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DO NOT DELAY. DATED MATERIAL

Plarn projects weave communities and ministry

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

A new mission project from Midwest Mission is being woven across Northern Illinois. Church groups are turning clean plastic shopping bags into sleeping mats.

The mats are distributed to organizations around the world that serve people who lack homes, who have been displaced by disaster, or who need temporary sleeping arrangements—anyone who needs a clean, dry barrier between them and the ground.

The bags (the kind widely used by grocery stores and other retailers) are easily cut and knotted into “plarn”—plastic yarn—and woven into blankets on special looms. Midwest Mission makes these available at cost (\$100), and churches across the conference have been obtaining them and busily weaving mats.

“Plarn sleeping mats are an exciting project for many reasons,” says Teresa Whitehouse, Midwest Mission’s project manager. “They not only give a second life to used plastic bags but, in a small way, they also help improve the lives of the people who receive the mats. It is a way for us to give comfort to someone we may never meet.

“Though individual volunteers have been crocheting beautiful plarn mats for years, the loom allows people to gather together in groups to weave sleeping mats and prepare the plarn.”

Lightweight and flexible, the mats provide a thermal barrier against dampness, grass, gravel, sand, and cold floors. They also repel

bugs (which don’t like plastic). It takes about 700 bags to make one mat. A completed mat is just under three by six feet.

This summer at the North Central Jurisdictional Mission Academy, Kris Aves worked on a loom at the Midwest Mission display booth. Kris, co-coordinator of Northern Illinois Conference’s United Methodist Volunteers in Mission, purchased a loom, thinking there were ways it could be used in the conference.

After a church-wide trip to Midwest Mission, members of First United Methodist Church in Dixon picked up a loom on Aug. 30. They have weekly loom workdays that up to nine people attend; many others flatten, cut, and knot the plastic bags at home. After the church’s first mat was completed, they realized how many people were interested in the ministry. On Oct. 23, they picked up two more looms. They now have a dedicated workroom with multiple stations for working on mats. The local PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter) organization is excited to receive them.

During a September Sunday morning service, Rev. Jim Bell, pastor at First United Methodist Church in Belvidere, distributed \$100 bills to members of the congregation. This was a “kingdom assignment:” each person was to spend the money on something that would further the kingdom of God in some way. One recipient, Dan Holmes, was scrolling through Facebook when he saw Midwest Mission’s post about the sleeping-mat project. The suggested donation for a loom

is \$100, the post said. He immediately knew where to invest his kingdom funds. He called Midwest Mission right away and soon picked up the loom. He’s now looking for the best place to set it up.

Also in September, the Tampico United Methodist Church’s mission group made its yearly visit to Midwest Mission. There they learned



Lynn Roe of First UMC in Dixon works on one of the church’s looms

how to make sleeping mats. Two members purchased a loom and asked their church folks and friends to save plastic bags. They have made two mats so far and hope to recruit more people from the church and community involved in the project. They plan to take the mats they make with them when they head back to Midwest Mission in March to pick up the supplies needed to work on the rice-meal project.

During an NIC Vital Congregations workshop in October, Joyce McCullough of First United Methodist Church in Oak Park heard about the Belvidere church’s work on the sleeping mats. This inspired her to contact Midwest Mission to learn more. “Our church was getting ready to revitalize our crafting group and it seemed that this loom might be an interesting fit,” she says. “It also might engage youth and other adults who would not necessarily be interested in knitting or crocheting.”

continued on page 2, see Plarn



Completed sleeping mat made at the summer North Central Jurisdictional UMVIM Mission Academy.

 Your giving to Mission Links supports the work of Midwest Mission.



From Your Bishop:

We Belong to Each Other

"The eye cannot say to the hand I have no need of you."

—1 Corinthians 12:21

When I introduced myself to the districts last winter, I told my call story. It really isn't all that remarkable. I will spare you the furniture and the play of light in the room and go straight to the scripture: 1 Corinthians 12. It broke open my moral imagination. This notion that all members of the body are of sacred worth, that all have gifts, and that our unity and love engage the world in ways that make Christ known—wow! I remember thinking: I want to give my life to this! The way we offer ourselves to each other communicates that we belong to each other, in Christ.

John Wesley taught that the covenants of Methodist polity affirm that we share for the good of the whole, be it the trust clause, the apportionment, or the apportionment. I write today to ask you to pray and consider how to finish well and move toward 100 percent payment of all your church's apportioned items, both conference and general church apportionments.

After the news of Bobby Knight's Nov. 1 death became public, I saw again the clip in which this very successful college basketball coach taught that everyone wants to win, but not everyone is willing to prepare to win. I write to encourage you to do what preparation is needed to finish our apportionment covenant strong for 2023.

As we learned about Hamas's attack on Israel on Oct. 7, it was clear to me that this conference was prayerful and concerned, but also wanted to do all it could to support our colleague, Rev. Jane Eesley, our United Methodist staff person with the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem. This ministry is a partnership

of the World Methodist Council, the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, and the Methodist Church in Great Britain. Our connexion appointed her there for such a time as this. We belong to each other. (And let's keep praying for her and all in this web of war.)

During one week in October, I attended two different conference events: one a meeting of Hispanic leaders and the other a meeting of our Korean leaders. Both groups receive support from the agencies that administer United Methodist ministry plans that are funded by general church askings. The United Methodist Church so believes in our mission in Northern Illinois that they have invested in us. Praise God. We belong to each other.

I can't imagine a world without our general agencies! I know when I was an assistant to the bishop, I depended on the Commission on the Status and Role of Women to help guide my work in dealing with cases that involved abuse of power and boundary violations.

We depend on the General Commission on Religion and Race. I have learned so much from them! Recently a contingent of Northern Illinois Conference leaders—the largest conference group in attendance—returned from a GCORR training event that will bless this annual conference. We belong to each other.

In a recent conversation with Andrea Hall of Methodist Youth Services Inc., she told me of a young person who had been homeless so long he has no memory of experiencing Christmas. Their work with young people brings tears to my eyes. Add Kids Above All to the list of UMC-related organizations that change the lives of children and youth. At their recent celebration I presented awards to amazing leaders who are impacting the life of



kids. I can't imagine life without them! Ditto for Rosecrance—how many lives and families are healthier for that ministry?

Our partners at the Midwest Methodist Foundation, including its president, Chris Walters, offer us so much to bless ministry. Add Justice for our Neighbors. Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and North Central College are leaders in the field—and we belong to each other.

I know times are hard. I know that maintaining support of our local church ministries is more difficult every year. I also know we will not shrink to greatness. Remember, when your church does not remit its apportionments in full, another church is paying your share. Every year, our annual conference budget includes an additional amount to apportion to make up for those churches that cannot take their place in the connection.

I ask you to pray and consider if your church can finish well for 2023. Whether you do or not, every gift is significant, every gift is an expression of grace. Thanks be to God for the giver of every gift! Thank you for your ministry.

Know that I am praying for you.

Your giving to apportionments support the Episcopal Office as well as all the programs mentioned.



Plarn *(continued from page 1)*

"Midwest Mission would love to take credit for this wonderful idea, but we can't," Whitehouse says. "In the late '60s, plastic bread wrappers were braided together to make beautiful rugs. Some are still around today. We have only recycled an old idea. I pray our sleeping mats will be as durable as those of our grandparents."

Nancy Wadsworth of First United Methodist in Dixon says the mat-weaving is "a great multi-generational project."

"Our youth have helped with weaving and we have someone in her 90s who flattens bags [in preparation for turning them into plarn]. People drop in during the week to check on the project or leave bags."

As well as healthier and more peaceful rest to people without a bed, the project

is a fantastic way to reuse plastic bags and prevent them from becoming litter. Those who'd like to help don't need a loom to participate; they can contribute bags or even turn them into plarn, ready for the loom.

Most churches mentioned in this article accept donations of bags as they are, cut into strips, or knotted into plarn. Midwest Mission has posted an easy-to-follow video demonstration of how to make plarn and weave it on the loom. And those who enjoy wood work

can download from midwestmission.org plans for building a loom.

Learn more about how to make the mats and obtain a loom at midwestmission.org/loom.



Multiple workstations in the mat-making room at First UMC in Dixon.

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

Job Openings

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

Your giving to NIC Apportionments support this publication.



NIC Church and Society Board calls for cease-fire in Middle East

by Northern Illinois Conference
Board of Church and Society
The following is an abbreviated version of the NIC's Board of Church and Society statement from Nov. 10, 2023. Please use the link at the end of this article to read it in full.



"We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ."

United Methodist Social Principles (165C)

of all nations is to work together to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them."

Northern Illinois Conference's Board of Church and Society joins the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society and other faith groups and communities in calling for a cease-fire, de-escalation, and restraint following the violent conflict between Israel and Hamas.

We are heartbroken by the escalating violence in Palestine and Israel. We send our sympathies and solidarity to all Israelis and Palestinians who lost loved ones on Oct. 7. And we decry Israel's response to relentlessly bomb Gaza night and day, collectively punishing the two million residents of Gaza, more than half of whom are children; most are refugees, living in the most densely populated area in the world. As we enter the fourth week of Israel's assault on Gaza, Israel has declared a full siege of Gaza and has blocked the entry of fuel, electricity, water, food, and goods into Gaza, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

We mourn the more than 8,000 Palestinians who have been killed in Gaza, especially the 3,342 children who have been killed. We grieve knowing that each child is special, each child has a name—like three-year-old Sabah Al-Khatib, who was killed along with her mother, three aunts, and their children. We are disturbed that Save our Children has reported that Israel has killed more children in Gaza in three weeks than have been killed in all global conflict annually since 2019.

More than 8,000 Palestinians have been killed during Israel's relentless bombing attacks.

As people of faith, we reiterate the United Methodist Social Principles statement (165C) that "we believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. ... As disciples of Christ, we are called to love our enemies, seek justice, and serve as reconcilers of conflict. We insist that the first moral duty

This war cannot be understood without a clear look at historical perspective. We know the context in which this most recent Israeli assault has taken place: the people in Gaza are in the sixteenth year of a crippling blockade imposed by Israel, with little access to electricity, medical care, jobs, education, or other essentials of a decent life. The water resources have been almost totally contaminated.

Even before Oct. 7, in the West Bank just in this year, more than 250 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military and illegal settlers; 1,100 Palestinians have been forced from their homes; there were more than 800 attacks on Palestinians by Israeli settlers that resulted in injuries and property loss.

The Northern Illinois Conference Board of Church and Society also calls Congress to take action that upholds international conventions and supports unrestricted humanitarian aid allowing agencies to provide food, water, and medical supplies in the war-torn region. We acknowledge that a central part of calling for peace also requires that Israel change long-term policies that ignore the apartheid realities and Israeli abuses of Palestinian rights; we ask Congress to reject efforts to transfer or "relocate" Palestinians, many of whom still are refugees.

We urge NIC clergy and laity to take action for peace by contacting their legislators. GBCS offers a form for this purpose (umcjustice.org/news-and-stories/action-alert-tell-u-s-congress-to-pursue-peace-in-the-middle-east-1849).

Read the conference board's complete statement at umcnic.org/news/nic-church-and-society-calls-for-cess-fire-in-middle-east.

Your giving to NIC apportionments support the NIC Church and Society Board



UM Bishops ask Middle East combatants to "Give Peace a Chance"



The United Methodist Council of Bishops released this statement on Nov. 10, 2023.

Christ's true disciples must work for peace: build it and not just keep it; live it and not just aspire for it. If Christ is our peace, then peace must be imperative.
(Resolution 6129: The United Methodist Church and Peace)

The United Methodist Church Council of Bishops, along with millions of people across the globe, are weeping and praying for the people of the Holy Land. We decry the October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas and the continuing loss of life of Israelis and Palestinians including thousands of children.

We cannot remain silent while a preventable humanitarian crisis in Gaza unfolds with no safe haven for the citizens in Gaza or the volunteers and agencies seeking to prevent starvation and to treat the wounded.

We value all life. We encourage every effort toward a peaceful solution. We call for the release of hostages and for the killing to stop. We also call for the immediate allowance of unrestricted humanitarian assistance. As Bishops of the Church, we denounce acts of and the proliferation of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and hate crimes that may begin with words and often turn to violence directed toward persons whose race, ethnicity or religion is disparaged.

We cannot stand by as though God is not weeping when the innocent, including children, are dying. We cannot abandon the way of Peace.

May we find ways to listen to the stories of those most directly impacted by this centuries-old conflict. We commit to join all people in creating life-giving ways to journey toward peace with justice for all.

Bishop Tracy Malone elected council president

by Heather Hahn, assistant news editor, UM News Service

The United Methodist Council of Bishops has elected East Ohio Conference Bishop Tracy S. Malone, formerly a clergy member of the Northern Illinois Conference, as its next president.

Malone, who will take the president's gavel next spring, will be the first Black woman to lead the more than 110 active and retired United Methodist bishops in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the U.S.

Her election comes as she celebrates the 30th anniversary of her ordination.

"This is a sacred trust, and I will hold it with care and great responsibility," Malone told her fellow bishops upon the announcement of her election. "And as I prepare to assume my role as president, I am deeply committed to doing the prayerful work of deep listening."

She said she would seek to attend "to the voice, to the wisdom and to the guidance of God" and "to the needs, the fears, the hopes

and the dreams of the people called United Methodist" as well as "to the cries and to the needs of the world."

The council's active bishops elected Malone and their other officers by ballot Nov. 10 during the fall meeting at Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center in North Carolina.

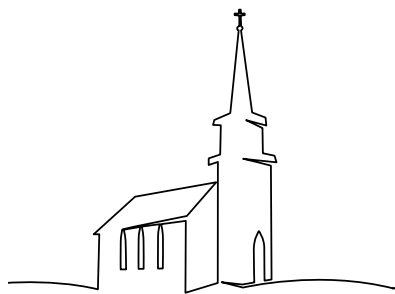
Council of Bishops presidents serve two-year terms at the helm. Malone will succeed New York Conference Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, who has served as president since spring 2022.

Malone will assume the presidency from Bickerton midway through General Conference, the denomination's top lawmaking assembly scheduled to meet April 23-May 3 in Charlotte, N.C. As immediate past president, Bickerton will continue to serve on the Council of Bishops executive committee for another two years.

Your giving to general church apportionments' Episcopal Fund supports the Council of Bishops.



East Ohio Conference Bishop Tracy S. Malone speaks Nov. 6 at First United Methodist Church in Waynesville, N.C., during a memorial service for bishops and spouses who have died over the past six months. During its November meeting, the Council of Bishops elected Malone to serve as the council's next president. Photo by Rick Wolcott, courtesy of the Council of Bishops.



Local Church News

Conference UMM Men feed neighbors through 'potato drop'

by Steve Nailor (Grace: Rockford) & Robert Bruozas (New Lenox)

United Methodist Men from Grace United Methodist Church (Rockford), the UMC of New Lenox, and the Prairie North District partnered with Society of St. Andrew this fall to give away fresh produce and other basics to their neighbors.

The give-away that took place at Grace UMC on Oct. 28 (with a satellite distribution site at Court Street UMC) distributed 42,000 pounds of potatoes (1.4 million servings of food) for people in seven counties. It caught the attention of Rockford WREX-TV's newscast in October. Over the years, the Prairie North District has provided over 294,000 pounds of food to area residents through local community food pantries.

The New Lenox UMM hosted a drive-through event on Oct. 14 and distributed 45,000 pounds of potatoes, many crates of water, Starbucks coffee, graham crackers, and boxed cereal through the generosity of Hands of Hope of Illinois. Some 37 church pantries and government agencies also participated.

Church members and youth from Lincoln-Way West and Lincoln-Way Central High

Schools made that very wet morning a success. They served people from as far north as Barrington and as far south as Wilmington.

A United Methodist-related ministry, SOSA directs salvaged potatoes (and other fresh produce) to churches and other organizations that provide food to those who need it. It is the America's first and largest gleaning network.

The salvaged produce was rejected by commercial markets or potato chip factories due to slight imperfections in size, shape, sugar content, or surface blemishes. They are still safe to eat. Usually, these rejected loads end up at local landfills. Of all the food raised in the U.S., 133 billion pounds (40 percent) goes to waste each year while each year 40 million people in the U.S. struggle with access to food.

In 1974, the Northern Illinois Conference UMM and the then-Rockford District worked with SOSA as they

began their ministry. The conference UMM have been the top financial supporters of SOSA in the connection, raising \$70,846 over the last eight years.

To raise awareness for the organization, SOSA started offering "potato pins." These were designed in Northern Illinois and are still in use today.



United Methodist Men groups unload over 4,000 pounds of potatoes to the Grace UMC (Rockford) parking lot in preparation for the Potato Drop. (Photo by Steve Nailor)

Apply for a grant for your church's ministries to others

by Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer,

NIC Director of Connectional Ministries

Looking for a bit of a financial boost to help get a ministry off the ground?

Healthy churches look for ways to share God's love with their neighbors in practical ways. The Northern Illinois Conference offers a number of grants that assist many kinds of ministries for your church's context. Your church may qualify for one of the following. Some of the deadlines are coming up soon, so visit the grants web page now.

Connectional Ministries Grants

The Creative Ministry, Congregational Redevelopment, and Social Reform grants support ministries that engage the community in new ways, witness to the transformation of society, and experiment with new ways of being the church. Church apportionment giving makes these grants possible. Deadline to apply for any of these three grants: Dec. 15.

Creative Ministries Grant

The Creative Ministries Grant, coordinated by the program ministry members of the Annual Conference Shepherding Team, aims to encourage creative, collaborative ministry programs throughout the conference. The grants support new, risk-taking initiatives for the community the church serves, to fulfill the mission of the church for the transformation of the world. This grant is designed to encourage experimentation, so "success" is not a necessary result. The grant's purpose is to free your church to explore new ways for your community to learn and be transformed in mission and ministry.

Award range: \$1,500 to \$3,000



Congregational Redevelopment Grant

Coordinated by the conference Congregational Development and Redevelopment Committee, this grant aims to encourage congregations to deepen their effectiveness in ministry. Grants will support projects that seek to increase engagement with faith or the church, help the congregation rediscover its unique call to mission in the community, and/or reimagine congregational life for greater fruitfulness in ministry. Projects may focus on specific areas of congregational life or mission, but should ultimately contribute to a larger vision of revitalizing the church's mission and ministry. Grant priority will be given to churches that have set goals and have participated in conference training for redevelopment.

Award range: \$1,500 to \$3,000

Social Reform Grant

The Social Reform Grant, coordinated by the Conference Board of Church and Society, aims to provide financial empowerment to churches that have a passion and propose a plan for addressing a specific concern related to social justice. These funds can be used for

both domestic and international ministries of justice and must address the root causes of the injustice while extending God's grace and mercy to all people. Primary consideration will be given to applicants that build partnerships among different ministries.

Award range: \$1,500 to \$3,000

PACK and Keagy Grants

These are available to conference churches in rural or small-town areas. See article on bottom of page 7 for more information. Deadline: March 31.

United Methodist Volunteer in Mission Grants

These are for districts and local churches planning to organize, fund, and lead youth and/or adult mission journey teams. Deadlines: April 11 (summer projects) and July 1 (fall projects).

Accessibility Grants

Churches who wish to make their worship services, activities, and facilities more accessible for people with disabilities may apply for this grant. The committee considers requests as they are received.

Midwest Methodist Foundation Grants

The foundation offers grants of up to \$2,000 to churches and church-related organizations that are developing new or expanded creative ministries. Deadline: Sept. 15.

Learn more and apply for these grants at umcnic.org/grants.

Bishops urged to turn page on a painful chapter

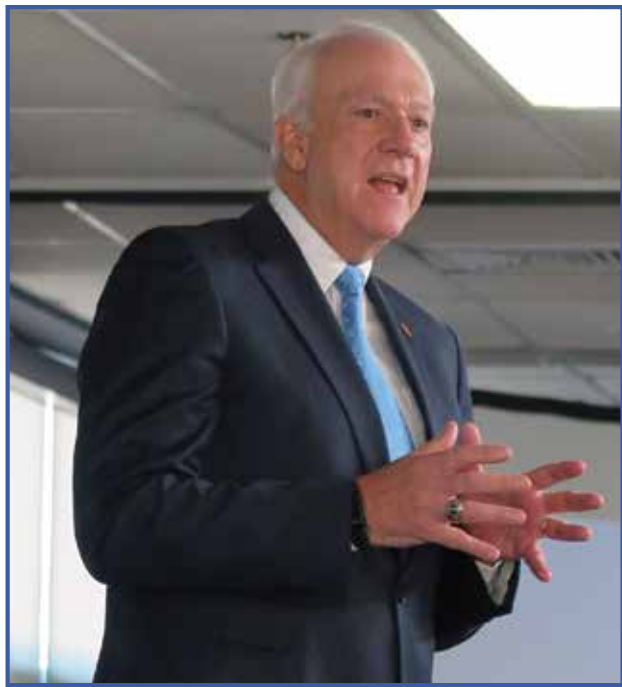
by Heather Hahn, assistant news editor for UM News Service

Nearing the end of a painful season, Council of Bishops President Thomas J. Bickerton urged his fellow bishops to use their woundedness to help The United Methodist Church heal.

"2023 has been a year when the climate of the world—a world filled with skepticism, distrust, anger and fear—has confronted our work and leadership at every turn," Bickerton told more than 100 bishops and other denominational leaders gathered from four continents for the fall meeting of the Council of Bishops.

However, Bickerton stressed during the Nov. 7 opening worship service that the experiences of the past year do not mean the end of the UMC or its mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Bishops, he said, still have a needed voice in a broken world. He opened the day's meeting by asking those gathered to pray for the peo-



Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, Council of Bishops president, calls on his fellow bishops to keep The United Methodist Church going in his address during opening worship. Photo by Heather Hahn, UM News.

ple affected by wars raging around the world including in Ukraine and in Israel and Gaza.

"As bishops," Bickerton said, "we must play our part in doing the absolute hard work of helping to craft a narrative about our sole aim to love God and love neighbor so deliberately that people will notice it and be transformed by it."

As of Nov. 24, an unaudited total of 7,286 U.S. congregations had cleared the necessary hurdles to disaffiliate under a provision that allows churches to leave with property if they meet certain financial and procedural obligations. The Council of Bishops also has seen five fellow bishops leave the UMC for the Global Methodist Church, a theologically conservative breakaway denomination.

In a sermon that drew heavily from Henri Nouwen's book *The Wounded Healer*, Bickerton described those gathered as "the wounded ones."

"We, like many of our pastors, have said goodbye to people who we once called colleagues and friends," he acknowledged. "We are scarred and worn and, if we are honest, have days when we have wondered how much longer we could continue on the path that we are following."

And yet, despite their pain, Bickerton said, United Methodist bishops are still here to plan next steps and consider how to lead a smaller denomination—one where a clear majority of congregations and individuals have committed to remain. At the June gathering of the Texas Annual Conference, one of the hardest hit by disaffiliations, Bickerton said the mere mention of "The United Methodist Church" was enough to draw applause.

Bickerton urged his fellow bishops to have a similarly renewed spirit and resolve as they meet.

Strategy for 2024 General Conference

The bishops spent the week strategizing for General Conference, scheduled to meet April 23-May 3, 2024, in Charlotte, N.C.

Bishops preside at the assembly but do not have a vote during the proceedings.

Bickerton cautioned that the bishops shouldn't simply wait to see what General Conference will decide. He urged those gathered to work for an assembly focused more on reclaiming shared ministry than the rancor of the past.

"We cannot afford to go into another General Conference where the narrative is about our arguments, our disagreements and our division," he said. "We cannot continue to talk about disaffiliation and separation."

At the start of his sermon, Bickerton spoke of the commitment he saw among Asian United Methodist missionaries he met last month during the General Board of Global Ministries meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. They are among the 186 missionaries and 25 mission volunteers from 40 countries serving around the world.

These missionaries, Bickerton said, "are not waiting to see what happens at a General Conference or sitting by the wayside waiting for a position paper on bringing relevancy back to a distressed denomination."

He said these 21st-century mission servants each have their own story of pain, alienation, and harm. But those experiences help them to connect effectively with other people.

As a result of their ministry, he said, lives are being touched and regions transformed.

He concluded his sermon urging his fellow United Methodists to keep the ministry going.

"I pray that we will not harden our hearts," Bickerton said, "and instead find meaningful ways to sing a joyful song that acknowledges the reality that in the midst of all we are facing, God will provide a way for us to keep the message and the story going."

Your giving to general church apportionments' Episcopal Fund supports the Council of Bishops.



Net Zero Emissions: Are we there yet? How will we know when we've arrived?

by Mac Robinet and Maureen Stillman, NIC Net Zero Team

The familiar refrain of a child traveler, "Are we there yet?" is a good question for us to ask ourselves as we travel the road toward net zero emissions. To avoid critical climate tipping points, those who work actively to prevent climate change pursue the goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

But how will we know if we are on the right road? How will we know if we are getting there? We must have a realistic road map, and we must have a way to accurately measure progress.

What will we measure?

We create greenhouse gas emissions primarily from our use of electricity and natural gas for heating and cooling our buildings. We measure the usage of electricity in kilowatt-hours (kWh) and natural gas in British thermal units (BTU). To describe total energy use, both natural gas and electricity are given in BTU. (One kWh is equal to about 3,000 BTU.)

However, the metered total doesn't tell us everything. For example, what if a new high-efficiency appliance is using more energy per month than the old one? Is the appliance defective or was there a significant change in the weather during the test period? To accu-

rately measure and track energy use, we must have a means of normalizing the data (make corrections for weather, etc.). This is a major part of what Energy Star Portfolio Manager was designed to do.

Energy Star portfolio manager

The Environmental Protection Agency created Energy Star in 1992 to provide resources and tools for businesses and households to manage and improve their energy use. Its Portfolio Manager (portfoliomanager.energystar.gov) was launched in 2000. It's a free online tool that measures and tracks energy and water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions of buildings. It can be used for a portfolio of properties or for a single building. By normalizing our energy usage input, Portfolio Manager can provide an ongoing measure of energy usage per square foot for all our buildings. This is called an Energy Use Intensity (EUI) score.



Benchmarking

In addition to measuring, normalizing, and tracking energy data, Portfolio Manager has a sophisticated benchmarking component. Energy Benchmarking determines whether a building is using more or less energy than peer facilities that have similar characteristics, occupancies, and size. This can provide valuable insight into energy usage.

The future is here

Maybe most important is that the future lies with measuring our impact on the planet. As it has been said, "If you want to lose weight you had better have a scale!" A sign that things are getting serious is the Village of Oak Park's passing an ordinance this year requiring all buildings over 10,000 square feet (Chicago's minimum is 50,000 square feet) to be recorded on Energy Star Portfolio Manager so the village can monitor buildings' use of electricity, gas, and water. All United Methodist churches are larger than 10,000 square feet and are in the process on initiating Energy Star Portfolio Manager.

Your giving to NIC apportionments support the Net Zero Team.



For survivors' sake, pledge to the Repair the Harm Fund today

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

What would you give to keep a child safe? What would you give to help the wounded heal?

Northern Illinois Conference's Bishop Dan Schwerin asks churches to prayerfully consider these questions as they make a pledge to the conference's Repair the Harm campaign. The campaign is raising \$754,348 toward a survivors' fund for those who endured abuse while participating in Boy Scout activities.

This is the conference's fair share of the \$30 million that The United Methodist Church will provide, as approved by the U.S. Bankruptcy Court.

"We have heard the cries and painful stories of those abused while in the Boy Scout program, some in troops chartered at local NIC churches," the NIC Council on Finance and Administration stated earlier this year when establishing the Repair the Harm campaign. "Our Christian faith calls us to have an obligation to children—past, present, and future—to do no harm to them and to repair the breach when harm is done."

Amid mounting claims of Scouting-related sex abuse going back decades, the Boy Scouts of America filed for bankruptcy in February 2020. Many of the over 82,000 claims come from those who participated in BSA groups in churches, including UM congregations.

Make a pledge before the year's end

It's time for churches to submit their pledges and initial contributions to the Repair the Harm fund. Bishop Schwerin encourages churches to make their pledge as soon as possible. Contributions are payable over three years.

"We invite you to give because you can be a participant in the healing, as compassionate Christians. For many of these survivors, knowledge that the church is on the side of truth and wholeness matters."

The Northern Illinois Conference's Repair the Harm to Children campaign addresses the needs of the survivors in three ways: listening and providing healing to the survivors,

contributing the conference's fair share to the survivor fund, and strengthening safeguards against harm in the future.

How to participate

Churches that have not yet made a pledge might consider committing 1 percent of the church's annual budget to the healing fund. This is a start, not a limit; churches and individuals can give more, as their hearts lead.

Individuals can pledge and give this to work as well. Pastors and church leaders can invite members who have a heart for children to make a pledge—and make a difference.

See the sidebar with this article to learn where to submit a pledge as well as contributions toward the pledge.

The conference has received contributions and pledges from 29 churches and several individuals. Pledges made so far come to \$135,988. This is 17 percent of the conference goal.

Churches also can review their Safe Sanctuaries policies, make them even stronger, and recommit to them.

"This is our chance to commit to a deeper safe sanctuaries policy and protections to protect children and vulnerable adults at all times and under all circumstances," Bishop Schwerin says.

Bishop Schwerin also promises to meet with any survivor in our conference who would find such a meeting helpful.



Scouting ministries continue

"Let's remember that we can still provide a discipleship formation for young people through scouting," Bishop Schwerin says. "Scouting is an important ministry and has many opportunities for discipleship."

Churches are urged to ask Boy Scout groups that meet in their facilities to enter into an affiliation agreement approved by the UMC. (Find a link to this agreement at umcnic.org/RepairTheHarm.)

More information about the Boy Scouts and how churches can renew strong and accountable relationships with them will be provided soon through NIC media. Watch for announcements.

How to make and fulfill a pledge

As compassionate Christians, churches and individuals can contribute to the Survivors' Fund. In this way, we can participate in healing for those who have been abused.

First, visit umcnic.org/RepairTheHarm and find the gray box on the right-hand side of the web page.

To make a pledge:

Click on "Pledge Form" and complete the form.

To submit payments:

Click on "Make a Payment." This will take you to a new page, which will provide links to a couple of options. One is to use the Tithe.ly online payment system. Another is for the church to remit payments through the NIC apportionment payment system, Prosper. You may also mail checks to the NIC office.



This statue greets visitors to the Jet Potter Scout Service Center in Nashville, Tenn. Photo by Mike DuBose, UM News.

Advent 2023 Photo-a-Day Challenge

Post a photo a day in response to the day's word.
Tag your post with #RethinkChurch

<p>12/3 TENDERLY</p> <p>12/4 PREPARE</p> <p>12/5 GLORY</p> <p>12/6 REVEALED</p> <p>12/7 VOICE</p> <p>12/8 MIGHT</p> <p>12/9 CARRY</p>	<p>12/10 NEWS</p> <p>12/11 RELEASE</p> <p>12/12 COMFORT</p> <p>12/13 PROVIDE</p> <p>12/14 JOY</p> <p>12/15 ACKNOWLEDGE</p> <p>12/16 EXULT</p>	<p>12/17 GIVEN</p> <p>12/18 BUILD</p> <p>12/19 MOVING</p> <p>12/20 WORD</p> <p>12/21 SERVANT</p> <p>12/22 REST</p> <p>12/23 FOREVER</p>
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CHRISTMAS EVE:
SHINED

CHRISTMAS DAY:
REJOICE

CELEBRATE

We celebrate Human Relations Day the Sunday before Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday to recognize his vision of "the beloved community."

January 15, 2024

<p>57% FUNDS COMMUNITY DEVELOPER PROGRAMS</p>	<p>10% FUNDS REHABILITATION PROGRAMS</p>	<p>33% FUNDS UNITED METHODIST VOLUNTARY SERVICES</p>
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SUPPORT

Donations support ministries of advocacy and community engagement

resourceumc.org/hrd

Leading the Laity Anticipation

by Eugene Williams, Conference Co-Lay Leader

Now is the time to embrace all the blessings of the past year and look forward to what lies ahead for the remainder of 2023 and all of 2024. Opportunities, prospects, and challenges abound. And as the Grammy-Award-winning singer/musician/actor Phil Collins would say, "I can feel it coming in the air tonight, oh Lord." We have come this far by faith and with faith we will reach our final destination.

But siblings, there is always a special excitement in the air at this time of the year as we embark upon the Advent season. There is anticipation and remembrance, and it never grows old as each year we celebrate anew the greatest gift ever given—for unto us a savior was born.

As a youth, I remember walking throughout the community and singing Christmas carols. Our rewards of hot chocolate, peppermints, pastries, and fruit cakes were greatly appreciated and we hardly noticed the cold weather.

Rejoice! Again, I say rejoice!

The story that never gets old

And even now, many decades removed, I still await with eager anticipation the story of the birth of our Lord and Savior. Because that story never gets old. Once again, the air is filled with joy, hope, and anticipation; with thoughts of Mary, Joseph, the star, the wise men, the manger, the oxen and sheep, the drummer boy, along with frankincense and myrrh. Indeed, what child is this? Sisters and brothers, this, this is Christ the King.

So during this season of Advent, let us embrace the love of Jesus as we consider those in need. Let us reach out to those who don't have food, clothing, housing, or medical attention and to those who have not yet come to know the love and saving grace of Christ. Let us share the good news and consider what gifts we can offer others, since we have already received the greatest gift of all. Make a special effort to renew our love for each other. Yes, Emmanuel! Joy to the World! Silent Night! O Come, All Ye Faithful! I pray that we will re-live the greatest story ever told; not just during Advent but throughout the year.

Because of the sinful nature of humanity, we could never be in a right relationship with God. So God sent God's Son! Yes, they called him Jesus. The greatest gift that anyone could ever receive was given for the forgiveness of our sins, to offer us salvation, to place us in a right relationship with God, to be members of the royal priesthood as sisters and brothers of Christ and heirs and co-heirs together with Christ. That's why I'm always excited and filled with eager anticipation at this time of the year.

As you embrace this season of anticipation, always remember your baptism and keep it holy as we carry out the mission that has been set before us: to love Jesus and one another. My siblings, in anticipation of who is to come and what is to come, and in anticipation of what God has in store for us in going forward, Rejoice! Again, I say rejoice! Merry Christmas, feliz navidad, meri keuriseumaseu, joyeux noel, eid milad majid, happy Kwanzaa . . .

May God bless you with a healthy and prosperous 2024.

Your giving to NIC apportionments support the Board of Laity.



Upcoming Events

See the full calendar at umcnic.org/calendar

January

14 NIC MLK Celebration



3 p.m.
St. Mark UMC
8441 S. St. Lawrence Ave.
Chicago, IL
Cost: Free

For further details visit umcnic.org/calendar/nic-mlk-celebration-2024



Lake South: Sat., January 20
Prairie South: Sat., January 20
Lake North: Sat., January 27
Prairie Central: Sat., January 27
Prairie North: Sat., January 27

Each district will host a combination of worship and workshop sessions on different topics. For further details and registration visit the calendar at umcnic.org/calendar and click on the individual events.

February



Lake North - Thurs., February 1
Prairie South - Wed., February 7
Prairie North - Thurs., February 8
Lake South - Mon., February 12
Prairie Central - Tues., February 13
Cost: Free

Clergy
- Fellowship: 9:30 a.m.
- Program: 10 a.m.
- Lunch afterwards
Laity
- Conversation: 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Join Bishop Dan Schwerin for a day of reflection and conversation on your district. For further details visit umcnic.org/calendar/2024-bishops-days-on-the-district.

10 Laity Convocation



9 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Belvidere: First UMC
610 Bonus Ave. Belvidere

Theme: Growing Together in Love: Learning to Have Courageous and Respectful Conversations. For further details and registration visit umcnic.org/calendar/laity-convocation-2024.

Small-town or rural ministries may apply for Keagy grants

by Rev. Libby Rutherford, Apple River UMC & Scales Mound UMC

Is your church in a small town or rural area (that is, not in an urban or suburban location)? Have you been dreaming of a creative ministry opportunity in your community, but need a little financial help?

The Northern Illinois Conference offers two grants that are funded by a bequest from Martin Keagy, who had a big heart for small-town and rural churches. The PACK (Planned Act of Christian Kindness) grants range from \$100 to \$500. Qualified ministries are meant to bless the church's neighbors and show them the love of Jesus Christ. The Keagy Grants range from \$500 to \$5000. These are for larger ministry projects that benefit the community and strengthen the church through evangelism, discipleship, justice, and compassion.

Grant recipients present their ministries at the Keagy Festival, held in the fall, where they show what God did through them and to encourage each other. This year's Keagy Festival took place at Grace United Methodist Church in Dixon, which showed the group amazing hospitality.

Grant recipients in 2023 have fostered community with teens, senior citizens, teachers, sports teams, children, and LGBTQ+ persons. Food pantries, community meals, and meals for Ukraine also received grants.

Rev. Libby Rutherford now leads the Keagy Committee. Please contact her at rutherford.libby@gmail.com if you have any questions about these grants.

The deadline to apply is March 31. Find more information at umcnic.org/grants.



Your giving to NIC apportionments support these grants.



Our reach goes beyond the parish

by Rev. Arlene Christopherson,
NIC Assistant to the Bishop
On Nov. 11, North Central
College installed their eleventh president, Dr.
Anita Jones Thomas. This Midwest institution
is more than home to a winning football team
(although the fighting Cardinals have brought
much notoriety to the school).

North Central College traces its roots to the
early faith movements that spread across our
country. Founded in 1861, our predecessor
evangelical branch of The United Methodist
Church gave rise to this strong, forward-think-
ing institution. Our ties as the Northern Illinois
Conference to North Central College are some-
thing to claim, celebrate, and nurture.

Founded in 1861 as Plainfield College, the
school had 40 students—both men and
women, in a time when coeducation was not
common. This is the same year the Civil War
began. The first president of the college was
Augustine Austin Smith, an administrator from
Oberlin College in Ohio. He and his family

actively supported
abolition, temper-
ance, and women's
rights while fighting
against racial dis-
crimination.

The college
moved to Naperville
in 1867 and just a
few years after its
founding the Evan-
gelical Theological
Seminary was also
established as
part of the school

in 1873. One of our successor's branches, the
Evangelical Association, joined with the Unit-
ed Brethren in Christ in 1946 and became the
Evangelical United Brethren Church. In 1968,
the EUB and the Methodist Church merged to
become The United Methodist Church. During
its time in Naperville, the Evangelical Theolog-
ical Seminary educated church leaders, includ-
ing clergy who also became bishops. In 1974
the Evangelical Theological Seminary joined
with Garrett Theological Seminary to form Gar-
rett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evan-
ston, on the Northwestern University campus.

Through all these changes in our country,
our denomination, and in higher education,
North Central has remained in relationship
with the UMC. Our history with North Central is
a vital part of our identity as a conference.

A valuable partnership

At Dr. Thomas's installation in November,
North Central's campus minister, Rev. Eric Doo-
little (a UM elder), Bishop Hee-Soo Jung (Wis-



**NORTH CENTRAL
COLLEGE 1861**

consin Conference), and I, representing Bishop
Dan Schwerin, were present to remember and
strengthen the ties and deeply rooted commit-
ment we have to this institution. Our prayers,
blessings, and leadership solidify the connec-
tions between the college, our denomination,
and our annual conference.

The installation of the college's first wom-
an and first person of color was a milestone
moment for the school and for all of us. Dr.
Thomas is a wonderfully gifted leader. She is a
mission-driven administrator and educator, re-
searcher, and psychologist. The presence of so
many United Methodists throughout the week-
end participating in the celebration is a witness
to our continued investment in education and
our relationship with North Central College.

The same weekend we celebrated the instal-
lation of Dr. Thomas, another North Central
College graduate, Bishop Tracy Smith Malone,
formerly an elder in our conference, was elect-
ed president of the UMC Council of Bishops
and the first Black woman to hold that role.

God has done amazing things over the years
through the work and witness of North Cen-
tral College, her students, and leaders. At this
moment when Dr. Thomas has been named
the eleventh president, we as a conference
remain open to ways in which God is calling us
to continue this long and rich relationship.



Your giving to general church apportionments
supports United Methodist related schools.



Clergy Appointments and Retirements

Bishop Dan Schwerin announces the following clergy appointments and retirements for the Northern Illinois Conference of
The United Methodist Church, effective July 1, 2024 (unless otherwise noted):

Appointment to Retirement

Martha L. Scott (Full Elder) to Retirement
from Oak Park: Euclid Avenue (Lake North
District), effective Jan. 1, 2024. Marti was
ordained a Probationary Elder in 1975 (Cen-
tral Illinois Conference), transferred to the
NIC in 1980, and became a Full Elder in 1982.
During her ministry, Marti served at Chicago:
Lincoln, McKinley Park, Elsdon, University of
Chicago Divinity School, Garrett-Evangelical
Theological Seminary, Chicago Northwestern
District (District Superintendent), and Oak
Park: Euclid Avenue.

Reuel A. Talapian (Full Elder) to Retirement
from Leave of Absence, effective Jan. 1,
2024. Reuel began his ministry in the Philip-
pine Annual Conference an Ordained Dea-
con in 1988, and then an Ordained Elder in
1990. He transferred to the Northern Illinois
Conference as a Full Elder in 2011. During
his ministry here, he served Oak Park: St.
John's, Chicago: West Ridge, Chicago: St.
Matthew and Evanston: Hemenway.

Brenda Byrne (Full Elder) to Retirement from
Durand/Davis: Calvary, effective Jan. 1, 2024.
Brenda was ordained a Probationary Elder in
1991, and Full Elder in 1997. During her min-
istry, she served Willow, Kent, Freeport: Faith,
New Milford, Fairhaven, Argo Fay, Thomson,
Triumph, Northern Illinois Hospice and Grief
Center (Rockford), Davis: Calvary, Rock City,
Burritt, and Durand.

Mai Le (Licensed Local Pastor) will conclude
her ministry at Chicago: First Vietnamese,
effective Jan. 1, 2024. Mai was first licensed
and served the Missouri Conference in 2015.
She was appointed to Chicago: First Vietnam-
ese in 2019.

Other Appointments

Chung Nam Kwak (Retired Elder) to Nap-
erville: Woori NFC (Prairie Central District) (1/4
time) Chung Nam follows Sam Park who
graciously served as an interim during an
emergent situation. October 1.

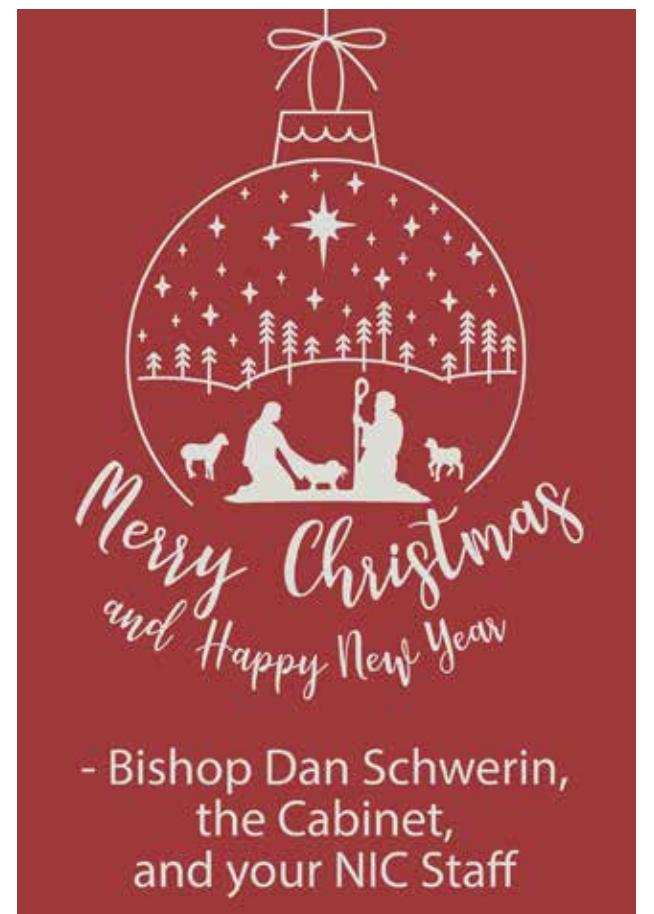
Kelli Harrison (Licensed Local Pastor) to Wil-
mette: Trinity (Lake North District) (1/2 time,
Associate), which is a newly created position.
October 15.

Vinay Pathak (346.2) to Chicago: Granville Ave
(Lake North District) (1/4 time) while remain-
ing 3/4 time at Chicago: Indo Pak (Lake North
District). Vinay has been serving pulpit supply
at Granville for the last year. November 1.

Lois Parr (Retired Elder) to Chicago: Urban
Village Church (Lake North District) (1/2 time
interim). Lois follows Kari Lindholm Johnson
who withdrew for health reasons. November 1.

Tony Asta (346.2) to Oak Park: Euclid Ave
(Lake North District) (1/2 time interim). Tony
follows Marti Scott who is retiring. January 1.

Your giving to NIC apportionments support
clergy appointments, moves, and retirements.



**THANK YOU
FOR ALL
OF YOUR
SUPPORT!**



**KIDS
ABOVE
ALL**

