

The Northern Illinois Conference OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Reporter

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NIC pilgrims march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala.

NIC pilgrims visited Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma, which played a pivotal role in the marches that helped lead to the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

'Broken but Changed Hearts': NIC Pilgrims Trace the Civil Rights Journey

By Susan Dal Porto

In late April 2023, a racially diverse group of 37 clergy and lay members from 20 churches in the Northern Illinois Conference embarked on a six-day Civil Rights Pilgrimage. This journey helped the pilgrims remember, lament, reconcile, and strengthen their resolve to end racism and to share with others what they learned and experienced.

Pilgrims visited the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., where four Klu Klux Klan members detonated a bomb just before a worship service started on Sept. 15, 1963. The explosion killed four girls: three 14-year-olds and one 11-year-old. The church building was also greatly damaged. The church has since been restored and its beautiful sanctuary accommodates worshippers every Sunday and visitors daily to remember the sacrifices made for freedom.

The Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama—erected on the site of a warehouse where enslaved persons were shackled and detained before being auctioned off with animals and other goods—was another stop on the pilgrimage. The museum puts the transatlantic slave trade into sharp focus, reminding us America was founded on the backs of 12 million persons who were stolen and

trafficked from Africa. (Two million of them died on the ocean voyage and their bodies were tossed callously into the ocean.) The museum also presents visitors with the stark realities of lynching, Jim Crow-era terrorism, and mass incarceration.

Pilgrims also visited The National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Ala. It is an outdoor monument of 805 suspended steel rectangles, on which the names of lynched individuals are engraved. Over 9,500 people were lynched in America (including in Illinois), without any kind of due process, trials, or even in many cases, accusation.

The Equal Justice Initiative, founded by Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, established this museum and memorial with the purpose of changing the narrative about race in this country. This parallels the work of many in the United Methodist Church.

Rev. Marcus Tabb, a participant in the pilgrimage, says that "the Civil Rights Pilgrimage provided a lens of how much all people don't realize the damage caused by a history of denigration and brutalization that caused indignation that divided our country."

Pilgrims learned that the civil-rights movement was not all about demonstrations; it was also about music. Among the powerful voices in the movement in the 1960s were the Freedom Singers, a quartet who toured the country, performing songs of protest and of hope. Pilgrims had the opportunity to meet one of the Freedom Singers, Charles Neblett, who is still going strong at age 82. He told of his work in the movement and sang, in a still-powerful voice, these moving words: "Who'd a-thought I'd still be fighting, 59 and 60 years down the line?" Rev. Toni Lucas, chair of the pilgrimage, said that hearing him sing this song was an experience "that will stay with me for the rest of my life."

Rev. Chris Williamson, a pastor and community leader from Franklin, Tenn., told the pilgrims about the controversy over the many Confederate monuments in the South, which glorify white supremacy. He told us about "The Fuller Story," a community effort to reclaim hidden history. They created a "public classroom" around a Confederate monument in Franklin's town square to teach residents and visitors the stories of Black community members.

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From Your Bishop:

Broken Connections, Healing Connections

My favorite moments of recent days included a bedtime prayer with my grandson and conversation at lunch with the 2023 class of ordinands. What do those moments have in common?

The ordinands were recounting how these days are full of broken connections: hate crimes, mass shootings, people undermining their ministry with misinformation, and a general suspicion coming out of patterns of isolation during the pandemic. My grandson? He is eight and having bad dreams. He saw a death on a television show and now he has nightmares because he is afraid that he will be separated from the family he loves.

During a learning component from our recent Council of Bishops meeting, we reflected on trauma, and how trauma can break our connections with self and other. Some trauma is acute, some is chronic and ongoing. Some can be complex and generational, and some can be collective with trauma related to racism or genocide, for example. Clergy health and well-being is a major concern coming out of the pandemic. We are awash in broken

connections with self and other—and we live in a time of people pulling apart.

These are reminders for me of the importance of being grounded in our bodies. These are days to reconnect with personal wellness, practices that sustain our faith and heal community. Our witness as United Methodists is to be a resistance and alternative to the pulling apart we see these days across society and the United Methodist Church. It is interesting to me that often Thomas Merton described sin as alienation.

We should recognize that clergy were and are frontline workers. Teachers, delivery people, nurses—many of us need to attend to our well-being and reset our connections with the faith community.

I prayed with my grandson that night, and it was healing for both of us. I was reminded of the healing of covenant community by the ordinands; what a gifted and committed group we will receive! These are days for connecting to God, our true selves, colleagues, community, and yes, the annual conference. Our theme is

“Come to the Table.” I am praying for our healing, and for a conference vivified by the Spirit. I can’t wait to see you! Know that I am praying for you.

P.S. Thank you for all who helped us host the Council of Bishops at the beginning of May. Your hospitality was a gift to these servants. I was so moved by your faithfulness.



Bishop Schwerin met with ordinands as they prepared for their ministries as full members of the conference.



Annual Conference Reminders

Tuesday, June 6, to Thursday, June 8

Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center, 1551 N. Thoreau Dr., Schaumburg, Ill

Special Services

- Celebration of Ministry: Tues., June 6, 7:00 pm
- Retirement: Wed., June 7, 10:00 am
- Korean Peace Reflection & Prayer: June 7, evening during Plenary 6 that starts at 7:00 pm
- Memorial: Thursday morning, June 8, 10:30 am

As this year marks the 70th anniversary of the armistice of the Korean War, the Korea Peace Reflections and Prayer will give Annual Conference members the opportunity to pray together for the armistice treaty to be superseded by a peace treaty.



Bishop's Appeal for Migrant Needs

As followers of Jesus, we take seriously the commandment to welcome the strangers in our midst. Whether they journeyed from Venezuela on foot, crossed the Southern border of the U.S. seeking asylum and ended up on busses to Chicago, or flew across the ocean from Ukraine to escape the Russian invasion, we want to offer compassion, love and care to our neighbors.

People take the risk to leave their homes for many reasons: to escape harassment, arrest, or even death from their government due to religious affiliation or political views; to find refuge from war or disasters; or to get away from gang threats of violence, among others.

Gifts to the Bishop's Appeal will benefit organizations that provide for immediate needs, such as hygiene kits,

temporary shelter, and food; and longer-term needs, like employment, housing, medical care, and legal assistance. As a conference we will partner with groups such as Justice For Our Neighbors, World Relief, Refugee One, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and NIC congregations.

Bring your congregation's donation to Annual Conference. For more information, visit umcnic.org/bishopsappeal2023. (This page includes a link for online giving.)



Fill the Truck Mission Challenge Collection Drive

Send to Annual Conference your church's donated items for Midwest Mission. The organization sends tangible resources to those in need to make an intangible difference in their lives through hope and empowerment. The NIC Board of Global Ministries is coordinating with Midwest Mission to collect the most-needed items.

Donations will be accepted on June 6 from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. and June 7 from 7 a.m. to noon. Bring your donations to the Midwest Mission truck, which will be located in the east parking

lot outside the Schaumburg Convention Center. If your church does not bring its donations to Annual Conference, it can drop them off at one of these collection sites:

- Lake North: Maywood: Neighborhood UMC or Glenview UMC
- Lake South: New Lenox UMC
- Prairie Central: Fox River Grove: Community
- Prairie North: Lanark UMC

More information is available at umcnic.org/2023MissionChallenge.

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Pilgrims also had the opportunity to walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala. In 1965, John Lewis, a young activist and future congressperson, led demonstrators across the bridge to stand up for the right to vote. The first time over the bridge, marchers were beaten severely and injured with tear gas; the incident referred to as “Bloody Sunday.” Two weeks later, demonstrators tried again and completed a march of 52 miles from Selma to Montgomery. Their courage led to change: later that year, a new Voting Rights Act was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson.

The final stop on the pilgrims' journey was the Lorraine Motel National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, where Martin Luther King Jr. was killed. It was a powerful reminder that so many have given the ultimate sacrifice for justice. These sacrifices make it incumbent on all of us to speak up and act to continue this work.

In Montgomery, the pilgrims saw the church at work for justice and equity today. They met a visionary young pastor, Rev. Richard Williams, whose congregation,

Metropolitan United Methodist Church, has been building a community resource called the Beacon Center. It is home to medical and counseling clinics, an education/workforce development center in partnership with the local community college, offices for nonprofit organizations, and a food pantry.

And joyfully, pilgrims were blessed by their brothers and sisters at United Methodist churches who provided meals and snacks for their journey: McKendree in Nashville, Tenn.; New Beginnings in Birmingham, Ala.—where Rev. John Baldwin also runs a catering company (best food ever!)—and First and Metropolitan in Montgomery.

Pilgrims were held to a high degree of accountability. They were asked to reflect deeply and make written commitments to take their learning and their broken but changed hearts back into their communities. They promised to use their experiences to take action for racial justice. After returning from the pilgrimage, participants are gathering on three consecutive Mondays, called “Meaningful Mondays,” for advocacy training.

This transforming journey was a reminder that no one travels alone for this important work. The pilgrimage spoke to the power and solidarity of the connectional United Methodist Church. It also invoked the words from United Methodist musician and hymnwriter Mark Miller: “From Seneca Falls, from Selma to Stonewall, we’ve come a long way, but the journey isn’t over.”

This pilgrimage was one of a number of initiatives developed out of the Northern Illinois Conference's commitment to act on the principle that racism is incompatible with Christian teaching. The pilgrimage also represented the power of the United Methodist connectional system. Additional pilgrimage partners were the United Methodist General Commission on Religion and Race, Discipleship Ministries, and the North Alabama Conference.

Dig deeper into the places and history of the pilgrimage by visiting umcnic.org/2023civilrightspilgrimage.



Annual Conference Members Will Consider Churches' Disaffiliation Requests

Ten churches' request for disaffiliation from The United Methodist Church will be considered by Northern Illinois Annual Conference session members on June 6.

These churches, constituting 2.8 percent of NIC congregations, are completing a set of required steps that the 2019 UMC General Conference, in special session, passed as church law. Approval of their requests is contingent on the completion of these steps.

"As a connectional community of faith, the Northern Illinois Conference values our diversity," said Bishop Dan Schwerin. "We enter this season of disaffiliation in prayer and with discernment, recognizing that for some the theological differences are so great as to require separation. It is our pledge to do this work with respect and grounding in our faith as we bless those who must set out on a new path, all to the glory of God."

The 2019 process, codified in ¶ 2553 of The United Methodist Book of Discipline, allows churches that no longer wish to remain United Methodist "for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the Book of Discipline related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals" to withdraw from the denomination. To be eligible for consideration, churches must complete the required process by Dec. 31, 2023.

Over the past year, our bishops and the cabinet worked with the 18 congregations that expressed interest in exploring this option. Those churches first contacted their district superintendent to learn about the process. The district superintendent and Rev. Arlene Christopherson, the assistant to the bishop, sent explanatory documents and met with churches to present more information.

If a church then wanted to pursue the possibility further, the entire congregation was invited to attend a

discernment process involving three sessions on local church identity, United Methodism, and practical steps toward moving away from the connection. Retired United Methodist clergy and lay leadership facilitated these sessions, which were resourced by conference staff.

Once the church completed the discernment process, it took a straw poll to determine whether to continue in the process. Some churches at this point decided against continuing toward disaffiliation.

Those that chose to move forward then engaged in financial conversation with the NIC Board of Trustees and Lonnie Chafin, conference treasurer.

The conversations address five areas of financial concern. Paragraph 2553 requires that exiting churches remit two years of apportionments (the current and one future year), pension liabilities, and any arrearages and repayment of conference grants. In the NIC, these churches are also obligated to contribute to the conference Repair the Harm to Children Fund and to a future United Methodist ministry developed for that region. In the cases of churches that have outstanding loans, these must be satisfied or refinanced by a newly incorporated congregation.

Following these conversations, the district superintendent presided at a church conference wherein members voted on disaffiliation. The decision requires a two-thirds majority vote.

The ten churches that have completed or nearly completed the process are listed in the Disaffiliation Resolution that will be considered at the next Annual Conference. (Find this and all proposed legislation at umcnic.org/AC2023docs.)

On June 6, the cabinet and NIC Board of Trustees will report on the matter and session members will vote on

each church individually. Passage requires a simple majority. Once these resolutions are ratified, disaffiliating churches must meet all terms and conditions to disaffiliate by June 30.

"This has been a long and difficult journey for congregations exploring their past and future, for staff giving countless hours to the work, for our Trustees as they did the hard work of talking about finances, and for those who are caught in the middle between their love for their congregation and their belief in the United Methodist Church," Bishop Schwerin said.

While members have left the UMC before and congregations have closed, this is the first time in denominational history that a congregation can leave the denomination while retaining church property—if it meets the requirements of the new church law. Per the "trust clause" in The Book of Discipline (¶ 2503.1 and elsewhere), church buildings are the property of the annual conference. Denominational law requires that such a trust clause appear in all deeds of all UM properties. The rule dates to the leadership of John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist movement in England.

In the coming months the cabinet and staff will work on ways to care for individuals who wish to remain United Methodist though their churches are disaffiliating. Cabinet and staff will also address the trauma congregations experienced during this process.

Find the legislation, which includes the requests for disaffiliation, here: umcnic.org/AC2023docs.

For definition of the denomination's temporary process for congregational disaffiliation, visit Ask the UMC at umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc--series-is-the-umc-really.

Five Tips for Talking About Apportionments By Rev. Ken Sloane

1. The Process is Democratic, Not Autocratic

I'm convinced that many people in the UMC believe apportionments are determined in an autocratic way: at the whim of someone like a bishop, district superintendent, conference treasurer, or president of the annual conference's Council on Finance and Administration. They don't realize that the apportionment process is quite democratic! Therefore, my first tip is to make sure listeners understand how apportionments are determined. For a step-by-step breakdown of the apportionment process, read umcdiscipleship.org/articles/where-do-apportionments-come-from.

2. Shift the Conversation to Mission/Ministry Shares

Now that you've explained the "how" of apportionments, leave that word behind. It is limited in focus to how the numbers (dollars) are determined. You will do best to move the conversation on to how the money is used, where I think terms like Mission Shares or Ministry Shares help to keep the focus where this connectional giving is used.

3. Connectional Is Best

Ultimately, a "win" in this conversation is not going to be helping someone who was resentful of their apportionments becoming suddenly happy about paying. A win for me is simply someone who comes to see the value of being a connectional church. "Together we can" is one of my favorite phrases for talking about all the ways United Methodists—working and sacrificially

giving together—are able to dream big dreams, like providing to the people of sub-Saharan Africa with bed nets that will greatly decrease the number of children dying from malaria. Churches working on their own, each its own little island, could never dream that big!

4. Move the Perspective from "They" to "We"

This is one of the biggest challenges when engaged in these kinds of discussions. I experienced this in a dramatic way when I was part of a group consulting with an annual conference. The bishop had assembled conference leaders: superintendents, conference staff, leaders of groups like United Women in Faith and UM Men, finance and pension officers, and chairs of program committees. The head of our consulting team was leading a presentation when one of leaders in the room made a statement to the effect of, "the conference, they always seem to be asking us for more and more . . ." I stood up and called attention to the comment: "the conference, they?" "Who is this other, this 'they,' if not the people in this room?" I asked the group. This is exactly the challenge of moving the perspective from "they" to "we." How do we help our people to see the ministry done by the annual conference or general church not as "their ministry" but as "our ministry"? No ministry happens at the conference level or general church without the participation and support of local churches. If you can move someone to claim as "ours" the ministry funded through connectional giving (whether it is ministry done by a district, annual conference or through the global

UMC presence) you have had a very successful engagement!

5. Tell Stories of Impact and Scale

A child whose life has been influenced and shaped through the ministry of your church. An individual who suffered the loss of a spouse and could have retreated into their grief, but the church surrounded them in love and wouldn't let them withdraw. Tell stories of impact. Stories are the currency of generosity. People are hungry to make an impact.

Through our United Methodist connectional giving, people are connected to purpose and impact, and the better you are able to articulate the stories of impact, the easier it will be to open hearts to the joy of generosity. Accumulate stories of impact by regularly visiting websites like www.UMCgiving.org and www.umc.org. As you have opportunity, tell stories of scale: how working and giving together United Methodists gave birth to Africa University, shaping graduates who are shaping Africa. United Methodists coming together to fight malaria in Africa and raised over \$70 million and cut the number of childhood malaria deaths. Scale gives us the means to have an impact beyond our wildest imagination. The more we share these stories, each of us will increase our impact!

For more information on Apportionments, including stories, resources, explanations, and the NIC break down visit umcnic.org/apportionments

Rev. Ken Sloane is director of stewardship and generosity for Discipleship Ministries. This article appears at umcdiscipleship.org.

Local Church News

This monthly column highlights local church outreach ministries that are making a difference and transforming lives. We hope sharing these success stories ("it worked for us") will inspire and become learning tools for other churches. If you have a Ministry Makers story, email communications@umcnc.org.

Hartzell Memorial & Grace (Logan Square) earn grants for green outreach By Victoria Rebeck

Many churches would love to have more money available to serve their communities with Christ's love—and to become more environmentally responsible at the same time. Grace United Methodist Church, Logan Square, and Hartzell Memorial United Methodist (both in Chicago) recently received Chicago Recovery Grants that will make this possible.

The grants are given to Chicago entrepreneurs, small businesses, and developers to boost sustainable economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan's \$1.2 billion strategy aims to enhance equitable economic recovery and help communities thrive and become safer.

Finalists were selected from four categories: community development, climate investment, equitable transit-oriented development, and building community wealth.

Hartzell Memorial's energy-efficient HVAC

Hartzell Memorial's plan to purchase and install an energy-efficient HVAC system and ceiling fans won them a \$250,000 grant, says church member Brenda Asare.

This plan is especially urgent for the Bronzeville neighborhood, where Hartzell Memorial is located. Based on the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool map, it's one of the zones in significant need of climate justice initiatives.

The benefits of the project are threefold: it better protects the environment, reduces energy expenses, and allows the church to devote more funds to their ministries with the community.

"Priority one is to replace the original natural gas boiler and water-chiller air conditioning system with electric heat pumps," Brenda says. "The higher efficiencies of heat pumps compared to the current HVAC system would save on energy consumption. Projected savings are between 15 and 20 percent."

They will also install ceiling fans in the main part of the

building, which has high ceilings, to circulate the air to provide more even heating and cooling.

Many churches experience the burden of aging HVAC systems. Hartzell Memorial was built in 1964 and covers 18,162 square feet. It still relies on the original systems to heat and cool the building. The existing chilled water air conditioning system isn't functioning anymore; the compressors shorted out and there are multiple refrigerant leaks, Brenda explains. The hot-water boiler has passed its life expectancy and is unable to support the burners.

The church's gas bills average \$3,000 per month during the winter and the electric bills at least \$1,000 per month, Brenda says. They expect that replacing these systems will reduce these costs by about \$11,200 a year.

The church will use those savings to boost ministries that strengthen the neighborhood, such as its daily after-school program for area children and youth. And it will be better able to maintain its building—which Hartzell Memorial considers a ministry resource.

Grace UMC's solar panels

Grace United Methodist Church's intention to install solar panels and upgrade its electrical system won a grant of \$100,000. Like Hartzell Memorial, Grace wants its building to serve the community. The grant will enhance that opportunity in an environmentally sustainable way.

Church members have become interested in making environmental responsibility part of its community outreach. Last year, the church participated in the Neighborhood Power Project, which brought together resources from the Environmental Defense Fund, Elevate Energy, and the Illinois Green Alliance. Having the building assessed before they began the renovations has allowed Grace leaders to think about sustainability for those plans.

With the grant, the church upgraded their aging boiler from 56 percent to over 90 percent efficiency. A Commonwealth Edison program enabled them to obtain lighting that is more energy efficient.

Grace's pastor, Rev. Hope Chernich, believes that the investment in efficient energy systems is a testimony itself.

"This is a witness to the community," Rev. Chernich says. "As our neighbors see and hear about the solar installation and our other sustainable renovations, we are able to share the ways our faith moves us to care for the environment and take actions to mitigate climate change."



Solar panels by Moritz Kindler

UM Bishops Receive Warm Welcome on a Chilly Afternoon

By Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications



Julia Boesche, Libby Edmondson, and Anne Hardy served refreshments.



Jan Weber (left) helps guests at the memorial service for the Council of Bishops find their way around the church.

You won't get lost in a crowd when you walk into First United Methodist Church in Des Plaines, Ill., on a Sunday morning. But you will see people walk forward with a smile, welcome, and help finding the sanctuary or room you seek.

Church members flexed their hospitality strength on April 30 when the United Methodist Council of Bishops met at that church for their memorial service. During that time, the bishops honor those colleagues and spouses who died in the past year.

When First United Methodist members agreed to host this service, they immediately got organized for an opportunity they considered an honor. It seemed daunting at first, but their pastor, Rev. Audrea Nanabray, helped them plan.

"Everyone stepped up," says Cindy Yelich, who welcomed people at the door.

Jan Weber, who had just been named chair of the church council—for which she expected only to be presiding at meetings—was told it was her job to find volunteers. She considered this a chance to show off the church and its people.

"When we got the call, I knew it was God telling us that he wants us to do this," she says.

"We wanted it to be spirit-filled. We wanted people to meet us; to see that we are regular people and we care about our church. It's been a group effort, and we are proud of how our church comes together."

Once volunteers were lined up, a thorough cleaning was one of the first tasks. Even the members were surprised to see what a difference that made.

"The church has never been so spic-and-span," says Anne Hardy, who led the kitchen volunteers.

Other groups readily did their part. The trustees made sure that the bathrooms were functioning and that helpful, visible signage was posted.

The media team made sure they had the audio set-up ready. And a group of men who met guests in the parking lot carried umbrellas on that rainy afternoon as they walked people from their cars to the door.

Members of another United Methodist church that meets

in their building, Nuevo Amanecer, served as ushers and sang in the service.

As at any church gathering, preparing and serving refreshments was a high priority.

Anne Hardy went to work right away on that. She's also a leader of Bessie's Table, the church's Monday meal for the community. Preparing and serving food is her calling.

"This gathering was a natural fit: it's food, it's me," she says. "I enjoy it. It's my way of working for God."

After the service, she was packing up the leftovers to serve at Bessie's Table the next day. Nothing would be wasted.

The number of worshipers at First United Methodist is cozy, but not closed off. Their welcoming attitude was not only a special effort for this day. It's the church's culture.

A good example is Matthew Edmondson. He was on elevator duty, helping people get to the floors they needed.

"I love volunteering," he said, and it showed. Even the community has noticed: last year, he was recognized for devoting 300 hours in service to the community. And their "awesome" pastor, Dr. Audrea Nanabray, is a good model for showing care for others, he says.

Cindy Yelich invoked the denomination's advertising motto from a few years ago: Open hearts, open minds, open doors.

"Keeping an open mind is necessary to how you greet people," she says. "Today, we had people here from all over the world. We are grateful that we got to be part of that."

They always step toward visitors to greet them, rather than waiting for visitors to come to them. And they make sure to smile, to put people at ease. "We like to welcome them to our little slice of heaven here," Cindy says.

Jan wants visitors to meet God there as well.

As a lector in worship that morning, she read a portion of Colossians 2.

"Paul said to the people there, 'I want you to be woven into the tapestry of love.' I just love that," she says. "That, to me, is our church. I just get so much here spiritually. Every time I come here. I feel like I am walking into the presence of God and these are my people."

Council of Bishops Look to Reclaim, Revive, and Renew the UMC

Adapted from a COB press release

“Reclaiming, reviving, and renewing” was the top concern of the United Methodist Council of Bishops when they met in Chicago, April 30 through May 5. This was the council’s first in-person meeting since 2019.

About 100 bishops from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America attended the meeting in person. About 20 other bishops attended the meeting virtually through a secure Zoom link, making the meeting the first-ever COB hybrid meeting.

In his presidential address, Bishop Bickerton said that in this overwhelming time of transition, marked by a number of congregations’ leaving the connection, the church should now focus on its future.

“We are not talking about new wine in old wineskins,” said Bishop Bickerton. “Rather, it’s like pulling up the carpet to reveal the linoleum and pulling up the linoleum to reveal a beautiful hardwood floor.”

He also encouraged the bishops to encourage more attention on those who are staying than those who are leaving the UMC.

“We must grieve our loss. We must complete the disaffiliations,” he said. “We must plan for our time of conferencing. And we must engage in the work directly in front of us this week. But in the midst of it all, in spite of it all: What do you say that we reclaim, revive, and renew this church for the dance that lies ahead?”

This was Bishop Dan Schwerin’s first time meeting with the Council.

“I experienced wonderful welcome and met colleagues in very challenging environments,” he said. “Hearing the stories in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo made me more deeply appreciative of the ministry we share as a global church.”

Part of the council’s work together includes gaining new information about timely subjects that face the UMC. Bishop Schwerin found the teaching about trauma-informed ministry to be very enlightening. He is also assigned to the Vital Congregations work area.

“It was a deep dive in the most recent best practice conversations related to congregational and conference vitality,” he said. “I will look forward to bringing learning

and congregational development acumen into our context of research and development.”

Among the decisions that the bishops made during their meeting:

- **Special General Conference:** The bishops are proposing a five-day General Conference in May 2026 that would focus on reestablishing connection and offer time for lament, healing, celebration, and recasting the mission and vision for the denomination. They also recommend that the proposed special conference consider a more regional governance structure to support the mission and vision of the church for the current and future realities within the world and church.
- **Jurisdictional conferences:** The bishops determined that the 2024 Jurisdictional Conferences in the United States will be held July 10-12, 2024. Central Conference sessions outside the United States will be held within one year after the General Conference in 2024, as per The Book of Discipline.
- **Campaign for Children in Poverty:** The bishops approved a request that every United Methodist episcopal area would promote the Pan-Methodist Campaign for Children in Poverty, including participation in possible ecumenical and interfaith collaborations.
- **Clean water for all:** The bishops approved a resolution to start work in cooperation with other organizations to help provide clean water for all people throughout the world.
- **Sandy Creek Massacre:** In follow-up to a petition adopted by General Conference 2016, the bishops approved release of funds to support the Center for Sand Creek Massacre Studies in Eads, Colorado, and that Bishops Karen Oliveto, Elaine

Stanovsky, Sally Dyck, and David Wilson be the COB representatives to work with the Sand Creek Massacre descendants to continue the healing work; and that the COB assist the Sand Creek Massacre Healing Partnership.

- **Complaints against bishops:** The bishops learned that a task force regarding paragraph 413 of The Book of Discipline (which addresses the process for addressing complaints against bishops) will report to them within a month on its recommendations for criteria and a specific process for how to handle complaints against bishops.

During a session of anti-racism training, Rev. Dr. Candace Lewis, president of Gammon Theological Seminary, presented research that showed that 70 percent of African-American American churches did not seek to leave the denomination but are calling for changes within the church.

In his closing sermon, Bishop Bickerton reminded the United Methodists, “We are always connected together. We share common burdens, common challenges, common opportunities, and common blessings.”

The next COB in-person meeting will take place in November in North Carolina.



Bishop Tracy Malone, president-delegate of the Council of Bishops, anoints newly elected bishops.

Bishops call for General Conference in 2026

Drawn from United Methodist News Service and the Council of Bishops



Bishops Tracy Malone and Thomas Bickerton hear proposals for a 2026 General Conference. Photo by the Rev. Todd Rossnagel.

The Council of Bishops is recommending that The United Methodist Church hold a five-day General Conference in May 2026.

This gathering would be in addition to the regular General Conference sessions already planned for 2024 and 2028. Under the bishops’ proposal it would last five days—half as long as regularly scheduled General Conferences.

“This also would be a regular session,” Council of Bishops President Thomas J. Bickerton, who also leads the New York Conference, told United Methodist News Service. “But we are asking for it to be framed a different way to enable us to make the kind of shifts that the denomination needs to make.”

According to a Council of Bishops’

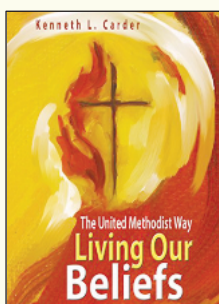
press release, the bishops propose that the session would focus on re-establishing connection, lament and healing, celebration, recasting the mission and vision for the UMC, and considering a more regional governance structure to support the mission and vision of the church for the current and future realities within the world and church.

The bishops’ resolution also supports a recent ruling by the UMC’s Judicial Council, UMNS reports. With the pandemic-caused postponement of the 2020 General Conference to 2024, the Judicial Council majority said in Decision 1472 that another regular session must convene between the beginning of 2025 and the end of 2027 to get the schedule back on track.

The Judicial Council majority said that since paragraph 14 in the UMC’s constitution “stipulates one session per every four years, another regular session of General Conference is therefore required.”

Four of the nine Judicial Council members dissented from that part of the ruling. Because the majority was slim, the UM General Council on Finance and Administration is asking the Judicial Council to reconsider its decision.

With that division in mind, the General Council on Finance and Administration—the denomination’s finance agency—is asking the church court to reconsider its decision. One of the agency’s concerns is the cost of holding three General Conferences in a five-year period.



Latest NIC Book Club Book

Join the NIC Book Club this fall as they study Bishop Kenneth Carder’s book *Living our Beliefs: The United Methodist Way*. If you are attending Annual Conference, you may stop by the Discipleship Task Force table and enter to win a copy of this book. You may

also buy a book there at the discounted rate of \$10.

“I am super excited about this year’s Book Club,” says Rev. G. Morris Jarkloh Jr., the pastor of West Ridge United Methodist Church in the Lake North District and the

chair of the NIC Book Club. “I look forward to seeing all of you, clergy and laity, as we together deepen our faith with God.”

Learn more about the NIC Book Club and watch a video from Bishop Kenneth Carder at umcnic.org/Discipleship/NICBookClub.

Leading the Laity

Words of encouragement



By Eugene Williams

Greetings on behalf of my conference co-lead leaders, Connie Augsburger and Mark Manzi, and the entire Board of Laity.

Annual Conference (our family reunion) is right around the corner. As we gather to conduct the business of the Northern Illinois Conference, we face a great deal of

uncertainty because of all the issues we must consider.

We will be celebrating changes in appointments, ordinations, and retirements. We will be voting on budgets and legislation, particularly on some disaffiliation requests that will affect the very future of the Northern Illinois Conference.

As we address these concerns, we are also faced locally with the backdrop of newly elected mayors, unabated violence, the loss of several first responders, and decisions on how we will accommodate migrants and immigrants.

Across the nation we continue to see senseless mass shootings and neighbors being shot for simply knocking on a door or entering another's yard to retrieve a ball. When lawmakers attempt to voice their concerns on how unfettered access to handguns might play a role in this gun violence, they are expelled from the legislature.

With these concerns making up just a small part of all that we face, it's a wonder that we can maintain our sanity, let alone deal with high level decision-making. It would be so easy to become discouraged.

But siblings of the NIC, be ye ever encouraged in the work that you have done, are doing and will do for Christ. We must never tire of doing the work that Christ has set before us, because Christ never intended to build His church alone. He expects each of us to assist Him by being a force-multiplier for the building of the beloved community; our "kin-dom" here on earth. We cannot be distracted from our work because of uncertainty, confusion, fear, and unbelief. Unlike the disciple Thomas (Didymus), we are people of faith. We don't need to see His hands or stick our fingers in the holes in His side.

So, no matter the uncertainty, doubt, or fear regarding what might lie ahead, we know that Jesus is still on the throne! The songwriter Ira Stanphill says it best: "I don't worry over the future, for I know what Jesus said. And each day I'll walk beside Him, for He knows what is ahead. Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand; but I know who holds tomorrow and I know who holds my hand."

Be encouraged indeed! May you have a blessed and productive 184th session of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference.

2023

Back to School Backpack Drive

June 20 - August 11

Kids Above All invites everyone to step up this summer for the school-aged kids in our care to ensure they have the school supplies they need for the new school year!



Contact our Faith & Community Relations Manager, Catherine Inserra, at cinserra@kidsabovell.org, or at (847) 224-2870, for more details!



#BeUMC

Child Safety & Active Shooter Training Modules Available at no cost

Philadelphia Insurance, in partnership with the Northern Illinois Conference, is making online trainings on child safety and active shooter available at no cost. For United Methodist churches participating in the conference insurance program, Skillful Screening and Parent Training modules are available.

Web-based training

Skillful Screening (130 minutes)

When bringing on new volunteers or paid staff to work with children, background checks are prudent and necessary. However, fewer than ten percent of sexual abusers have a criminal record, which is why skillful screening is necessary, along with background checks. Through this training, church leaders will learn how to conduct interviews to identify red flags and high-risk indicators, and receive sample applications, interview forms, and reference forms.

Active Shooter: Run/Hide/Fight (14 minutes)

Through the first four months of 2023, there have been 187 mass shooting events in the U.S. These situations are

unpredictable and chaotic, which is why a plan of how to respond should be in place before an event takes place. (This training is also available in Spanish.)

This training covers:

- The Run, Hide, Fight method for reacting to an active shooter situation
- Secondary concerns, such as first aid for victims and communicating with first responders

Workplace Violence: Prevent the Threat (30 minutes)

Approximately two million Americans are victims of workplace violence each year. In fact, workplace violence can occur in churches as well as other organizations. This training covers the major causes and types of workplace violence, warning signs, and prevention.

Accessing these training modules

For access to Skillful Screening, Active Shooter: Run/Hide/Fight, and Workplace Violence: Prevent the Threat please contact Dwayne Jackson, Director of Risk Management & Ministry Protection, at djackson@umcnic.org.

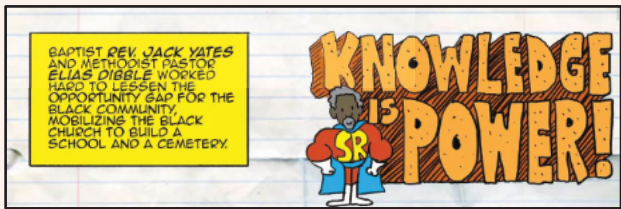
Parent Training (67 minutes)

Parents play a critical role in safeguarding their children while they are participating in church ministries. Through this training, parents will learn:

- Common grooming behaviors sexual predators use with parents and church staff
- What to do if a parent suspects abuse
- Teaching your child about keeping themselves safe

Parents with and guardians can access the Parent Training module at no cost using this QR code.





From "What is Juneteenth?" Copyright held by artist Rev. Charlie Baber. Used by permission.

Juneteenth

Drawn from United Methodist agency sources

It wasn't until June 19, 1865, that Black Americans in Texas learned of the Emancipation Proclamation, which was announced by President Abraham Lincoln two and half years earlier. The enslaved people in west Texas were the last to learn of their freedom.

The next year, Black Americans began celebrating this historic day through Juneteenth celebrations. Over time, annual observances spread to other states. These often include prayer, religious services, educational events, and festivals.

"Juneteenth ought not be a celebration only for those in the Africana tradition, but for all of God's people," write the worship resources staff of Discipleship Ministries. "As a part of the denominational efforts toward dismantling racism, Juneteenth can be an observance of solidarity and hope for God's people and a sign of unity within the body of Christ."

The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society urges the denomination to make Juneteenth a priority observance. In a press release on its website, the agency says it "stands with and advocates for the rights of all Black persons."

"Inspired by the Gospel and the church's Social Principles, Church and Society is dedicated to making lasting change for racial justice and equity. Current advocacy priorities include fighting for voting rights, defending rights of formerly incarcerated persons, calling to reform police and criminal justice practices, access to safe and affordable housing, and ensuring educational equity."

Discipleship Ministries suggests these hymns for Juneteenth observances:

- "Freedom Is Coming" (The Faith We Sing, 2192)
- "O, Freedom" (The Faith We Sing, 2194)
- "Siyahamba" (The Faith We Sing, 2235)
- "Goodness Is Stronger than Evil" (The Faith We Sing, 2219; Upper Room Worshipbook, 436)
- "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (The United Methodist Hymnal, 519)
- "We Shall Overcome" (The United Methodist Hymnal, 533)

Find more Juneteenth worship resources at umcdiscipleship.org/resources/juneteenth-day-worship-resources.

An engaging illustrated explanation of Juneteenth—and its historical Methodist connection—is depicted in Rev. Charlie Baber's comic "Wesley Brothers" (wesleybros.com/wesbros/what-is-juneteenth/).



Peace with Justice Sunday, observed on June 4 (or when convenient for churches) highlights the United Methodist Church's historic commitment to the biblical values of eradicating violence and compassion for the poor, overlooked, and belittled in our world. Among other ministries, offerings fund grants for churches and conferences.

On this official Special Sunday, churches take an offering to support ministries to educate, equip, and mobilize churches, conferences, and agencies to pursue economic, health, and gender justice.

Our annual conference uses half of the donations to strengthen the social-justice ministries we share. The other

half of the offerings collected fund national and international peacemaking ministries and grants. Three different grants are available to UMC congregations and organizations that support ethnic/minority local-church ministries.

The United Methodist General Board of Church and Society awards these grants annually. The next application cycle opens in July. To learn how to apply, contact the agency by email at grants@umcjustice.org. Learn about last year's recipients and their projects at umcjustice.org.

Find resources to help your church learn about and support Peace with Justice Sunday at resourceumc.org/pwjs



Rev. Dr. Audrea Nanabray Appointed Superintendent to the Lake South District



Rev. Dr. Audrea Nanabray

Rev. Dr. Audrea Nanabray has been appointed Lake South District Superintendent, effective July 1, Bishop Dan Schwerin has announced.

Rev. Dr. Nanabray currently serves at First United Methodist Church in Des Plaines and will follow Rev. Jacques Conway, who has been appointed to Faith United Methodist Church in Orland Park, effective July 1, 2023.

"Rev. Dr. Audrea Nanabray's pastoral record, skills in counseling, degree in administration, and commitment to the connectional church commend her to the cabinet," Bishop Schwerin says. "She has previously served on the Lake South District and knows it well. I look forward to our new chapter working as a superintendent of the whole conference, assigned to work with the faithful people of Lake South."

Rev. Dr. Nanabray is a product of the Lake South District. She was raised at New Gresham United

Methodist Church and spent the first 27 of her 30-year career in seven churches across the Lake South District.

"I am very grateful for a career of multi-faceted service: being enriched by clergy and laity alike, being able to encourage and to be encouraged, to walk with God's people through the 'best of times and the worst of times,' and being blessed beyond measure as they walked with me through my own personal peaks and valleys," Rev. Dr. Nanabray says.

"The thought that God has used me to make a difference in a way that is acknowledged by colleagues such that it warrants an invitation to serve on the bishop's Cabinet is an honor not easily expressed with words. I deeply appreciate Bishop Dan Schwerin for examining my works and discerning something that he could use on his team as we navigate through the challenging years

facing our denomination and conference. All I can say is 'to God be the glory for the things He has done.'"

Rev. Dr. Nanabray is licensed in the State of Illinois as a clinical social worker. She holds a bachelor of science degree from Bradley University, a master of divinity from Chicago Theological Seminary, a master of arts in social service administration from the University of Chicago, and a doctor of philosophy from Union Institute and University.

She has served as an adjunct faculty member of two colleges. At the College of DuPage (2004-2008), she taught English as a Second Language, Ethics, and Religions of the World. At Trinity Christian College (2008), she taught The Christian World View.

Around the conference, she has served as a Rule of Christ trainer, helping churches across the



DYK DID YOU KNOW?

An Invitation for All

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

During the month of May I had the honor of attending my great-niece's first communion. Molly was beaming in her white dress, shiny shoes and delicate veil. Molly is a seven-year-old, excited about a sacrament of the church. Like her mother before her, whose first communion I also attended, Molly was filled with joy and honor, solemnity and understanding.

While first communion is not a practice of Protestant churches, it is a marker of growing faith for those who are Roman Catholic. As I sat in the pew of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity on the north side of Chicago, I was surrounded by young families, squirming babies, and proud parents and grandparents, all drawn together by this act of faith and acknowledgment of God's presence in our life and world.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper unites us beyond denominational lines and draws us back into the basics of Jesus's teaching and witness as he fulfilled God's promise of salvation for all of creation. In her classes, Molly

learned about the power of forgiveness. She dug into the Bible and read the stories of Jesus's breaking bread with sinners and saints. In the celebration of her first communion, she and our family created memories centered around Christ and grounded in faith.

This year as we gather for Annual Conference, living out our theme "Connected in Christ: Come to the Table," we come from an era of challenge and change. Our hearts are heavy as the body is broken by the experience of a pandemic. Barely on the other side of this global event, we are just beginning to understand its effect on our health, spirit, and psyche. Our patterns of worship and the place of faith in our lives were slowly changing before this global crisis, but the fallout of the pandemic has altered our religious world in ways we are just beginning to understand.

We gather with heavy hearts to face the loss of churches through disaffiliation. We've always known that not everyone wants to be United Methodist. We are

surrounded by Roman Catholics, other Protestant denominations, and many branches of Wesleyan faith. As I sat in the pew of a Roman Catholic Church, I saw that there were many similarities in the liturgy, music, and word. We find our grounding in the same scriptures and witness of Christ. People come and go from one religion or denomination as they feel led, but in this season, for the first time in our history, the United Methodist Church has created a path for entire congregations to move away from our heritage. This is an era of challenge and change.

I was blessed to be part of Molly's first communion service. I'm grateful that we can step into one another's faith traditions and be greeted with hospitality. May we all find room in our hearts and our world to welcome others to Christ table in gratitude for God's love poured out on us. We are connected in Christ. Let us come to the table.

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, 2023 (unless otherwise noted):

Melissa Earley (Full Elder) to St. George Episcopal Church in Leadville, CO, under paragraph 345, Appointment to Ecumenical Shared Ministries, from Arlington Heights: First (Lake North District).

Jeremiah Thompson (Full Elder) to Maple Park (1/2 time) while remaining at Malta (1/2 time) (Prairie South District). Jeremiah follows Joe Munroe who is appointed to Sugar Grove (Prairie South District).

Melwyn Alagodi (Full Elder) to the newly yoked appointment of Lena (1/2 time) and Stockton: Wesley (1/2 time) (Prairie North District). Melwyn follows Keri Rainsberger who is moving to Pacific Northwest and Doug Carroll who has withdrawn his credentials.

Roger Bronkema (Licensed Local Pastor) to Pearl City: First (1/4 time) while remaining at Orangeville (1/2 time) (Prairie North District). Roger follows Doug Carroll who has withdrawn his credentials.

***Updated: Jungmi (Deborah) Kang** (Full Elder) to 346.1 California Nevada Conference (Richmond, Open Door UMC) while also pursuing a PhD at Graduate Theological Union.

Sung-Ja LeeMoon (Retired Elder) and **Soong In Moon** (Retired Elder) to (interim)Wheeling: First Korean United Methodist Church. Sung-Ja and Soong-In follow Kwangtae Kim who is taking renewal leave before taking his next appointment. Effective May 15.

Victor Melad Jr. (Full Elder) to Sr. Pastor for Oak Park: St. John's (1/4 time) while remaining at Chicago: Edison Park (3/4 time) (Lake North District). Vic follows Noah Panillio who is retiring.

Jacques Conway (Full Elder) to Orland Park: Faith (Lake South District) from the Lake South District Superintendent. Jacques follows Caleb Hong who is appointed to Rockford: Christ (Prairie North District).

Kyeong-Ah Woo (Full Elder) from GBGM Missionary to Switzerland, to Program Manager, Mission Engagement, General Board of Global Ministries.

Donna Hoffman (Retired Local Pastor) to Elizabeth: First (1/4 time) while remaining at Hanover (1/4 time) (Prairie North District). Donna follows Roger Bronkema as Elizabeth is unyoked from Orangeville to be yoked with Pearl City: First (Prairie North District).

Kicheon (Peter) Ahn (Provisional Elder) to Milledgeville (1/2 time) and Coleta (1/2 time) (Prairie South District) from Leon and Fenton (Prairie South District). Peter follows Joel McClellan who is appointed to Freeport: Faith (Prairie North District).

Audrea Nanabray (Full Elder) to Lake South District Superintendent from Des Plaines: First (Lake North District). Audrea follows Jacques Conway who is appointed to Orland Park: Faith (Lake South District)

Norval Brown (Full Elder) to 1/4 time Fox River Grove to create a partnership with Cary, while remaining lead pastor at Cary. Norval follows Karen Sersen who is retiring.

Bradford Wilson (Full Elder) to retirement from Sterling: First and Trinity (Prairie South District). Brad was ordained a Deacon in 1982 and an Elder in 1985. During his ministry he served Tampico, Stockton: Wesley, Rockford: Brooke Road, Fenton, Downers Grove: Faith, Des Plaines: First, and Sterling: First (3/4 time), Sterling: Trinity (1/4 time). Brad will serve as a Retired Clergy at Sterling: First (1/2 time) (Prairie South).

James Rough (Full Elder) to retirement from Havenwood Heritage Heights Retirement Village (Concord, NH). James was ordained a Deacon in 1977 and an Elder in 1981. During his ministry he served at Aurora: Fourth Street (Associate). Lutheran General Hospital (Park Ridge, IL, Chaplain and CPE Supervisor), and Children's Hospital National Medical Center.

Robert Biekman (Full Elder) to Chicago: Gorham (3/4 time) (Lake South District) from Transitional Leave. Robert follows Aaron McLeod who is appointed to Evanston: Sherman (Lake North District)

Rick Carlson (Retired Elder) to interim Arlington Heights: First (Lake North District) from Waukegan: New Hope (Lake North District). Rick follows Melissa Earley who is appointed to St. George Episcopal Church in Leadville, CO, under paragraph 345, Appointment to Ecumenical Shared Ministries.

Sung-Eun Kim (Full Elder) to El Buen Samaritano UMC and University Heights UMC (New Mexico Conference) from Forreton and Leaf River (Prairie North District).



Young Artists Display Work at the Temple

The work of eight artists in Kids Above All's Becoming Me program is on exhibit at First United Methodist Church at Chicago Temple.

Becoming Me is a 15- to 20-week mentorship program for youth aged 10 to 18 who are at risk of violence. It helps them obtain the skills and resources they need to set up their futures.

Becoming Me's Youth Support Specialists provide group and individual support to ensure the teens in the program establish personal and professional goals.

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Northern Illinois Conference navigate through conflict resolution and discover strategies for communication and mutual understanding. She has also contributed as a Safe Sanctuaries trainer, helping churches keep children and vulnerable adults safe from sexual exploitation. She has served with Wespeth (the United Methodist pension and health benefits agency) as a pastoral counselor for clergy.

Rev. Jacques Conway, the present superintendent of the Lake South District, will begin serving Faith United Methodist Church in Orland Park, effective July 1.

"It is with gratitude that I give thanks for the wisdom and strength of our brother in Christ, Rev. Jacques Conway, who has served as the Lake South District superintendent over the course of the past seven years," Bishop Schwerin says. "I am grateful for his skills in discernment and care for the Lake South District and will miss working with him on a daily basis."

Job Openings

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

Stay Connected

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