feb. 21 with speakers, performers and special guests.

“We kicked off the event with beautiful song selections performed by one of our very own clients,” said Claudia Marchan, NIJFON Executive Director. “We were also honored to have State Representative Delia Ramirez share her memories as co-founder for the Chicago Clinic and her continued work for immigrant families and we welcomed

Continued on page 8, see Survivor

Road to reopening

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



Thank you to the amazing, talented and versatile laity and clergy who have given leadership to our congregations during this time of the pandemic. We have learned and persevered.

Now, a year into our unprecedented experience, we are ready for it to end. We have had enough of the restrictions, limitations and loss. We long for a “normal” life. Some of our churches have returned to worshipping in person with limited attendance and precautions. Others continue to work and worship remotely in anticipation of a time when all can safely gather.

In February, the State of Illinois moved from Phase 3 to Phase 4. This opened up the possibility of small progressive steps for our work and worship. On March 18, Governor J. B. Pritzker spelled out the next pathway to move toward Phase 5 and the full reopening of the state.

We have reached this point of gradual reopening, in

part, due to your good work. As our congregations moved cautiously and consciously in their gatherings, you have helped keep people safe and stopped the spread. Now is a time for reasoned, measured steps toward normalcy. You can find the tiers we must travel from Phase 4 to Phase 5 at [coronavirus.illinois.gov](https://www.coronavirus.illinois.gov).

As churches, we have focused on the category called “Meetings, Conferences and Conventions.” We are now in a revised Phase 4 plan. For church sanctuaries with a capacity of less than 200, the maximum capacity is 50 people, or 50% capacity, whichever is less. For church sanctuaries with a capacity of 200 or more, the capacity limit is 250 people, or 25% capacity, whichever is less. In order to move into the “bridge” phase and 60% capacity, our state will need to vaccinate 70% of residents age 65 and older, and enter into a period of 28 days with no increases in hospitalizations and deaths.

Expanded capacity is probably some months away, but with your continued precautions (no communal singing, careful social distancing, hand washing and masks) we

can get there.

When I look back at the ReTurn Team Plan designed by clergy and lay leaders in our conference last spring, I am amazed at how insightful this team was at a moment when we really had little understanding of what we were in for. The ReTurn Team Plan can be found at umcnic.org/returnteam on the conference website. Key to this plan is that each church forms a health team to give deep thought and clear leadership to every aspect of a congregation’s reopening (and closing if the need arises). For more guidance as you expand your ministries, please follow the recommendations of the ReTurn Team.

Meanwhile, encourage those who are eligible to be vaccinated. Host a clinic. Help navigate appointment making for those who cannot do this themselves. Drive people to their vaccination appointments if they cannot do so themselves. This is the proactive work we can do today for the hope of tomorrow.

March 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):

Satya Sudhakar (346.1) to Ottawa: Epworth (DeKalb District) from Ashton/Franklin Grove (DeKalb District). Satya follows Carolyn Lukasick who is appointed to Rockton.

Jennifer Wilson (Elder) to Willerup UMC, Cambridge WI, Wisconsin Conference, from Naperville: Wheatland Salem (Aurora District) as a 346.1, clergy from another annual conference.

Zaki L. Zaki (Elder) to Naperville: Wheatland Salem (Aurora District) from Roselle (Elgin District). Zaki follows Jennifer Wilson who will serve in the Wisconsin Conference.

Marcus Tabb Sr. (Elder) is appointed to Chicago: South Shore (Chicago Southern District) from Maywood: Neighborhood (Chicago: North Western District). Marcus follows Adonna Reid who is appointed to Oak Park: First.

Laura Barkley (Elder) to Family Leave from Barrington: Salem (Elgin District). Effective April 15.

Laura Wilson Underwood (Elder) is appointed to Heartland Hospice, Buffalo Grove as Bereavement Coordinator. Effective May 1.

SoYoung Kim (Elder) is appointed to Barrington: Salem (Elgin District) from Bensenville (Elgin District). So Young follows Laura Barkley who is moving to Family Leave.

Yoshiya Takahashi (Elder) to Senior Clinical Administrative Chaplain, Children’s Services, with the Department of Chaplain Services and Education, Duke University Hospital in Durham, North Carolina. Effective December 1, 2020.

Larry Pickens (Elder) to Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches from Executive Director of the Lehigh Conference of Churches in Allentown Pennsylvania. Effective December 4, 2020.

Michael Stoner (Elder) to retirement from Yorkville: Trinity (Aurora District). Mike was a probationary member in 1983 and full member in 1988. During his ministry in Northern Illinois Mike served Naperville: Grace (Assoc), Batavia and Yorkville: Trinity.

Tedd Steele (Elder) to Yorkville: Trinity (Aurora District) from Naperville: Wesley (Aurora District). Tedd follows Mike Stoner who is retiring.

Peter Kicheon Ahn (Pending Local Pastors License) to Leon and Fenton (DeKalb District). Peter will follow Jan Shaulis who is retiring.



Jenny and Boubacar, wearing masks he made for the NIJFON office—using traditional West African material.

Justice For Our Neighbors

Survivor (continued from page 7)

back nationally known storyteller Nestor (the Boss) Gomez who warmed our hearts with his stories.”

Marchan said they would not have been able to provide quality, free immigration legal services for the last decade without the dedicated staff, board members, volunteers and generous support from NIC churches.

“One person on our staff who has had a tremendous impact on immigrant families throughout Northern Illinois is our Supervising Attorney Jenny Grobelski,” said Marchan. “We thank her for her tireless years of service.”

The More Justice and More Love campaign calls for:

- More Justice and More Love to support immigrant families of color that have been affected disproportionately by the pandemic.
- More Justice and More Love to assure that our clients get their day in court in the midst of further delays caused by the pandemic.
- More Justice and More Love to dismantle racist and unjust policies that have broken the immigration system and have separated immigrant families for years.

Marchan said your continued support to NIJFON helps them get closer to their vision of a world where immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are welcomed, supported, and able to live without fear. To support the More Justice, More Love campaign, please visit nijfon.org/donate.

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.

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

For editorial content, subscriptions and address changes:

Anne Marie Gerhardt
Dir. of Communications
312-312-346-9766 ext. 766
77 W. Washington St.
Chicago, IL 60602
agerhardt@umcnic.org