

Northern Illinois Conference
of The United Methodist Church
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This year's Christmas Eve services in churches will look different than Christmases past but the light of Christ can still be shared. Photo courtesy Dick Stone, Kingswood UMC.



Some churches are sending instructions in kits on how to make their own Advent wreaths.

Pandemic can't cancel Christmas

By Diane Sanchez-Bushong, Discipleship Ministries

How do you plan for Advent and Christmas worship when you don't know what to plan for? Who to plan for? Where to plan for?

What we do know is why we plan for the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany season. It's a season of anticipation, of hope, and of God made flesh. It's a season of lights, joy, and the sparkling eyes of children. It's the season of singing favorite Christmas carols and enjoying friends and family.

But this season may be very different. All the givens from past years are in jeopardy of feeling like shadows of the past. So, how do we help our communities of faith celebrate this season?

First, we acknowledge that there are differing opinions about whether we should gather in person for worship during Advent and Christmas. Many congregations are continuing their online worship presence, even when and if they begin to offer in-person worship. Second, we decide to plan for worship and music that might be scaled down from past years. Finally, we find ways of creating worship for Advent and Christmas that still engages worshipers and asks them to fully participate in the retelling of the Christmas story.

Have we done it this way before? No, but it's an opportunity to think creatively and pastorally, knowing the needs and limitations of those entrusted to us.

Plans may already be in place, but here are some suggestions on making these liturgical elements participatory for online worshipers.

Hanging of the Greens

This celebration is traditionally done on the first Sunday of Advent, which is November 29 this year. Consider how to help your congregation members who are worshipping at

home to participate in the service. Prepare them ahead of time and ask them to have the pieces ready for hanging: wreath, garlands, tree (maybe a small symbolic one), symbols for Christ, stars, crosses, and triangles (can be made out of paper to hang on the tree).

There are some great suggestions music in those services, but if you are planning an online experience, you may want to use one or two pieces that can be repeated throughout the liturgical acts. In particular, consider "Prepare the Way of the Lord," 207, The United Methodist Hymnal, and "People Look East," 202, The United Methodist Hymnal.

Advent Wreath Lighting Each Sunday

A great song to go with lighting the Advent wreath, whether at home or in church, is "Light the Advent Candle," The Faith We Sing, 2090. Another idea is to use a refrain from a carol or hymn to sing at the end of the liturgy. One that works well with this theme is "Celebrate Love" found in The Faith We Sing, 2073. And finally, a more contemporary song, "Welcome to Our World," found in Worship & Song, 3067, may be used on Christmas Eve as a very effective solo.

Pastor Leslie Stanford at Dakota-Rock Grove UMC is creating an outdoor Advent wreath so those who don't feel comfortable coming inside the sanctuary can still take part and take the light of Christ home with them.

The Rev. Melissa Meyers at Faith UMC in Freeport says their church is looking at hosting an advent wreath making event outside with evergreens. "We may also be building a large advent wreath for outside— this idea isn't firm yet, but has some excitement!"

Advent Kits

Some churches are offering Advent take-home kits. At

Kingswood UMC in Buffalo Grove, they're giving out "A Christmas Carol" themed Advent package for families that include weekly devotionals, instructions on how to make your own Advent wreaths and different surprises to observe each week of waiting for baby Jesus.

Kingswood's Coordinator of Welcoming and Connecting Jenn Sawyer says she hopes the kits will help families bring in the faith traditions usually observed on Sunday mornings during Advent.

"There will be devotionals to read and follow, Advent candles to light and other traditional activities to do," said Sawyer. "I believe the kits will bring a sense of normalcy and comfort in a time of uncertainty. These kits will also be connected to the online services that are offered both on Sunday mornings, as well as the special Christmas programs planned for three Sunday evenings in December."

Alison Lally, a member of Kingswood UMC who grew up in the church and is a mother of three young children, is hoping the kits will bring some normalcy to the season for her family. "Christmas is my favorite season. I can remember going to the services at Kingswood since I was a kid," Lally shared. "Our children are always excited to participate in the Christmas program and the annual spaghetti dinner. I can't imagine Christmas without these activities but I hope we can find a fun way to still celebrate even if it is virtually."

Lessons and Carols

The Service of Lessons and Carols is one of the best ways to tell the Christmas story. Under the NIC ReTurn Team guidelines, no congregational singing is allowed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. But songs and reading of the scripture can be pre-recorded from a variety of venues,

Continued on page 3, see From the Cover

INSIDE THE ISSUE



Bishop's Column: Change is Strange... 2



Tanzania School Update... 2



Exploring Options for GC... 3



NIC Accounting Director Retires... 8



FROM THE BISHOP: **Change is strange**

We keep saying that we are in unprecedented times. But the fact of the matter is we are in a time of great change. Everything has changed and we know that more will yet change. And change is strange!

Consider the word “strange.” The dictionary says that the word “strange” has a Latin root in “extraneus” (i.e., outside of us). We feel pummeled some days—or at least I do—by all the change. If you watch the late-night comedy shows (I watch the morning-after clips), they make jokes about how fast change happens in the course of a week. I read somewhere that Lenin once said, “There are decades when nothing happens and weeks when decades happen.” I feel like we’re in the latter! Change is strange: fast and unrelenting.

Just one change—the COVID-19 pandemic—has had a cascading effect on so many aspects of our personal lives, families, education, institutions, the church, business and the economy. Everything has changed. Decades worth of change have occurred in the last eight months to all of us.

As an annual conference, there have been—and there will be even more—changes in the future. We don’t know what many of them will look like yet, such as:

Redistricting. Anticipating that the legislation to reduce the number of districts will be passed at annual conference, the Cabinet and I have been working on a plan for redistricting. It will affect many, but my experience with redistricting is that once district leadership is sorted out, it flows fairly smoothly. You may have a different district superintendent and district committees and groups may be slightly different from what you have now, but soon things will settle in!

My retirement and the coming of an interim bishop. Over the next year, retired Bishop John Hopkins will provide episcopal guidance for the Cabinet, support the Annual Conference Shepherding Team with its work and provide general oversight. An interim situation implies “temporary” or “transitional,” so by definition, it suggests continuous change to a certain extent. Bishop Hopkins will do a great job as he helps guide the conference through changes in the near future.

General Conference 2020 (we still call it that). So many questions surround whether the General Conference will happen in person or virtually. General Conferences always generate a degree of anxiety, but this one, in particular, generates hard conversations in some local churches and among clergy as to what The United Methodist Church will be like going forward. What will our annual conference look like if churches leave the denomination (if they do)? What will the denomination look like if annual conferences leave (if they do)? All of these things are more questions than answers.

North Central Jurisdictional (NCJ) Conference. At some point in 2021, there will be a jurisdictional meeting. There is

still a question about how many bishops will be elected, if any. It’s pretty clear that NCJ will have one less bishop and that may—although we don’t know yet—impact this annual conference, meaning that NIC will be “yoked” with another conference and share a bishop with that conference, starting 2022. Again, we don’t know yet.

I could go on with unknowns and their resultant changes. And just this short list demonstrates that change is strange!

But how do we deal with all this change?

Over the last few years (for a variety of reasons), I have read a lot of Holocaust and post-Holocaust literature. Think about how strange the change was to a whole people as a result of World War II. The great Jewish philosophers, theologians and authors who lived through the Holocaust all emphasize that those who have thrived afterward did not allow the experience—no matter how horrendous—to define whom they were. The healthiest response is to not let change define us, but deal with how to respond to it. That seems very hard to do (and almost trite to suggest), except the Holocaust survivors themselves advocate for that philosophy.

Sometimes we deal with extraneous change by saying and doing things that actually increase the anxiety and drama—which makes it even more difficult to keep change from defining us. “Not letting change define you” means that we work hard at assuming the best of others and work from there instead of the opposite. If we have questions or concerns, it’s important to check them out with someone who knows before passing on rumors and rumors of rumors!

I encourage all of you—laity and clergy—to acknowledge that your leaders going forward are all servants of the church. We are not perfect people, but we work to address these changes in the most transparent, consistent, caring, creative and even reasonable way that we know how. But as you know in your local churches, sometimes these changes come hard and fast, and it takes a minute to work out all those transparent, consistent, caring, creative and even reasonable approaches. So stay connected and in good communication; I know that your District Superintendents and Bishop Hopkins will do the same with you as they are able or ready to answer your questions and address your concerns.

There’s extraneous or outside change and there’s internal or spiritual change. Our Christian faith is nothing if not a call to change! Through Christ, we are changed from the inside out: the change of our hearts and minds through Christ. As it says in the epistle: “be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:1). We need to pray for the transformation and renewal of our minds and hearts as we face extraneous changes such as how to face all that is and looks unfamiliar; holidays that aren’t going to be how we’ve always spent them; whatever this federal election will bring. All the extraneous changes challenge us to be open to the

renewal of our hearts and minds in Christ.

I read about a 92-year-old woman who was being moved to a nursing home. As an attendant wheeled the woman down the corridor to her new room for the first time and described her room and her new life in the care facility (undoubtedly trying to talk it up), the woman interrupted and gushed, “I love it!” “But you haven’t seen the room yet,” the attendant pointed out. “That doesn’t have anything to do with it,” she replied. “Happiness”—or she could have said peace—is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn’t depend on how the furniture is arranged. It’s how I arrange my mind.”

Practicing vital discipleship helps us in arranging our hearts and minds during these times. It takes discipline (as in discipleship) to follow Jesus (to be a disciple) in ways and challenges that are difficult. The renewal or arranging of our hearts and minds doesn’t just happen; the spiritual disciplines position us in relation to God’s grace and mercy so as to be transformed within as we are pummeled with extraneous change. Let us pray that we will experience the transformation of the renewal of our minds and hearts, allowing Christ to arrange them in such a way that we can embrace God, each other, our neighbors and colleagues in an open, loving and trusting way. Otherwise, our suffering is and will be great.

This is how Eugene Peterson puts it in *The Message*:
So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for (God). Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what (God) wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

~Bishop Sally Dyck



Registration is closed for the Annual Conference virtual session on Nov. 14. Observers may view the livestream on the NIC website, Facebook page and YouTube Channel. Visit umcnic.org/AC2020 for ways to connect.

The Memorial Service will be available to view online **Nov. 12 at 7 p.m.** The Retirement Service will be available to view **Nov. 14 at 4:30 p.m.** Look for a complete wrap up of the session in the December Reporter and the NIC eNews.



Bishop’s Appeal Update: Stage 2 underway

The Rev. Young Seon (Christina Kim) is happy to report that Stage 1 is 85 percent complete on construction of the Global Mission Secondary School in Tanzania. Work on Stage 2, which includes building the dorms, is 40 percent complete. In October, crews were working to finish Stage 1 construction and move to Stage 2, which will include roofing the dorm buildings.

“God has been awesome,” said Rev. Kim. “By God’s grace, we also made 40 sets of student tables and chairs and are continuing to make more furniture. We will be ready for the second school inspection after November 15.”

The goal is to open the coed school for youth ages 13-18 by January 2021.

How to give:

Text “Give” to (844) 563-0429 or mail checks to:

Northern Illinois Conference
PO Box 5646
Carol Stream, IL 60197-5646
Put “Bishop’s Appeal” in the memo line.

For more info, visit umcnic.org/bishopsappeal.



Supporters are making student tables and chairs to fill the classrooms at the Global Mission Secondary School in Tanzania.

Should General Conference go virtual?

By Heather Hahn, UMNS



With coronavirus cases on the rise across the U.S. and public gatherings still limited for the foreseeable future, United Methodists are urging 2021 General Conference organizers to plan for an online conference. Graphic by Laurens Glass, UMNS.

With no end in sight to the deadly pandemic, a number of United Methodist leaders are urging that General Conference be virtual — if it's to be held at all next year. Others worry such an option is impractical and possibly unjust for an international meeting that typically lasts 10 days and draws nearly 900 delegates from across four continents and 13 time zones.

The stakes are high. The coming General Conference faces multiple proposals to resolve longtime debate over homosexuality by splitting the denomination along theological lines. The United Methodist Church's top lawmaking assembly was set for May this year until the spread of COVID-19 caused the meeting's Minneapolis venue to cancel. Organizers have postponed the meeting to Aug. 29-Sept. 7, 2021 and kept it in Minneapolis. Even that delay might not be enough, given the disease's current menace. U.S. coronavirus case numbers are climbing across the country, and more than a dozen states have recently set record highs for COVID-19 hospitalizations.

"Many gatherings in the United States, including music festivals and concert series, are being postponed," said Bishop

Ken Carter, who leads the Florida Conference. "We are clearly in a third wave of the pandemic. And timetables for the vaccine and testing are still uncertain."

Ultimately, the Commission on the General Conference is the body that determines when, where and how the lawmaking assembly takes place. The Commission has named a Technology Study Team to explore the implications of options for accommodating full participation at General Conference including, but not limited to, the possibility of utilizing technology and online voting. The commission's next meeting will be held virtually in December.

Carter, former Council of Bishops President, is among multiple leaders encouraging the commission to consider online options. They include Bishop Bruce Ough, who leads the Minnesota and Dakotas conferences. The conferences have spent years preparing to host the next General Conference. However, with the Minnesota Department of Health limiting gatherings to no more than 250 people, he said, "we have no choice but to be talking about this."

Virtual platforms "are becoming part of our daily bread,"

Continued on page 4, see Virtual GC

From the Cover:

which make it more appealing to watch. You can encourage families to have the pieces of the nativity ready for children to make the readings more tactile. Remember that for online worship, less is more! Consider keeping the service short by using fewer verses or shortening the lessons when possible.

Christmas Cantata

For many churches, the Christmas Cantata is the highlight of the season. Choirs prepare for weeks to tell the Christmas story in song and narration. This year, the cantata may be a combination of virtual choir pieces prepared ahead of time alongside some videos and live leadership at the church under safety protocols. As storytellers, consider what you have available and how you can plan to make this a new, yet special experience for everyone. Pre-recorded videos allow for more venues and greater participation.

Christmas Eve

Around the world, Christmas Eve is one of the most family-friendly and intimate services of the Christian year. If you are still offering online-only services on Christmas Eve or offering online service for families that are not able to join in a group activity, consider how to help them part of this special event. A Christmas Eve service that offers children the opportunity to dress up as part of the story is a great way for a family to get involved. Some family members may play several characters. Another option is to use a nativity.

Pastor Luther Mason at Greenstone UMC in Chicago says weather permitting, they plan to hold an outdoor Christmas Eve bonfire service at Arcade Park across the street from the church. "We are praying for no or little snow, and above freezing temps," Mason said. "But, we are looking to do a 30-45 minute service of 'Lessons and Carols' in the park around a bonfire at 11:30 p.m., and we are asking everyone to bring sleigh bells so we would ring in Christ at midnight Christmas Morning."

Mason says they're also encouraging anyone who feels uncomfortable with the weather or has been staying home during the pandemic, to come and worship from their cars.

Terry McDorman, Pastor at Wood Dale Community UMC says they are scheduling 15-minute prayer sessions by reservation in the sanctuary during the day on Christmas Eve with instrumental music playing in the background. A Zoom worship service will be held at 4 p.m. McDorman says they are allowing time in between for sanitization.

Rev. Meyers said Faith UMC's Christmas Eve service will be streamed online, but they'll also be putting it on DVDs

for folks to have at home. "We will be giving families worship kits that include the DVD, communion cups, glow sticks or candles, hot chocolate and maybe some cookies," said Meyers.

Kingswood UMC plans on one outdoor service and a family-friendly online program Christmas Eve. "A gift of a Christmas book will be given to families that correlate with the message," said Sawyer. "In the Advent Kits, we will also provide candles. If families choose, they can read the devotional for that evening and light their candles."

Rev. Mason says he will most likely do a virtual online service on Christmas Day as well, "We want to share the good news that the Savior is Born!" Mason said. "So we are not gonna let the COVID Grinch steal our Christmas joy, but let the light of Christ shine this Christmas time, to God be the Glory!"

First Sunday after Christmas

The first Sunday after Christmas typically offers a great opportunity to sing all the Christmas carols that you didn't get to sing during the weeks of Advent! Try developing a couple of medleys (one at the opening and one at the close of worship) that provide a verse or two of each carol for congregations to sing along at home or for congregations to hum along in person. Below are some medleys from carols found in The United Methodist Hymnal. If you have additional songbooks, you may wish to add some contemporary carols or develop a medley from carols from around the world! Songs in the key of G that work well together are "There's a Song in the Air," 249; "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly," 229; and finish with "Go, Tell It on the Mountain," 251.

Churches may consider offering only an online service on this Sunday to give their staff a much-needed break after the hectic season. Kingswood UMC will offer one online service and carry on a tradition of blessing the toys. Families and members may share pictures of their toys and their trees to be included in the recorded service.

The Covenant Service - First Sunday in January

Think about ways to make this service on Jan. 3, 2021, more interactive in person and online. How can you help worshippers prepare in advance so that they can fully participate in this service? How can you help worshippers tie together the themes of Christmas (this Sunday is the tenth day of Christmas), the worship series theme of "Welcome Home" and the theme of starting a new year and reaffirming

our covenant as followers of Christ? This is a threshold moment as we begin a new year and wrap up this season.

Even though this Christmas season will look different, COVID-19 cannot steal the true meaning of the season.

"Just because we require 'other ways' right now to celebrate, our Savior is still very much present and the same; His birth, sacrifice, and gift does not change for us, even though our world has," Kingswood's Jenn Sawyer reminded us.

To find more resources, visit umcdiscipleship.org.

*Anne Marie Gerhardt, NIC Director of Communications contributed to this article.

Twass the night before Christmas and all through the Church... Webinar Nov. 19 at 10 a.m.

Whether you are like so many retail stores and have been planning Christmas at your church since August or you are just now starting to think about how you can make the season special for your church and community, you are invited to an online conversation to share ideas. The pandemic has made the church adjust in so many ways and as we think about Christmas Eve services and other ministries we do around Christmas time, we are probably adjusting what we do and how we do them. Will you have in-person worship? How might you sing the carols? Will you have the tree decorating at your church this year? How do you spread the joy to your children and youth? How can the community know that Christ is born?

Join us for an online Christmas planning Zoom conversation on **November 19 at 10 a.m.** For more information and to register, visit umcnic.org/online-learning. A panel of church leaders will offer creative ideas for the season and we will learn from one another in the hopes of sharing the love of Christ in new ways. Christmas Eve may not be the same as it has been in the past, but it doesn't mean we cannot still make it the most wonderful time of the year!

Longtime NIC accountant retires, Successor returns “home”

By Anne Marie Gerhardt, NIC Dir. of Communications



After more than two decades serving the Northern Illinois Conference as the Director of Accounting, Athena Staveris is hanging up her calculator and retiring. Staveris' last day is Oct. 30, 2020.

Staveris said she will miss her co-workers the most. “I love my work and the conference as a whole,” said Staveris. “I really enjoyed working with the people here. They’re loving people and the reason I stuck around for 21 years. I can’t say enough about them.”

Staveris, a self-identified numbers cruncher, oversaw every financial transaction of the conference, ensured that all income and expenses were properly recorded, and prepared records for the annual audit, said NIC Treasurer Lonnie Chafin.

“She is the one to be sure the money is spent well and as expected on a daily basis,” said Chafin. “She’s been pivotal in ensuring the proper use of funds, check by check, transaction by transaction.”

Staveris was born in Cephalonia, Greece, an island in the Ionian Sea, and immigrated to the United States in 1964 with her family as a young girl. She often shared baked treats in the conference office celebrating her Greek heritage and holidays. She is excited to spend time with her son and daughter and five grandchildren in retirement, as well as catching up on her favorite hobby, reading.

“Athena has been a rock of reliability for the conference and we are so grateful for all she did in keeping the finances accurate. We all love her very much and know she will give as much focus to being a grandmother as she did to being the director of accounting,” said Chafin.



A homecoming for new hire Brady Goetz

Brady Goetz, who officially started Oct. 15 for training with Staveris, will be the NIC’s new Director of Accounting, and he is no stranger to the conference. From 1998 to 2000, he served as an intern starting in the accounts payable department and was

quickly promoted to the accountant position after a few months. Some of the processes he created are still being used today in the conference office.

“I am super excited about coming back!” Goetz said. “When I heard the position was available it’s like the stars aligned.”

Goetz said his experience at the conference helped propel him into a 20-year career working in corporate accounting and finance for companies such as American Express’ tax and business service, a leasing business, and a company that provided diagnostic imaging services. Goetz wanted to return to a job that grounded him and allowed for more time with family.

“I was working on a personal business and doing

eLearning with my two children, but when my wife and I decided it would be best to put the kids in real school my schedule freed up and things slowed down,” Goetz said. “The next thing you know I was interviewing with the same people I worked for in the past!”

Goetz said his career has come full circle as he looks forward to returning and contributing his skills and knowledge to a place he’s always loved. “Coming into the office and working with Athena again has been great,” Goetz said. “Before I left the conference, I trained her to take over and now she’s training me! It’s truly been a blessing – God laid it out perfectly.”

While the pandemic has made this a challenging year financially for businesses of all types, especially the church, Goetz believes working together will make us stronger.

“I am enthusiastic about bringing all my abilities/knowledge from the for-profit sector to a not-for-profit entity and help the church stay lean as well as evolve during this challenging time by using technology, teamwork and passion,” Goetz said. “We need to remember the church has adapted and will continue to grow in a new way. We are all in this together and God will help see us to the other side.”

Goetz is married to his high school sweetheart, Rosa, and they have two children, a son Lincoln (7) and a daughter Logan (4). They live in Arlington Heights. To contact him, email bgoetz@umcnic.org.

Virtual General Conference *(continued from page 3)*

said Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, the current Council of Bishops president and leader of the Louisiana Conference. “With the proper preparation and training, I believe a General Conference could be held virtually,” Harvey said. “There are new technological developments every day that could make traversing the globe, languages and time zones possible.”

Bishops caution that any online meeting would need a compact agenda. Church law requires General Conference to vote on all properly submitted petitions. Lonnie Brooks, a veteran General Conference delegate and now a reserve from Alaska, said delegates could fulfill that requirement by referring any proposals they do not address to the next legislative gathering. Brooks also has been pushing the commission to plan for going online and talked about the idea with some fellow delegates.

“There are some folks who have reservations about the technology,” he said. “But most folks who have experience using this, especially at their annual conferences, think it’s going to work.”

Even when potential church separation is not on the agenda, General Conference — the only body that can speak for the church — must make big decisions. The conference deals with ordination requirements and social teachings. It also elects

members of the Judicial Council, the denomination’s top court, and sets the budget that supports denomination-wide ministries.

With so much at stake, Jessica Vittorio — a delegate from the North Texas Conference — would prefer to see General Conference rescheduled or held off until the next scheduled assembly in 2024.

“I appreciate the potential cost savings a virtual conference could present, and I would be excited to see the church develop means of conferencing that is more financially sustainable,” she said. “However, I have significant concerns regarding representation and accessibility.”

But for many United Methodists, further delay of the General Conference is a non-starter. Among the separation proposals is the Protocol for Reconciliation and Grace through Separation, a mediated agreement that, if accepted, would allow a new, traditionalist denomination to break away from The United Methodist Church. Amid the postponement, the Wesleyan Covenant Association has continued to work on forming that new denomination.

“The WCA hopes that General Conference 2021 occurs in person in Minneapolis as scheduled,” said the Rev. Keith Boyette, the group’s president. “However, if an in-person gathering is not possible, the WCA believes that every alternative should be explored to enable the General

Conference to conduct its business.”

Nonetheless, like Vittorio, many United Methodist delegates raised concerns that there are many equity and accessibility issues to consider, particularly in Africa, where the United Methodist presence is growing.

“Internet connectivity is an issue for us already and the issues that are discussed at the General Conference are too delicate for a virtual meeting,” said the Rev. Jerry Kulah, the head of the Liberia Conference delegation.

Kulah and other African delegates suggested the commission look at relocating to a venue outside the U.S., the country with the most deaths from the coronavirus. Because of COVID-19, multiple countries have banned foreign visitors or require 14-day quarantines for those who do visit.

The Rev. Ande Emmanuel, a delegate from Nigeria, said he and fellow Nigerians pray for the disease to be under control in the U.S. before General Conference.

“But if things continue the way it is with COVID-19 going higher,” he said, “I will love the General Conference to meet online.”

**Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News. Contributors include Sam Hodges of UM News and communicators Kudzai Chingwe of the Zimbabwe East Conference, E Julu Swen in Liberia, Philippe Kituka Lolonga in the Kivu Conference of Congo and Phileas Jusu in Sierra Leone.*



Youth Ministry Jumpstart Plan

For most people, the “new year” begins in January. But for anyone who works with children and youth, we often think of our “new year” beginning in the fall, when the school year starts up and we begin our student ministry programs anew.

Of course, this year like many things, church, worship, and student ministry looks a little different. Perhaps this period has even provided a time of reflection for church leaders? How can we minister, be the church, grow and make disciples in times like these? Disciples of all ages, including our youngest members?

The NIC Discipleship Taskforce is trying to answer those questions, and help other church leaders do so as well, especially when it comes to youth ministry. For the next six months, they’re presenting what they call a “Jumpstarting Youth Ministry” plan. Each month they will have a theme with a video to accompany it, followed by a list of resources to help leaders, both clergy and laity, paid and volunteer, to “jumpstart” their youth ministry, whether it presently exists or whether they’re looking for a starting point!

Visit umcnic.org/jumpstart to get started.



Many United Methodist churches donate gifts to to bring holiday cheer to children through Kids Above All (formerly ChildServ) programs.

Brighten a child's Christmas

The holidays are right around the corner and that means it’s time for the Kids Above All Holiday Gift Drive! Each year, through the generosity of community and corporate partners, Kids Above All (formerly ChildServ) helps more than 700 children in their programs have a great Christmas.

They are collecting new toys, clothes, books and gift cards from November 30 through December 16.

For more information or to sponsor a child, contact Deaconess Catherine Inserra at cinserra@kidsaboveall.org or (847) 224-2870.

Greenstone UMC announces historic restoration project

After receiving a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Greenstone UMC announced that it is restoring its 135-year-old church building in the heart of Chicago's Pullman National Monument as designated by President Obama in February 2015. Work will include a full roof replacement, restoring the "green stone" facade and stabilization of the bell tower.

Construction began mid-October by Berglund Construction Company and MDC Inc. Remodeling & Roofing. Assistance for Phase 1 of the project comes from the NIC and Chicago Southern District, as well as project partners Landmarks Illinois, National Parks Conservation Association, Pullman Civic Organization, Historic Pullman Foundation, and the U.S. National Park Service: Pullman National Monument.

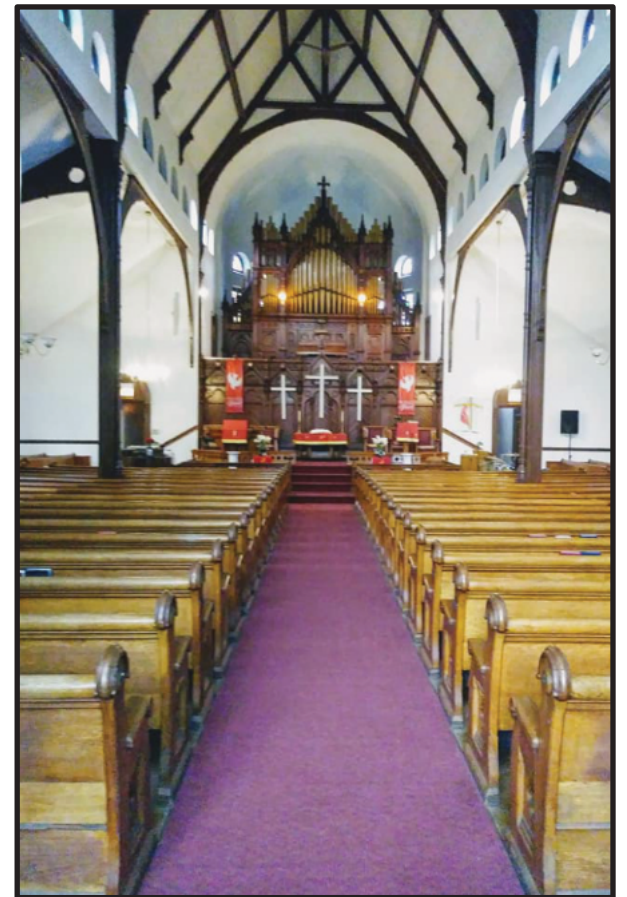
"It took us four years to get to this point and we are ever so grateful renovations are underway," said Pastor Luther Mason who is especially grateful for all the continued support. "Now the real work begins as we continue to raise funds and complete the church restoration phase by phase."

The Greenstone Church was built by industrialist George Pullman in his "company town" of Pullman in 1882. Designed by Solon Beman, it features a unique facade of green stone quarried in Pennsylvania. The original cost of the building was \$57,000, and seats 600. With the exception of the chancel arrangements, the sanctuary has remained unchanged since the 1880s. The cherry wood that comprises the altar and pews, over 90% of the stained glass windows, and the two manual-tracker pipe organ are original to the building.

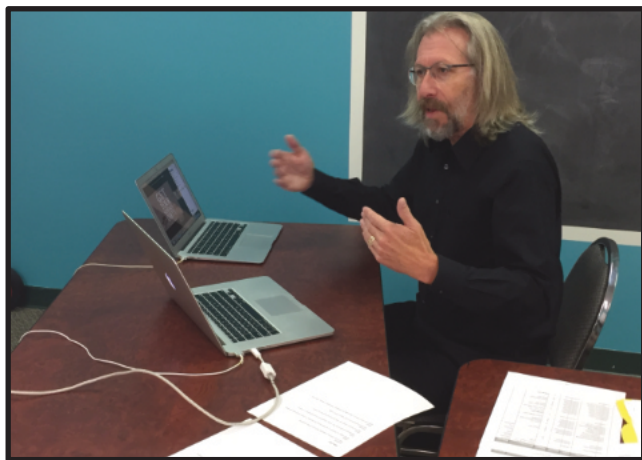
The church asks for continued prayers for their campaign "Raise, Repair, and Restore" and as they continue to love and serve God and God's people making "Disciples for the Transformation of the World." Follow the project on the church's Facebook page or visit greenstoneunitedmethodistchurchchicago.wordpress.com.



Greenstone UMC in Chicago's historic Pullman District is receiving a facelift including a new roof and stabilization of the bell tower.



Greenstone's sanctuary has remained unchanged since the 1880s. The cherry wood that comprises the altar and pews, more than 90% of the stained glass windows, and the two manual-tracker pipe organ are original to the building.



Randy Lawrence, Kingswood United Methodist Church and Barrington United Methodist Church, created and directed the Zoom production, a complex job because speakers' videos, live speakers, and music videos were all integrated.



Arnold Rivera, Redeemer of Calvary United Methodist Church, wearing his red United Methodist Men's vest, moderated the program, adding information and perspective between speakers and music.

UMM Spiritual Congress 2020 goes virtual By John Maxson, UMM

The United Methodist Men's online Spiritual Congress 2020 with the theme, "Finding Solutions to the Challenges of Our Time," brought clergy and laity together to hear top leaders discuss ways to mitigate and eventually eliminate racism. Some speakers provided an overview; others gave concrete ways to improve understanding, build trust, and break down barriers.

Organized by the NIC United Methodist Men, 184 men and women registered for the program, which went from 9:00 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, September 19, 2020. Craig McGregor, Director of the Spiritual Congress Planning Team, led a core group consisting of Paul Callaghan, George Groves, David Holland, Herb John, Jim Loeppert, Mark Lubbock, John Maxson, and Eugene Williams. Other key players included Randy Lawrence, who directed and produced the Zoom webinar, and Arnold Rivera, who moderated the program, adding perspective and continuity between speakers.

Key leaders were asked what role men of the 360 United Methodist Churches in northern Illinois could play to achieve the Spiritual Congress' goal. Presenters included (in order of appearance) Mississippi Bishop James Swanson, Rev. Caleb Hong, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot, Catholic Priest, and Activist Father Michael Pflieger, Congressman Danny Davis, Aurora District Superintendent Rev. Jeffrey Bross, Illinois Attorney General Kwami Raoul, Chicago Southern District Superintendent Rev. Dr. Jacques Conway, Congressman Adam Kinzinger, Director of the UMM Center for Scouting Ministries Steven Scheid, UMM General Secretary Gilbert Hanke, NIC Bishop Sally Dyck, and Dr. Rev. Norval Brown. NIC UMM President George Groves concluded the event with an overview and his perspective on the day.

Each speaker approached the subject in a different way. In aggregate, common themes supported men engaging in programs that build trust, unify people of all races and

socio-economic backgrounds, and bring men together to advance the Christian values of love, respect, and assisting those in need. Engaging youth and younger adults in these initiatives were viewed as a priority. NIC churches are diverse in many ways, some in the most affluent communities in America with supportive congregations and others in economically challenged regions barely getting by. Speakers suggested that partnerships, sharing, mutual respect, and bridge-building are ways to raise the tide that lifts all boats.

NIC UMM Prayer Advocate Herb John, with the assistance of Craig McGregor and Eugene Williams, conducted the "Sunrise at the Point" prayer meeting beginning at 7:00 a.m. on Sunday morning. This traditional follow-up to the Spiritual Congress gave participants the opportunity to reflect on their experience from the day before and pray for the effective implementation of programs inspired by the speakers.

The Spiritual Congress was the largest, most ambitious event undertaken by the United Methodist Men in many years, proving that the pandemic need not lead to cancelled or smaller events. Though the annual Spiritual Congress is generally held at Conference Point on beautiful Lake Geneva, the lack of face-to-face interaction and camaraderie was made up for by extra-engaging presentations by highly qualified authorities in their respective fields.

Recordings of the online Spiritual Congress 2020 are available to watch at www.nicummm.org. Note that the Spiritual Congress included music from selected churches across the conference and due to licensing restrictions, this has been taken out of the recorded version of the event.

The Elgin District closely won the distinction of being the best-represented district at the event. The three top districts were Elgin (40 registrations), Chicago Southern District (39 registrations), and Aurora District (33 registrations).



Wesley UMC and Epworth UMC in Elgin merged May 31, 2020, forming Journey of Hope based out of Epworth's original church building. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the new church held its first service online and continues to offer worship on YouTube and Facebook.



A new journey begins for United Methodists in Elgin

By Diane Strzelecki, NIC Communications Specialist

Two churches in Elgin, Wesley UMC and Epworth UMC, combined congregations on May 31, 2020, and formed Journey of Hope UMC—just five months after merger talks began and despite a worldwide pandemic.

The congregations had previously explored merging with each other and other churches, but the idea of possibly giving up their buildings was difficult. Ultimately, Wesley would agree to sell its property and “move” to the Epworth building, and the two churches would combine their rich histories, local mission work and musical talents with a new vision for the future. Due to the State’s COVID-19 restrictions on in-person gatherings, Journey of Hope’s first service was held online via Facebook live.

Foundations for a merger

After former Epworth pastor Rev. Deb Percell encouraged the congregation to explore merging with another church to expand their ministry and vision, Epworth leaders attended a 2018 NIC workshop titled “New Models of Mergers and Cooperative Ministries” organized by Rev. J. Martin Lee, NIC Director of Congregational Development and Redevelopment.

“We attended thinking ‘someday’ this might be part of our future so we should go and listen,” noted Carole Burris, former Epworth Staff Parish Relations Council Chair, who describes herself as a lifetime member of the church. The workshop covered vital mergers, adoption mergers, and partnerships as well as ways to partner with another church in ministry.

In 2004, Wesley revitalized its mission when it merged with Grace UMC in Elgin. Shortly afterward, the church began nurturing a Hispanic ministry, which fit its location in the heart of Elgin and its growing Hispanic population. Wesley’s vision was to become a legacy church, eventually leaving their building and finances to the Hispanic congregation. Elgin District Superintendent Darneather Murph-Heath notes the congregation could see the handwriting on the wall. “When I came in as district superintendent six years ago, that was their story. And I resonated with that story, too,” she said.

With a Hispanic pastor at the time, dual services were very easy for Wesley, but the Hispanic congregation numbers dwindled after the pastor left due to the General Conference turmoil. Then Wesley’s October 2019 charge conference brought with it a reality check. Gary Newton, a

Wesley member for 51 years, says they learned they didn’t have enough people to fill their committees.

“At that point in time, it was like, well, we don’t have enough hands to do the job, how can we justify keeping our church?” Newton said.

Coming together

A few years after attending the NIC workshop, the ‘someday’ arrived, and Epworth leaders faced the hard reality of their financial situation. One solution: selling their church building.

“When I learned that Epworth was considering selling their property and moving into a smaller facility because the financial costs were too steep, I held out hope that there would be another way,” Lee said. “The location is one of the best that we have in our annual conference, with high visibility and easy access. I encouraged the leadership of the congregation to enter a process of discernment, and to anticipate that other possibilities existed, included working with other UM congregations.”

After Rev. Jarrod Severing was appointed to Epworth in August 2019, he listened to the congregation and encouraged them to revitalize the church right where it was.

“We started working through a couple of different things, like increasing social media presence and visioning what the church could be to multiple generations,” Severing said. “The congregation was really getting behind the mission and vision of what the church was going to be.”

Not long after, Wesley leadership officially approached Epworth about forming a new faith community together, and both congregations approved moving forward with the merger.

“We were able to get together and do some brainstorming and have some really good conversations face to face with everyone, and then all of a sudden COVID hit,” Severing said. “And then we immediately went to technology and held meetings via Zoom to work on a number of different things; mainly, the legalities of the merger, navigating the mission and the vision, as well as choosing a new name.”

The process felt different for everyone involved. “We were not initially of one mind,” Newton noted. “There was some instances of Epworth people thinking like Epworth people and Wesley people thinking like Wesley people.” Newton said although they struggled to select the new church name,

Journey of Hope, the process helped them work through the emotions of the merger.

Murph-Heath understands these emotions well. “I think people are so tied into the building and it becomes ‘my mother was buried out of this church’ or ‘my children were baptized out of this church and that’s normal, that’s natural,” she said. “But it kind of blinds us from seeing that we together we can do more.”

Lee agrees. “Growth means change, and change is a difficult process because people resist in the face of fear, the fear of losing something dear to them,” he said. “Another congregation moving into this building means that the location of precious memories, baptisms, weddings, funerals, youth group lock-ins, Christmas Eve services, has been lost. The anticipation of that relocation can be a weight.”

Newton credits Severing with bringing the churches together in more than just the merger.

“I cannot tell you how strongly we appreciate our leadership coming from Pastor Jarrod—he’s a blessing,” Newton said. “When I think about him, all I think are positives: he’s warm in his relationships, he’s a good speaker, he’s intelligent—and he understands technology, especially sending out our services via Facebook, thank goodness for that!”

Burris notes that Severing’s leadership helped them through conflict. “He talked to team members saying we have to keep in mind that Wesley is giving up their building to come to ours, and we need to make sure that they feel like they’re not just ‘moving into our house’ but that we are merging together,” she said.

“The biggest keys for us were transparency and communication,” Severing added, pointing to a monthly newsletter, weekly emails, and communication with all the ministry teams. Most of all, he talks to as many congregation members as he can, whether they stop by the office or call him on the phone. “But I think the other key is just listening,” he said.

Moving forward

The pandemic might have stalled the merger, but Severing and members of the team pressed on. “God was working through some strange circumstances in the world to kind of lock us together,” Severing said. While keeping an eye on local restrictions, the church moved to in-person worship

Continued on page 7, see Merger



Rev. Martin Lee

A glimpse at a culture of gratitude and generosity

The following is from a stewardship talk given by Martin Lee, NIC's Director of Congregational Development and Redevelopment. It gives us a glimpse into the culture of gratitude and generosity of our Korean sisters and brothers in Christ.

How many of you have ever received a card in the mail with a gift in it? What kind of occasions prompted those gifts? Maybe a birthday, a wedding, a baby, Christmas, or just to say thanks.

In the United States we give one another gifts to mark important moments in our shared life together. Sometimes we give those gifts because we are supposed to. But most often we give gifts as way to say "you are an important part of my life. And I want to honor you, thank you, or bless you with this gift."

Every few years, I bring a group of pastors to South Korea on a Vital Church Immersion Experience trip. When they experience a South Korean Methodist church, they are often confused when they see people putting their offering in not just one envelope, but several. "What are all these different colored envelopes?" they ask.

Many Korean churches have color-coded envelopes to signify different reasons for making an offering. There are normal "tithes and mission" offerings. Almost all leaders tithed. But above and beyond that, people wish to express thanks to God for the many ways God has blessed them. People give thanks for birthdays, for wedding anniversaries, in celebration for one's first paycheck, and for all sorts of celebrations.

They give when they have recovered from illness, and to show thanks for birth, death, and resurrection. There are

so many things to be thankful for, and in the Korean church culture, one way to celebrate and give thanks is by giving. It shows appreciation for the church's and for the Lord's presence in their lives.

Giving is not only a way to support your local church, but a way to show your thanks. When I was a college student in late 1970s (a poor student in a poor country at that point!), I was once so moved that I took out all the money from my wallet and put it on the offering plate in a thanksgiving envelope. It wasn't until after the service as I was heading home that I realized I didn't save any money to take the bus back. It took me an hour and fifteen minutes to walk back home!

I guess I was living by John Wesley's words of "earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can!" While it wasn't easy to walk so long home, this is one of my most precious memories of how I was moved by God to give.

What do you have to celebrate today? A birthday? An anniversary? A blessing from God? Might that blessing you celebrate move you to give to the giver of all good gifts? What might God be able to do if we thought about thanking God in this way beyond just what we are supposed to give?

Are you grateful for your church? How has your church blessed you and the community you live in? As you give to its ministry today, perhaps consider an extra gift in honor of the many blessings of God in your life. You don't have to put in a special envelope, but you could make a note that it is given in honor of a birthday, anniversary, or simply in honor of the love of God in your life.

At least while worshipping at home, you won't have to worry you give so much you won't have bus money to get back! Amen.



Thank you all for your prayers and support through this interesting summer and fall. Even though we furloughed all employees at the end of May, we all hung around as volunteers and accomplished a bit of ministry this summer. Praise the Lord for such a dedicated team.

REYNOLDSWOOD

While the Illinois governor never allowed overnight camps to open, John Rocke and Craig Watters continued our partnership with the Dixon YMCA to provide Day Camp through August, and we converted the fall after-school CRICKET program into a fall day camp to complement the local schools every-other-day schedule, through October.

Jason Kloeping and Pastors Wes Dickson and Tim Mitchell hosted a virtual JOY Camp so that campers all had the opportunity to renew friendships and study God's word through song, discussion and crafts via Zoom video.

WESLEY WOODS

The Wisconsin governor allowed residential camps to open to self-contained family groups in July.

Dave Cooper, Jeff Hoxie, Kathy Utash-Ostrander and I hosted a COVID-compliant version of the annual Wesley Woods Family Camp during the first week of July. Several self-contained families also took weekend and week-long retreats during July and August. While Monte de Sinai Church could not come as a church, several of their families booked self-contained weekends to get away and enjoy God's beautiful outdoors.

Wesley Woods was also allowed to host non-family groups, up to 50% occupancy, beginning in August. Emmanuel UMC and Holy Trinity Evangelical Church took advantage of this window of opportunity. (Holy Trinity annually hosts an outdoor worship and picnic with a baptism in Geneva Lake. Too much fun!)

MOVING FORWARD

All of our regular groups that were forced to cancel this year have rebooked for 2021!

Staff at both camps took advantage of the lessened traffic to make repairs to grounds, facilities and equipment that are not normally accessible due to our 24/7 rental schedule.

While camp income was down from about \$650,000 to about \$110,000 for 2020, we think we will break even with our cuts and furloughs.

We are putting together a list of the infrastructure projects and equipment that were deferred because of the forced COVID-19 pandemic closures. We will share this list in early November for any that are interested and able to assist us, but we do not want you to support us at the expense of your local church. Contact us at exec@niccamp.org.

Blessings, peace and health.

~Jeff Casey, Dir. of Outdoor and Retreat Ministries



Merger (continued from page 6)

in July 2020 while maintaining online services. To help the new congregation stay connected, Severing developed a midweek online worship service and online weekly devotions.

On August 30, Wesley held a decommissioning service for their church building to provide closure for the former Wesley congregation. "Rev. Darneather was able to participate and I preached on "This is Not the End," Severing said. "Unfortunately, they were unable to have a celebration meal as they planned, but the service was good."

Journey of Hope is also creating a space to honor the history of Grace, Wesley and Epworth, churches that date back to the late 1800s. Newton heads a committee formed at the suggestion of Rev. Murph-Heath to fill a room with photos, documents and artifacts commemorating the churches, and he thinks it's likely that a framed 10- by 2.5-foot stained glass piece with the word "Grace" at the center will be prominent in the space. Newton's involvement in

this and other Journey of Hope committees and small groups has helped him get to know people from Epworth better. "I'm feeling pretty good about the merger right now," he said.

The new congregation has a lot to look forward to once pandemic restrictions on gatherings are lifted, especially in music. They are restoring a set of bell chimes from Wesley so they will ring true and clear in the hands of Journey of Hope musicians. Newton anticipates a combined adult choir of nearly 40 voices, and musicians sharing their talents weekly. But most of all, he looks forward to a day where they can all worship together and shake hands or embrace.

"Touching elbows doesn't get the job done, you know?" Newton said. "I guess that's part of my hope; that we'll get beyond COVID and we'll be able to show each other our love."

Burriss is ready for the future as well. "Pastor Jarrod has

been sharing through his messages a lot about helping people understand that the church is not about ourselves—it's being in ministry to those who don't have Christ in their lives yet," she said. "I think truly in our hearts we understand that this is where we're being called to be in ministry."

Martin Lee recognizes this call. "I thank God for the clergy and lay leadership who have been essential in this merger process," Lee said. "It is now time to focus on the people outside of these four walls."

"This is a journey of hope—we're going to keep moving forward with the idea of hope, so I believe this is a positive merger," Murph-Heath said. "You can love somebody from the past and still fall in love again."

Journey of Hope worships Sundays at 9:15 a.m. Visit johumc.org for more information.



DYK???

Breathe

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

I have a smartwatch. I like it. I can check the weather, look at a text, answer the phone, record my activities, and check my calendar, all from a little device on my wrist. Sometimes, I am left

to wonder just how smart that watch is? Lately, when I least expect it, my watch vibrates and flashes the message “breathe.”

The first few times I thought it was a nice message. Now I stop and wonder – was I holding my breath and didn’t even know it? Did my watch sense something I wasn’t aware of? Is it programmed to flash a “breathe” reminder every now and then, no matter what I’m doing? Do I sometimes stop breathing?

Breathing is an autonomic function usually done without any thought or effort. It’s something we take for granted. Without it, we would pass out or even worse. These days we would all benefit from a reminder to breathe. As we move into the next spike of the pandemic and realize that the hope of returning to normal, yet this year, is fading. It’s easy to sink so low into the fog of our circumstances that we forget to do what is second nature to us, breathe.

Breathing brings oxygen into our bloodstream, expands

our lungs, promotes healing, alleviates pain, keeps us alive, calms the mind and centers our spirit. Meditation, exercise, and mindfulness practices all help us breathe slower and more deeply. One of our conference staff, Director of Benefits and Human Services, Woody Bedell, is an expert in HeartMath, a system that teaches mindful breathing, promoting healthy heart rhythms that enhance our wellbeing. (You can learn more about HeartMath at store.heartmath.com/heartmath-experience).

Stop reading. Take a slow deep breath, fill your lungs with oxygen, and then slowly exhale.

This reminder is more important as we move ever closer to our virtual Annual Conference Session. Something we have never done before. Our Annual Conference Session, like every aspect of our living and the work in the church, is a feat of adaptation. Overall as an organization, churches are not known for rapid change. We often joke about the seven last words of the church: “We’ve never done it that way before.” Those words have allowed us to cling to old ways in a new world. Now as “keepers of tradition” and “resisters of change” everything about our traditions and routine are changed! Breathe!

This pace of change is exhausting. As I Zoom from

meeting to meeting with clergy and laity alike, one of the most common themes shared is that of exhaustion. Doing things differently takes more thought and new actions. In the midst of that exhaustion, we need a reminder to breathe. Breathe in the spirit of God, sink into God’s arms of prayer, reflect on how far we have come, celebrate how much we have adapted, know that even as the challenges continue we are not alone. Breathe in the “ruah,” the Hebrew word for the breath of God, and feel the grace of God giving us peace and courage.

Breathe is my “watch” word as I work with a great staff all rising to the challenge of this year’s unique annual conference. I am grateful for Anne Marie Gerhardt (Director of Communications), Diane Strzelecki (Communications Specialist) and Laura Lopez (Events Coordinator). I am grateful for a visionary, flexible bishop, and a supportive annual conference committee. I will be doing a lot of deep breathing these next few weeks!

None of us have done it this way before. We are all learning on the fly, adapting in the moment. I understand (I experience) the exhaustion, but I also celebrate the grace of God that gives us the courage and the strength to keep moving on. Breathe.

SAVE THE DATE — FEBRUARY 13, 2021



The Other Side
Explore the possibilities of church in a post-pandemic world

LAITY CONVOCATION
Via Zoom video conferencing

Northern Illinois Conference
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

November/December Calendar Items

Perkins Fall Convocation 2020: Leading into Change

Nov. 15-17

Cost: Full Conference \$85 | Sunday Night Only \$15
0.8 CEU available for Full Conference attendance, \$15 additional upon registration

Sharpen your skills, deepen your faith and nurture your soul at this virtual conference from Perkins Office of External Programs.

Register at smu.edu/Perkins/PublicPrograms/Perkins-Fall-Convocation.

“Dismantling Racism” Panel Discussion

November 18, 12 p.m. CDT

“The Doctrine of Discovery” with the General Commission on Religion and Race.

Around the connection, United Methodists are gathering online and in person to do the difficult work of dismantling racism. Join this important conversation online at UMC.org/EndRacism or [Facebook.com/unitedmethodistchurch](https://www.facebook.com/unitedmethodistchurch).

United Methodist Student Day

Nov. 29

In 2019, United Methodists gave \$370,123 towards the ministries funded by the UM Student Day Sunday offering – the United Methodist Student Loan and Scholarship program. This offering, combined with income from endowments, provided more than 70 scholarships available for thousands of UM students to further their education and enrich the life of the Church.

Visit umcsgiving.org for resources.

Online Campus Ministry Webinar

Dec. 16, 10 a.m. - noon

Speaker: Pastor Tony Arnold, Christ Church Online Campus, Virginia Conference.

The NIC Office of Congregational Development and Redevelopment is offering an “Online Campus” ministry webinar.

For registration and more information, visit umcnic.org/calendar/online-campus.



umcnic.org/prayernetwork

NIC Prayer Network needs your prayers

Weekly calendar with devotions, prayer tools, and much more!

Northern Illinois Conference
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

NIC Prayer Network needs your prayers

By Karen Bonnell and Rev Caleb Hong, Co-Chairs of Discipleship Task Force

What word has God spoken to you lately? What scripture have you read recently that has warmed your hearts? Would you encourage others by sharing that? Is God nudging you?

The Discipleship Task Force invites both clergy and laity to write short devotions (250 words). Include a Bible verse and a prayer. This should all fit on one page. Remember, laity, Methodism grew and was strong when the laity took responsibility in ministry.

We have been praying for you that in God’s presence you would experience the fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11).

Be a blessing. Share what God has given to you. Please send your devotions to DiscipleshipTF@umcnic.org.

Pray over the weekly devotions at umcnic.org/prayernetwork.

Job Openings

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

Stay Connected

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

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

How to Contact Us

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

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