

The Northern Illinois Conference OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH Reporter

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2 From Your Bishop:
Hope is Stronger than Memory



2 Bishops Encourage a
Relaunch



5 Missions for Ukraine



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United Methodists condemn hate, urge action after racial violence

By Heather Hahn*

Lincoln Memorial United Methodist Church stands a few blocks from the grocery store where a gunman opened fire May 14 — killing 10 people and injuring three.

But for members of the largely Black congregation in Buffalo, New York, what officials labeled a white supremacist attack hit far closer to home.

One member lost an inspiring teacher. Another lost her beloved uncle. The church's pastor, the Rev. George Nicholas, is close to the family of Aaron Salter, the retired police officer who died trying to stop the gunman.

On Sunday the day after, an interracial crowd of worshippers came to Lincoln Memorial to mourn, to begin to heal and to discuss what following Jesus requires.

"See for us Black folks, we are familiar with suffering," Nicholas told those gathered. "This ain't news to us. We've

been here before and we're just desperately waiting for God's people to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us not just for a moment, not just for a vigil, not just for prayer time. I'm talking about standing with us."

Nicholas was among the United Methodists calling for prayer and action after a weekend that not only saw a mass shooting in Buffalo but also across the country in a Presbyterian church in Southern California.

The Rev. Doug Williams, senior pastor of Laguna Country United Methodist Church in Laguna Woods, California, said his church is reaching out to its Presbyterian neighbors to find out what is needed.

"We are going to try to meet those needs if we can," he said. "We're going to offer prayers and support. I know that's cliché, but it does give comfort to folks."

Laguna Woods started as a 55+ community that has

(continued on page 4, see From the Cover: Urge Action)

Racial Justice Resources

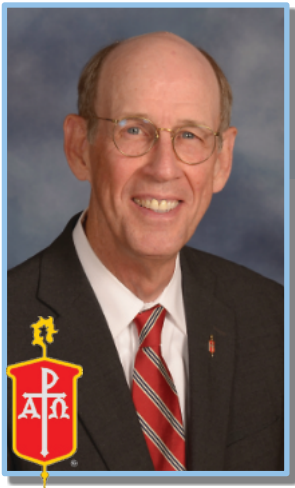
For those looking to act, the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race offers resources for faith communities and individuals working towards racial justice on its website at gcorr.org.

They include:

- The racial justice prayer and action challenge
- A conversation guide
- Anti-racism dos and don'ts
- 8 ways church leaders can move the conversation forward
- A guide to overt and covert racism

Find more resources from the NIC Anti-racism Task Force at umcnic.org/antiracism.





From Your Bishop: Hope is stronger than memory

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

For Christians, hope is always stronger than memory. We are reminded

of that truth when summertime blooms with life and outside activities. As we see the flowers burst into color and feel the warmth of sunshine on our face, we are reminded that new life is not only possible—it is all around us. Resurrection triumphs over death as surely as snow melts and the robins sing.

Christians believe that history has a direction. That is, we are not caught in a Sisyphus-like cycle that repeats itself, but God is unfolding something crucial in our very time. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, through which God revealed a love that will not die. Even though we cannot

see the end of history, we believe we can faithfully participate in God’s work even now. The reign of God has already begun and will come to completion in God’s time. We have hope as a gift, and it is stronger than memory.

As our churches have seen more people coming back to worship after two years of a pandemic, I sense a new hope that God is creating new possibilities. Vacation Bible Schools are meeting, summer camps are open, outdoor services are continuing, and people are looking for a community of faith. When possible, many churches are keeping their online services and imagining how to stay in touch with those who cannot attend in person. This is not a time to go back to how we did things before COVID-19. It is a time to reach out to people who need a spiritual friend like you.

Is your church already planning activities to reach new people this fall? Do you have a neighbor or friend who you could invite to meet you in church? From my experience, a church grows when it has quality activities for spiritual growth and service, and its members do their part by simply inviting people to join them. This summer

and fall, we can re-launch our ministries’ knowing God has plans to give us a “future with hope.”

Keep in mind that many people looking for a faith community have memories that have wounded them. They are looking for hope. COVID-19 alone has killed over one million people in the United States. Individually and collectively, we mourn the loss. Everyone has a memory that makes them want to hold on to the past. Only God can heal some of those memories and help us move forward with confidence. We cannot hold on to how we have been the church if we want to make a difference for those who follow us.

I believe the best days of The United Methodist Church are ahead of us. The temptation has always been to return to an idealized view of the past rather than move forward. That is true for an individual, a local church, or a denominational movement. Will our vision exceed our hindsight? Will our hope be stronger than our memory? Can we move into the future with hope?

~Bishop John L. Hopkins

United Methodists urged to relaunch their church

By Heather Hahn*

The new Council of Bishops president shared his hopes for a renewed United Methodist Church while lamenting the imminent departure of some to a breakaway denomination. Those breaking away include a fellow bishop.

But even as a new denomination gets off the ground, Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton urged United Methodists to celebrate a launch of their own.

“In the midst of heartache of separation, let us launch and proclaim once again a unity of purpose in ministry together,” Bickerton, who also leads the New York Conference, preached April 29.

“In the midst of legal documents and term sheets, let us launch and affirm the reality that United Methodists are Bible-based, faith-driven, mission-focused and global in scope.”

The United Methodist Council of Bishops concluded its five-day spring meeting with Bickerton receiving the president’s gavel from his predecessor, Louisiana Conference Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey. The bishops also acknowledged what Bickerton called a “sad and sobering reality” — the May 1 start of the Global Methodist Church, a theologically conservative denomination.

The bishops delayed the start of the April 29 livestream on Facebook for a closed session to discuss the resignation of one of their number: retired Bishop J. Michael Lowry.

Lowry, who retired Jan. 1 after leading the Central Texas Conference for more than 13 years, serves on the Global Methodist Church’s Transitional Leadership Council.

Then-president Harvey sent Lowry a letter April 21 noting that if he remained in the Global Methodist Church’s leadership after its launch, his United Methodist membership would be terminated. The United Methodist Church does not allow clergy members to be part of more than one denomination.

The Global Methodist organizers are splitting from The United Methodist Church after years of mounting frustration with debate and defiance of church bans on same-sex marriage and the ordination of noncelibate gay clergy.

More from the bishops

With New York Conference Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton taking the gavel of Council of Bishops president, the Council of Bishops will see other leadership changes.

East Ohio Conference Bishop Tracy Smith Malone is the

new president-designate. South Carolina Conference Bishop L. Jonathan Holston is the new Council of Bishops secretary. As immediate past president, Louisiana Conference Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey will continue to serve on the bishops’ executive committee.

Retired Bishops Bruce Ough and Sally Dyck will continue in their roles as Council of Bishops executive secretary and ecumenical officer, respectively.

The coming General Conference — The United Methodist Church’s top lawmaking assembly — faces multiple proposals for some form of separation. However, after the third postponement of the international legislative assembly because of the pandemic, Global Methodist organizers decided no longer to wait for General Conference action.

Meanwhile, May 1 passed with little fanfare. Both United Methodist and Global Methodist leaders expect any potential separations to take some time.

The Rev. Keith Boyette, chairman of the Transitional Leadership Council, wrote shortly before May 1 that the launch date was chosen for “practical reasons.”

Basically, the Global Methodist Church wants to be in a position to accept disaffiliating United Methodist churches, clergy and potentially annual conferences — United Methodist regional bodies — during the season when U.S. annual conferences meet.

Annual conferences have final say on whether a church can disaffiliate. However, the Judicial Council, the denomination’s top court recently ruled U.S. annual conferences have no authority under current church law to withdraw from The United Methodist Church.

“There is no basis in Church law for any annual conference to adopt stopgap policies, pass resolutions, take a vote, or act unilaterally for the purpose of removing itself from The United Methodist Church,” the Judicial Council ruled in Decision 1444.



Louisiana Conference Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, at right, passes the gavel to her successor as Council of Bishops president, New York Conference Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton at the conclusion of their spring meeting April 29. The bishops acknowledged the planned launch of a breakaway denomination on May 1 while also discussing how United Methodist ministry continues. Photo credit Kathryn Moore

The church court said only General Conference — the denomination’s top lawmaking assembly — can set the process and conditions for these regional church bodies to leave the United Methodist connection.

But as of now, General Conference has not established such a process for annual conferences within the U.S.

For his part, Bickerton said that every day he prays that churchgoers can bless one another and mutually recognize each person’s sacred worth.

“I pray that we’ll somehow stop this fight and find a way to move on in the rediscovering of our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,” he said.

While matters of separation will take time to sort out, United Methodist ministry continues.

During their spring meeting, the bishops heard an update on how the United Methodist Committee on Relief — in coordination with European United Methodists and ecumenical partners — is responding to the human costs of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Roland Fernandes, the top executive of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries and UMCOR, said the invasion has led to the largest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II. UNICEF reports that about half of Ukrainian children have been forced from their homes. At the same time, the number of Ukrainian refugees has not

(continued on page 3, see Relaunch

Aurora church's display spotlights missing, murdered indigenous women

Submitted by Al Benson



Michelle Curiel, director of praise and worship at Aurora's Wesley United Methodist Church, poses Thursday, May 5, with an outdoor REDress installation on the church lawn. The REDress project calls attention to missing and murdered indigenous women. Photo by Al Benson

Thursday, May 5, was national Missing Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Awareness day.

Wesley United Methodist Church in Aurora observed the day by installing eight red dresses on a clothesline between poles on the church lawn.

Michelle Curiel, installation coordinator and Wesley director of praise and worship, said "The REDress Project is a visual reminder of the staggering number of missing or murdered Indigenous women who are no longer with us.

"We hope to draw attention to the gendered and racialized nature of violent crimes against Indigenous

women and to evoke a presence through the marking of absence," Curiel said.

The installation was on display 24/7 through May. Assisting her were congregants Jim Merk and Faith Burnett, both of Aurora. Merk is a member of Wesley's governing board. Burnett is a West Aurora High School freshman.

Curiel added that MMIW USA, a nonprofit, is dedicated to helping missing and murdered American Indian women and their families. MMIW USA is sponsored by Tryon Life Community Farm of Portland, Ore., another nonprofit.

Curiel explained that murder is the third leading cause of death in native women. Their median age is 29. Native women have a murder rate of 10 times higher than the national average.

Lack of communication combined with jurisdictional issues between state, local, federal and tribal law enforcement make it nearly impossible to begin the investigative process.

Curiel said, "We must protect the sacred and bring awareness to this crisis that has been overlooked."

For more information, visit mmiwusa.org or visit nativehope.org.

More Local Church News on page 5

United Voices for Children



United Voices for Children seeking award nominees

It's time to nominate individuals or groups who exemplify service and advocacy efforts on behalf of children, youth and/or families throughout the Northern Illinois Conference. United Voices for Children is excited to receive your nominations which are due by July 31.

Each year, UVC gives these special awards to honor extraordinary volunteer service or advocacy efforts on behalf of children, youth and/or families throughout the Northern Illinois Conference.

Any United Methodist member or congregation in Northern Illinois can nominate individuals both laity and clergy to receive one of these awards. Receiving such

an award is an affirmation of service and advocacy that impacts children.

To learn more about the three distinguished awards – Bishop Jesse. R. DeWitt, Katherine B. Greene, and Rev. Margaret Ann Williams – please go to unitedvoicesforchildren.org/programs/awards for descriptions and nomination forms.

Save the Date

These awards will be given virtually during the Raising Our Voices Through Resources; A Bridge for the Gap event on Tuesday, Sept. 13, 11:00 a.m. - 12 noon.

During this event, resources focusing on mental well-being, anti-racism, equity and accessibility will be highlighted for both clergy and laity to equip ministries, services and programs. A full resource list will be made available.

2022 UVC Child Advocate Award Nominees will be honored and speak on behalf of their ministries. Part 2 will be hosted in 2023.

For more information, email unitedvoicesforchildren@gmail.com or go to the website at unitedvoicesforchildren.org



Relaunch *(continued from page 2)*

eclipsed the volume of displaced people from Syria, Fernandes said. He said UMCOR, which was founded to help refugees during World War II, is working to respond to refugees from all around the globe.

"While all the churches in the region may be comparatively small, they have carried a tremendous load with generosity of spirit and care that has been very remarkable," Fernandes said.

In Estonia, a United Methodist church camp is now housing refugees. In the Czech Republic, diaconal ministries and local churches also are providing refugees with shelter. In Romania, UMCOR has provided a grant

so churches can provide support care, shelter and food at a local hotel for the refugees who are passing through. UMCOR also is working to provide grants in other European countries.

Germany Bishop Harald Rückert said his country has shown a welcoming attitude toward Ukrainian refugees. But there are still people from Africa and Asia, including Afghanistan, who are seeking safety and asylum in Europe.

"We as Christians have to raise our voices and advocate for them as well," Rückert said. "We have to advocate for all peoples in need."

Amid wars, migration and internal struggles, Bickerton expressed his belief that The United Methodist Church still can bring a vital Christian witness to a hurting world.

"Let's commit ourselves to spending most of our time positioning our church for the next chapter of our life together," he said. That includes "talking about the movement of the Spirit in our midst, the exciting days that lie ahead and the joy we will have being able to live out our calling to preach the good news of God's love."

*Hahn is assistant news editor for UM News



2nd Annual Rally Against Racism

In light of recent racially motivated violence and attacks in the news, it's more important than ever to stand in solidarity against hate.

Last summer, the NIC Annual Conference Shepherding Team (ACST) and the Anti-racism Task Force (ARTF) joined together to spearhead a way for churches to visibly show their commitment to the goal "to live out the conviction that racism is incompatible with Christian teaching."

Several churches across the conference participated by holding rallies in a variety of different ways. Churches were encouraged to be creative and hold Do-it-Yourself or DIY rallies.

Rallies ranged from church members standing outside on the front sidewalk

holding signs to speakers sharing resources in the town square.

"We believe that loving our neighbors the way we're called to do so means learning to hear the cry of our neighbors, hold ourselves accountable, and work compassionately to participate in bringing them justice," said Rev. Mary Bohall, pastor at First UMC in Mendota whose members participated in the rally last summer.

Join with churches across the Northern Illinois Conference this summer (May through September) to Rally Against Racism

To watch a video from last summer's event, learn more about ways to hold your DIY Rally and to register, visit umcnic.org/rallyagainstracism.



Members of First UMC in Oak Park, Ill., hold a rally against racism in front of the church after Sunday worship on July 18, 2021, for the first-ever Northern Illinois Conference DIY Rally Against Racism campaign.

From the Cover: Urge Action

since grown into a city. A gunman opened fire at a lunch banquet of a Taiwanese Presbyterian congregation that shares a building with Geneva Presbyterian Church. The attack killed one person and wounded five others. Investigators say the killing was motivated by political tensions between China and Taiwan, and they have also labeled the mass shooting a hate crime against Taiwanese people.

According to the Gun Violence Archive, the U.S. has seen more than 200 mass shootings as of the 19th week of 2022. The Gun Violence Archive defines mass shootings as an incident when four or more people are shot or killed — not including the shooter. The attack in Buffalo is the deadliest so far this year.

Bishop Mark J. Webb, who leads the Upper New York Conference that includes Buffalo, released a statement immediately after the attack calling for prayer for the wounded and people who lost loved ones.

"As the Church of Jesus Christ, we condemn hatred, injustice and sin in all its forms," the bishop said in his statement. "Violence against another, whether with a gun or with another weapon, is sin and we must stand against it."

Investigators say the 18-year-old suspect in the Buffalo killings allegedly laid out in a 180-page manifesto why he wanted to kill, including his belief in a racist conspiracy theory that white people are being replaced by Blacks and Jewish people. The suspect then recorded himself driving to the Tops Friendly Market and carrying out the attack, law enforcement officials said. The gunman targeted a largely Black neighborhood, shooting 11 Black people and two white.

United Methodist leaders across the denomination condemned the attack and called for prayer.

The Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe, top executive of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society, called the shooting an act of "domestic terror," noting that the shooter reportedly used assault weapons and wore military tactical gear.

"As United Methodists, we take seriously Christ's words 'to love our neighbor as we love ourselves,'" she said, quoting Mark 12:31. "We affirm that hate and racial terrorism has no place in our society. As Christians and Americans, we need to unite and rid the influence of white supremacy, white nationalism and racism — hate ideologies that severely veer from biblical teachings and The United Methodist Church's Social Principles."

The agency is pushing the U.S. Congress to address gun violence and urging The United Methodist Church to continue its work of addressing systemic racism and racial violence.

United Women in Faith, formerly known as United Methodist Women, noted that the massacre is only the latest high-profile shooting in which authorities say the suspect was motivated by hate. Those include last year's shootings at Atlanta-area massage parlors that left eight dead, including six Asian women; the 2019 mass shooting in El Paso, Texas, that targeted Latinos; a 2018 assault on a synagogue in Pittsburgh and the 2015 attack on a Bible study at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

"We name the simple truth today: White supremacist ideology is a poison to our country and anathema to the gospel of Jesus Christ," said Harriett Jane Olson, top executive of United Women in Faith.

The Rev. Giovanni Arroyo, top executive of the United Methodist Commission on Religion and Race, also expressed horror and grief at the attack. The agency offers resources to work toward racial justice.

"All our church and community leaders must act to undo the work of racism that's deeply rooted in our society," he said. "We must take responsibility for this ongoing work. Every anti-racist action and conversation is a step in the right direction."

Nicholas, the pastor of Lincoln Memorial United



Methodist Church, challenged the visitors to his church's Sunday service, to speak up when someone in their social circles says something racist. "If you say nothing, you are complicit," he told those gathered.

He spoke in front of an altar rail lined with 10 yellow roses — each representing a life cut short in the Buffalo attack.

In an interview on May 16, Nicholas said The United Methodist Church as a denomination also needs to do more to address the sin of racism. He said that includes digging into its own history of racial segregation from 1939-1968 that has left its shadow on today's church.

Nicholas said many clergy colleagues have reached out to him since the May 14 brutality. But he wants them to understand that this is a long-term battle. The challenges of segregation, poverty and health disparities faced by Black people in Buffalo will still be there when the television cameras are gone.

"We need to be working on a daily basis to really build what Martin Luther King talked about as 'the beloved community,'" Nicholas said. "But it takes real work. It takes introspective work. It takes painful work. And sometimes it takes sacrificial work and it takes holding ourselves accountable as a denomination for a racist past and some of our current racist practices."

**Hahn is assistant news editor for UM News.*

Lay Leader Letters

By Connie Augsburger, NIC Co-Lay Leader



I see these words every morning, "begin each day with a grateful heart," — they're on a little fridge magnet I got at the local dollar store a few months ago and stuck up above my bathroom mirror. I can look up while brushing my teeth and be reminded of all my blessings; I can't help but smile (try smiling with a toothbrush in your mouth!).

When my face smiles, my heart lifts. The simplicity of this idea might make you write it off as mindless, a platitude to paper over problems. But hear me out -- I have it on good authority that a grateful heart is a happy heart: "A cheerful heart is good medicine." Proverbs 17:22 NIV. What a wonderful beginning for each day.

Whether the sunrise is breathtaking, and I'm grateful for its beauty, or the sky is

overcast, and I'm grateful for the warm comfort of my home, when I start to count my blessings, I'm amazed at how many there are! The gratitude that wells up inside me inspires me to share my blessings.

Having a grateful heart lightens routine burdens: "In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." Proverbs 3:6 NIV. A grateful heart is humble yet strong: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13 NIV.

The days ahead are likely to present challenges and obstacles; we may even experience heartache and pain. The days ahead are equally likely to offer us happy moments and opportunities to have fun, learn and grow. We may even experience joy! How we handle the challenges and the

opportunities is up to us: the path to joy is a choice, and we can choose it.

A grateful heart acknowledges we are not alone and have a future and hope because the Lord is with us. He has plans to prosper and not to harm us. Jeremiah 29:11 NIV.

So, I purposefully choose that path to walk with the Lord by beginning my day with a grateful heart. In the time I spent writing these words, the sun broke through the clouds and brought light to my kitchen table and gladness to my heart.

"The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things, there is no law." Galatians 4:23 NIV.

I am grateful indeed!

Church missions support Ukraine

Four congregations come together to pack meals

By Cindy Law, Mt. Carroll UMC member

More than 50 volunteers, ages 6 to 90, from four neighboring UMC churches in Carroll County gather to pack rice meals for Ukraine. Together they assembled 1,800 bags in just a couple of hours and raised more than \$1,800 to make this mission event happen.

Last fall, a group of ladies from the Carroll County area traveled to the Midwest Mission Distribution Center (MMDC) outside Chatham, Ill., the disaster relief facility that's situated on an 8-acre campus, four miles south of Springfield.

While volunteering on-site, these ladies learned of another way to meet a need, allowing an opportunity for more volunteers without making a three-and-a-half-hour trip. We could host a mission experience right here in Carroll County. Driving back from Chatham, the ladies talked and brainstormed how to make this happen. The group decided to take it back to the Mt. Carroll and Savanna United Methodist Churches for consideration.

Both Pastor Nadan and Pastor Dave were on board with the idea. The Mt. Carroll Church Outreach committee got the ball rolling, asking if the Savanna church would be willing to host the event. With their willingness, Mt. Carroll confirmed a date with the MMDC to host a Rice Meal Packing event.

The rice meal packets include a vitamin pack, dried vegetables, soy, and rice. Each packet weighs 390 grams and feeds six people. At the time of our commitment to doing this, the cost of each packet was \$1.00. How many packets can we do? After some discussion with the Argo Fay and Thomson United Methodist churches, we decided 1,200 was a suitable number.

With donations from parishioners, we raised \$1,871 for the project from these four UMCs of Carroll County. Now, how many volunteers do we need? How do we get the supplies to meet our ambitious goal? Talking with MMDC, we knew they would have the supplies if we had the funds. How would we get them to Savanna? A lot of questions needed answers.

A huge question remained as to where these meal kits would go. Little did we know at the time what would be happening in our world by April of 2022.

April 2022 came quickly! Our project date was April 30. We had 55 plus volunteers signed up and a trailer load of supplies to pick up in Chatham. Two brave not-so-young women agreed to drive down to get the trailer

on April 28. The next day, the Savanna UMC fellowship hall became a work area for those 50-plus volunteers to assemble those 1,800 rice meal packets.

On April 30 at 9 a.m., we had all our volunteers gathered for instructions. By 9:35, we had five lines of ten workers and several runners ranging in age from 5 to 90, a job for people of all ages. By 11:45, we had filled our 1,800 rice meal bags, loaded them on the trailer, and started clean-up. Oh, and yes, these packets are being sent to Ukraine. On the 29th, MMDC put out a plea for volunteers at their site in Chatham as to help meet a request to fill 48,000 rice meal packets to be shipped out as soon as possible going to Ukraine.

As to feedback from our volunteers, all are ready to do it again, feeling it was a most rewarding experience. Following is a quote from one of the ladies who helped, "For me, today was one of the most fulfilling experiences I will ever have. I could feel God's hands on mine as I worked. He was everywhere! I am humbled." Other comments included: "everything was well organized and went smoothly." "When can we do this again?" "It was a fun and enjoyable day. We got to visit while we worked." "Maybe we could do it twice a year. All this and we will feed 10,800 people. AWESOME!!!!"

The trailer of packets and equipment were taken back to MMDC on May 2 and will be included in a large shipment to help those suffering in Ukraine.

Many hands indeed make light work, and we are so blessed to be able to help the less fortunate.

Operation Ukraine loaded and shipped

Update from MMDC: Our supporters have really stepped up volunteer and donation efforts to fill North Star Foundation's request to feed 288,000 people in Ukraine. In response, more than 400 volunteers gave nearly 3,000 hours to fill 48,000 rice meal bags. Thanks to the generosity of time and financial support, on May 20, we loaded and shipped more than 40 pallets with 30 cases each. Thank you for helping feed thousands of people in Ukraine. If you would like to donate, visit midwestmission.org/donate.



Aurora area women make quilts for refugees

Submitted by Al Benson

Aurora-area United Methodist and Catholic women are sending 30 handmade quilts to Ukraine refugees.

Mona Middleton of Montgomery coordinated the month-long project. She said, "One night I had the TV on and the coverage was the conflict in Ukraine. As I watched, I felt God tapping me on the shoulder reminding me that I had a room full of fabric just waiting to be put to a good use." Middleton, an avid quilter, formerly led the fabric department of the now closed Walmart store in Aurora.

"Patchwork quilts immediately came to mind," Middleton said. "I was not thinking of quilts made in a specific pattern, not hand quilted, but new fabric made into warm, old fashioned patchwork and tied with embroidery thread or yarn."

So she contacted friends in Prayers and Squares Quilters, a women's group that meets weekly at the former Fourth Street United Methodist Church in Aurora. The church closed in 2018 after 125 years.

Middleton said, "We got lots of support from our quilters, some Methodist and some Catholic, and set up an assembly line. Some people pieced tops and bottoms together, then added quilt batting to the sandwich and then sewed all together around the edge and turned it right side out. After top stitching the edges, we tied them to complete the quilts."



A group of Aurora women, called Prayers and Squares Quilters, is sending 30 handmade quilts to Ukraine refugees. They spent a month creating old fashioned patchwork quilts tied with embroidery thread or yarn at the former Fourth Street United Methodist Church in Aurora. Photo by Lisa Brawner

"Each quilt is labeled, 'With love in every stitch from the Prayers and Squares Quilters, Aurora, Ill., USA.'"

In addition to Middleton, quilters included Louise Hari, Montgomery; and Marsha Simmons, Pat Oleck, Sue Gilla, Pat Harmon and Sue Lenke, all Aurorans. All attended Fourth Street UMC except Oleck and Lenke who are from Catholic parishes. Middleton's daughter, Lisa Brawner, visiting from Melrose, Wis., sewed many tops and bottoms.

According to Middleton, Gilla solved the shipping issue. She found a UPS box that ships up to 40 pounds for \$15.

Middleton and Hari are congregants at Flowing Forth UMC in Aurora; Gilla and Harmon are congregants at Church of the Good Shepherd United Methodist in Oswego.

United Media Resource Center Director looking forward to retirement

By Paul Black *

Jill Stone, who serves as the United Media Resource Center Director, and her husband Doug are retiring after years of ministry in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference.

For the last 20 years, Jill Stone has managed the United Media Resource Center (UMRC) housed in the Illinois Great Rivers Conference Center (IGRC). In 2017, the NIC Media Resource Center merged with the UMRC adding to a large lending library of Christian materials and has enjoyed a great partnership with Jill.

We celebrate with Jill the news that she is retiring effective July 31 completing nearly 34 years of service. Her last day in the office is May 27.

Jill, a member of Normal First UMC, started working for IGRC in 1988 after applying for a job at the Conference office in Bloomington at the urging of John Woodruff, then Conference Treasurer. It's there where she met her husband Doug Stone, who is also retiring July 1 after 46 years of service.

Ironically, Jill's first responsibilities in the Conference office was working with Doug for about an hour. Doug assisted with computer issues and became both the mailroom and print room manager.

"The persons who I would be working for were busy and so they sent me to Doug to familiarize me with the work at the Conference office," Jill said.

"And obviously, she made an impression on me," Doug said with a smile.

Jill's first responsibilities were managing United Methodist Reporter subscriptions for Director of Communications Bettie Story as well as clerical and receptionist responsibilities. Later, a position opened in the United Media Resource Center, (UMRC) which had three employees on staff, and Jill found her calling.

When UMRC Director Mary Lou Scott retired in 2001, Jill assumed the responsibilities as the sole person in the UMRC and has managed its operations ever since. In more recent years, she has also returned to providing clerical assistance to both the Camping and Congregational Development ministries on a part-time basis.

In 2004, when the IGRC United Methodist Center



opened, consolidating offices in Bloomington, Mt. Vernon and Springfield, the Stones were part of a handful of employees that relocated to continue their respective ministries to the Conference. Both Doug and Jill noted the number of changes in both of their positions as they near retirement.

For Doug, much of his work over the years included churning out large amounts of print materials and coordinated bulk mailings of resources from the Conference to churches. While print materials have been declining over the years, the COVID pandemic accelerated its decline as Annual Conference packets and materials were reduced to placing them online.

The one area that has emerged in Doug's work is management of the Conference's databases – so much so that the person who will follow Doug will focus exclusively on the database work.

Jill's work in the UMRC has also changed in that it was a partnership at one time with two Illinois presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church. More recently, as other conference's media centers have closed its operations, the IGRC has provided its services to Northern Illinois, Iowa and the Great Plains Conferences.

"I appreciate the servant attitude and heart that both Doug and Jill display. They have served effectively and tirelessly for many, many years," Bishop Frank J. Beard said. "I was able to bear witness to their faith during tough times of personal challenge. Their commitment to ministry and mission, and their love for each other never wavered. They have served the IGRC well. And we are blessed because of them."

Jill and Doug said they are looking forward to having more time to travel and pursue hobbies.

"We have family in New York, the Carolinas, Florida, Texas and the West Coast," Doug said. "With COVID, we haven't been able to see family."

**Black is the Dir. of Communications for the Illinois Great Rivers Conference*

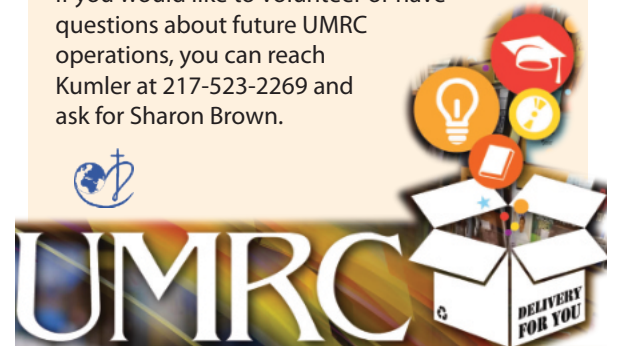
United Media Resource Center moving to new location

The United Media Resource is entering into a new location and partnership with Kumler United Methodist Church in Springfield, Ill. As part of the transition, Kumler UMC will be housing the resource center and managing the lending library of resources. The UMRC will pause its lending and operations on June 1, 2022 and resume operations on August 1, 2022.

"Kumler United Methodist Church is excited about the opportunity to house and operate the United Methodist Resource Center at our Outreach Center, connecting churches with materials and resources," said the Rev. Don Goodenow, pastor at Kumler UMC in Springfield, Ill. "This is another way we can be in ministry and help others grow as disciples. We encourage anyone who wants to volunteer at the UMRC to contact us."

Rev. Dr. Curtis Brown, Director of Connectional Ministries for the Illinois Great Rivers Conference said, "This is a great opportunity for us to partner with Kumler's facility and volunteers to help keep this Resource Center operating and supporting the mission and ministries of its users." More details about the transition, operations, and how to access the UMRC resources will be posted at igrc.org/UMRC.

If you have questions about this partnership, please contact Curtis Brown at cbrown@igrc.org. If you would like to volunteer or have questions about future UMRC operations, you can reach Kumler at 217-523-2269 and ask for Sharon Brown.



You Made a Difference

NIC Pension Initiative



"Difference Makers"

We're Looking for Stories

By Rev. Katherine Paisley, Chair, NIC Board of Pensions and Health Benefits

As you reflect on your life in the United Methodist Church, who has made a difference in your life?

Was it a pastor? A youth minister? A Sunday school teacher? What did this person do that made a difference for you? What did this person do for you that left you feeling grateful?

As the result of a resolution approved at the fall 2021 virtual session of the Annual Conference, an initiative is being launched at the 2022 annual conference session that has two purposes. The first purpose is to ask the laity and clergy of the NIC to consider those who have been "difference makers" for them and tell the story of how this person made a difference for them. The second purpose is to raise funds for future clergy retirement benefits through gifts made in gratitude for the difference these people made in the lives of our storytellers.

So we're looking for stories of "difference makers" and gifts given as a "thank you" to these people for the difference they made.

Admittedly, the UMC has some divisive issues to work out. Because of some internal issues within the UMC as well as broader societal influences, many of our churches

are struggling. Partly because of this, being a pastor or other church leader is a hard job. This is a time when we need to affirm our clergy and other church leadership.

We know that even as our denomination faces some difficult issues, lives continue to be changed in good, positive ways. In launching this initiative, the Board of Pensions believes that there are wonderful stories out there just waiting to be told. These stories, collectively, can create a narrative that binds us together and draws us into community. These stories will help us recognize that within the UMC there is much to be grateful for!

Here is what NIC Treasurer Lonnie Chafin wrote about this, "Stories are how we build connection. Our stories with others and their stories with others all lead to a network of connections that become a place where we find community. Our community is a network of stories. In our community we find our place in the world and our agency to transform it."

We're looking for your stories of those who have made a difference for you.

To participate, visit umcnic.org/differencemakers. On that page you will find more information about this initiative as well as an online form to tell your story.

When you fill out the form naming your difference maker and press "submit," your story will be saved and become a part of a collection of stories that form a part of our story as United Methodists in Northern Illinois.

After you have submitted your story, you can click on the "donate" link to make a donation to say "thank you" for the influence that your "difference maker" has had on your life. The suggested donation is \$100, but you can give less or more than that based on what feels right for you. While a donation is not required, we hope you will give as a "thank you" to this "difference maker." All funds raised through this initiative will be reserved exclusively for future clergy retirement benefit program payments.

If you are more comfortable telling your story through a "paper form," that form and directions for sending it will be available to download through the website or by emailing a request to the email address below.

Flyers to distribute in local churches to encourage participation in this initiative will be available to download on the webpage, umcnic.org/differencemakers. For questions about this initiative and how to participate, please email us at differencemakers@umcnic.org.

Calendar Events June - September

June 23

Unafraid: Stand up for social justice

**"Race, America,
and the Church"**



Unafraid and Unashamed to Tackle It!
A Speaker Series on the History, Causes,
and Effects of Racism and the Role of the Church in America

Time: 12 - 1:30 p.m. (CT) via Zoom

Part of the NIC Speaker Series program. Representatives from different conferences discuss what the local church and their conferences are doing to address racism.

Speakers: Rev. Derrek Belase, Rev. David Lagos-Fonseca, Rev. Dana Neuhasuer, Rev. Brian Tillman, & Rev. Kathy L. Williams.
Moderator: Pamela Pirtle.

Find registration for this event and future programs at umcnic.org/2022SpeakerSeries.



**August 19-20
Summer Mission u**



United
Women
in Faith



Who Can We Be Together?
Building Communities
of Hope and Joy

Hybrid event

Great news— COMMUNITY is God's desire for us! Please join the Northern Illinois United Women in Faith (formerly United Methodist Women) at Mission u 2022 to reflect on the community that Jesus is calling us to be!

This year, the study will focus on Luke 13. In the midst of a devastating pandemic, divisive political climate, unaddressed systemic racism, ecological crises and economic turmoil, we turn to the stories of Jesus that have anchored Christian communities for two millennia.

Our hope is that we will leave Mission u with a bigger and broader vision of the community Christ is calling us to be in times of loss, grief and massive disruption. What would be possible if we tend to the needs of our communities in small yet radical ways, as Jesus did in Luke 13?

Our newly designed Mission u 2022 is more flexible and intergenerational than ever— with curricula for youth, children and adults.

Watch for further details at umwnic.org.

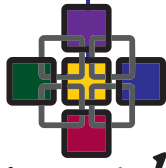
**September 10
Renewable Energy Summit**

Host: NIC Eco-Sustainability Task Force
Co-Sponsors: Wespeth and Global Ministries

Learn more about sustainable renewable energy sources and ways to reduce your church's carbon footprint. The event will include a report on the United Methodist interagency net-zero emission commitment with Jake Barnett, Director of Sustainable Investment Stewardship at Wespeth and Rev. Jenny Phillips, Senior Technical Advisor for Environmental Sustainability at Global Ministries. Also, participate in solar and geothermal tours, get information from resource tables, enjoy lunch and find fellowship.

Register to attend in person or virtually at umcnic.org/calendar/renewable-energy-summit.

For questions, email Richard Alton at richard.alton@gmail.com or Rev. Nancy Blade at harvestlove2day@gmail.com, Northern Illinois Conference Co-Chairs, Eco-Sustainability Task Force.



**Connected
in Christ**
Come to the Water

Stay connected with Annual Conference

The 183rd Northern Illinois Annual Conference members are gathering in person after two years of virtual sessions from June 8 – 10 at the Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center.

Worship services and plenaries including the Bishop's Episcopal Address, Bible Study and reports will be livestreamed on the NIC YouTube channel at youtube.com/c/AnnualConferenceofNorthernIllinoisUMC. Recordings will be posted online for later viewing.

Photos of the Ordination and Commissioning Service can be downloaded for free at nicordination22.shutterfly.com.

Look for full coverage and photos in the July/August Reporter.

Find updates and news at umcnic.org/AC2022.



**KIDS
ABOVE
ALL**

**Kids Above All Back to
School Backpack Drive**
June 20 – August 26, 2022

It's time again for Kids Above All's annual Back to School Backpack Drive! Kids Above All invites individuals, as well as our community, corporate and faith partners, to step up this summer for the 1,000 school-aged kids in the agency's care to ensure they have the supplies they need to succeed this school year. For details, visit kidsaboveall.org.



**NIC Outdoor and Retreat
Ministries Summer Camps**



Registration is open for several Summer 2022 camps at both Wesley Woods and Camp Reynoldswood.

- J.O.Y Camp - Camp Reynoldswood 6/19 - 6/24
- Family Camp - Multi-generational - Wesley Woods Retreat Center 7/03 - 7/08
- Woodland Camp - Camp Reynoldswood 7/24 - 7/29

For pricing and registration, visit niccamp.org/summercamps.



YOUTH 2023 Registration Open

Every four years, youth from throughout The United Methodist Church have gathered for four days of discipleship, fun, and fellowship at the YOUTH event. The event is filled with interactive learning, worship, Bible study, service opportunities, and fellowship time. Adult leaders who bring youth to our event can expect inspiration, support, and chances to authentically experience what it means to be part of the Methodist and Wesleyan family.

YOUTH 2023 will be an especially important year for you and your youth to be a part of this

gathering. COVID-19 restrictions have limited youth ministry opportunities over the last two-plus years. YOUTH 2023 is a chance for your church to again experience cutting-edge speakers, amazing artists, and broaden your youth's understanding of what they and their church are capable of!

Start planning today and register for this great event in Daytona Beach, Florida from July 25-28, 2023. For more information, visit umcyoungpeople.org/youth2023.





DYK

DID YOU KNOW?

Together Again

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

It's like coming out of hibernation. After two years of virtual annual conferences, we have arrived at the moment of reuniting in person, face to face (or mask to mask). We are returning, in part, to the familiar way of being United Methodist. We gather for holy conferencing - a time to listen and learn, lead and refresh.

As we gather in Schaumburg at the Renaissance Convention Center, so much will feel new. This is only our second meeting in that venue. We met at this site for the first time in 2019. Over the course of three years, we have said goodbye to retiring Bishop Sally Dyck and welcomed our interim Bishop John L. Hopkins. Clergy have retired, Memorial Services have taken place, and two ordination classes were commissioned and ordained last year with limited guests and livestream viewing.

The Annual Conference Committee leadership transitioned during the pandemic years, and new gifted leaders are forging the way out of our virtual days and into three dimensions. Six months ago, the Annual Conference Committee spent many meetings debating protocols to gather safely, uncertain of what the status of the COVID-19 pandemic would be in June. The work of discerning a protocol mirrored the best of our ability to debate, listen, respect and collaborate. To attend this conference, vaccinations are required and masks are

welcomed.

Interestingly, in the last days of registration, those wishing to be seated in a non-masked session of the convention center versus a masked session is running 50/50. Sessions will be shorter, breaks will be longer, and seating will be spread out with fewer people at each table.

We are compromising and even giving up some traditions in order to gather - fewer group meals, no mass choir, communion in prepackaged containers. All these are thoughtful decisions, they have some disappointments, but they are the cautions that give us an opportunity to see one another face to face.

Just as Annual Conference is waking up from its slumber, our congregations are emerging from hibernation. Vacation Bible School plans are underway. Youth groups are planning mission trips. I loved seeing the vibrant worship experiences across the conference as Easter came and we carefully moved into some of our favorite worship patterns. I am encouraged by stories of churches that are stronger than ever, gaining members and increasing attendance on this side of the crisis.

Some of the strengthening we see grows from the witnesses churches made in their community while waves of the pandemic assailed us. We really weren't in hibernation, nor did we slumber. One pastor rode her

bicycle from place to place, meeting people outside their homes to be a witness for Christ's love. Visible in the community - calling attention to the witness of the church. One of our churches brought care packages to every home on Saturdays, before Sunday worship, so people would have tangible reminders that they were "in church" during their online viewing.

Churches have grown in their capacity to record or livestream and straddle the virtual world while also meeting in person. So much has changed, and a few things have changed for the better. There are, however, scars and continued challenges.

There is no going back and no denying the shift caused by this tragedy: the loss of life, the economic chaos, the mental health issues, the rising levels of stress and incivility in society, and the continued tensions and violence especially aimed at people of color. We have seen the strengths that rise to the surface during adversity, but we have also identified our vulnerabilities.

Centered in Christ, we seek to navigate the evils of the world, celebrate the grace of our Savior and continue to live into God's grace while sharing that grace with the world.

What a witness we have to proclaim.



May 2022 Clergy Appointments and Retirements

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

Catiana McKay (Retired Elder) to Chadwich/Fair Haven/Hickory Grove (Prairie North District) from Galena (Prairie North District), where she is retiring. Catiana follows Sun-Ah Kang who is moving to Morrison.

Roberto Moreno (District Superintendent Supply) to Franklin Park: Living Waters NFC (O'Hare) (Lake North District). Roberto will co-pastor with his wife Jackie whose assignment was announced earlier. Effective April 15.

Jeremiah Lee (Full Elder) to Addison: Good Samaritan (Prairie Central District) from Naperville: Community. Jeremiah follows Sang Hun Han who is appointed to Schaumburg: Salem Korean (Prairie Central District).

Kathy Wellman (Full Deacon) to Director of Children's Education at Yorkfield Presbyterian Church in Elmhurst (Appointment Beyond the Local Church) from Naperville: Wesley.

Roger Bronkema (Licensed Local Pastor) to Orangeville (Prairie North District) while continuing at Elizabeth: First. Roger follows Siegfried Schwirblat, who is appointed to Rock Falls (Prairie South District).

Glen Stewart (Retired Elder from Illinois Great Rivers) to Reynolds (Prairie South District). Glen follows Seamus Enright who is appointed to Ottawa: First (Prairie North District).

Jane Cheema (Full Deacon) to Appalachia Service Project as Director of Spiritual Programs (Appointment Beyond the Local Church) from Evanston: First (Lake North District). Effective June 1.

Eric Reniva (Licensed Local Pastor) to Waterman (Prairie South District) from Rockford: Beth Eden (Prairie North District). Eric follows Jake Cho who is appointed to Highland Park: Galilee Korean (Lake North District).

Matthew Smith (Provisional Elder) to Warren (Prairie North District) from Lighthouse and Chana (Prairie South District). Matthew follows Roger Bronkema who is appointed to Orangeville and Elizabeth (Prairie North District).

Richard Mosley (Retired 346.1) as interim pastor to Chicago: Hartzell Memorial (Lake South District) from Chicago: Clair Christian (Lake South District) (Part-time). Richard follows Andrea Davidson who is appointed to Chicago: Kelly Woodlawn (Lake South District).

Keck Mowry (Full Elder) to Morris: First Senior (Prairie South District) from Palatine: First (Lake North District). Keck follows Robert Sathuri who is moving to Palatine: First.

Robert Sathuri (Full Elder) to Palatine: First Senior (Lake North District) from Morris: First Senior (Prairie South District). Robert follows Keck Mowry who will be moving to Morris: First.

Robert Houston (Licensed Local Pastor) to Chicago: Faith (Lake South District) from Chicago: Freedom. Robert follows Tom Rawlinson who will continue as Associate at Chicago: St. Matthews (Lake North District).

Carmen and Jizael (Kiko) Morales (District Superintendent Supply) to Joliet: Christo (Prairie Central District) from Franklin Park: Living Waters (Lake North District). Carmen and Kiko follow Ivan Sarabia who is assigned to Belvidere: Emerge (Prairie North District). Effective June 1.

Ayla Samson (Full Elder) to Morris: First (Prairie South District) as the Associate Pastor from Lombard: Faith (Prairie Central District). Ayla follows Jungmi (Deborah) Kang who is appointed to Carol Stream: St. Andrew (Prairie Central District).



Safe Sanctuaries training

The Northern Illinois Conference is offering six training options to help meet our goal of ensuring safe spaces of trust for all where we gather to worship and serve God. The trainings are being offered both online via zoom and in person.

The dates offered are:

- Thursday, June 23 - 6:30 p.m. - Plainfield UMC
- Wednesday, June 29 - 6:30 p.m. - Plainfield UMC
- Saturday, July 16 - 1:00 p.m. - Des Plaines: First UMC
- Saturday, July 30 - 10:00 a.m. - Rockford: Christ UMC
- Saturday, August 6 - 10:00 a.m. - Rockford: Christ UMC
- Saturday, August 20 - 1:00 p.m. - Des Plaines: First UMC

Find more information and register at umcnic.org/calendar/safe-sanctuaries-training.

**This free training is an alternative for those who cannot participate in other training options and does not include a background check.

For updated videos, policies, FAQs, downloads and more updated resources, visit umcnic.org/safesanctuaries.



Job Openings

For the latest job openings in the Northern Illinois Conference and across the connection, 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.

Submissions

Please submit items at least two weeks prior to publication date. Include your name, address, email, phone number and name of local church. Space is limited.

Electronic submissions are preferred with high-resolution attached jpegs. Submissions will be edited at the discretion of the Communications staff.

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