

The Northern Illinois Conference OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH Reporter

NON-PROFIT
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #583
Schaumburg, IL 60173

September/October 2024

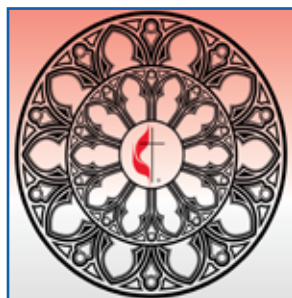
Volume 24 | Issue 5

umcnic.org

Postmaster:
Send address changes to:
303 E. Wacker Dr., Suite 2020,
Chicago, IL 60601

Key:  Supported by Apportionment dollars  Supported by Mission Links dollars | Learn more about Apportionment & Mission Links dollars at umcnic.org/apportionments and umcnic.org/misionlinks

In This Issue:



3 NCJ Recap



4-5 Summer Activity
Rundown



6 SCD Hospitality Provided



8 Divine Giving

DO NOT DELAY. DATED MATERIAL

Creatively connecting over the summer

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

Once school lets out and the weather gets warmer, many churches experience a noticeable dip in attendance. It happens every year as schedules get filled up with vacations, sporting events, outdoor activities, and family commitments.

Vacation Bible Schools, mission trips, and camps have often been ways for churches to stay connected to the children and youth in their communities. Even these regular summer standbys have seen a decrease in attendance. Many Northern Illinois churches are getting creative with their approach, finding new ways to engage their congregations and keep the community spirit alive.

Discerning something different

Community UMC in Naperville spent the better part of the year brainstorming how they might offer a meaningful summer opportunity for kids in grades Kindergarten through 8th grade. After a discernment process, they felt led to offer a Creative Arts Camp in place of the traditional Vacation Bible School this year. Placing a high priority on the gifts and graces of their church members, they focused on sharing about God through the craft of theater. A part of the DNA at CUMC is a community theater group named Community Players that produces 2-3 plays a year.



Community UMC in Naperville's Creative Arts Camp brought God's love to life through theater.

"The church felt God leading us to teach and share this art with the next generation," said Pastor Jacob Tipantasig-Wolverton. "Through the music, arts, crafts, and storytelling, kids are able to learn about the BIG LOVE that Jesus offers to everyone!"

The camp ended with a performance of *Tell Me The Truth: A Groovy Game Show Musical*. Campers were also invited to share selections from the show at service on Sunday.



The Galena UMC team brought VBS back to life, connecting with local children through community outreach.

VBS with little to no children

In Galena, attendance at the ecumenical VBS was falling. In the spring of 2023, Rev. Jin-Hee Kang, the pastor at Galena UMC, was determined to reach out to the community children. In conjunction with the United Churches of Galena (UCG), they made plans and sent

out over 300 flyers through the local primary school. Only a handful showed up, but it was more than what they had before.

After VBS, GUMC retained five children and retired pastor Rev. Patricia Allen-Stewart restarted Sunday School. This year, with the support of the UCG, they advertised the VBS through flyers, Facebook, and the local newspaper. Attendance doubled, and more children were enrolled in Sunday School.

The Jo Daviess County Transit is also an essential part of success. The church worked with them to transport the children (and their families) to Galena UMC every Sunday. "By all means, it would have made sense not to try and host VBS without any children of our own. But if we hadn't taken that first step, none of this growth would have been possible," said Rev. Kang. "Reach out to your community, find them, and invite them."



Combining camps

For 20 years, First UMC of Downers Grove has been hosting a week-long church camp at Wesley Woods Retreat Center. First UMC of Evanston has also been running a similar camp. Following the pandemic, they joined together for camp, enjoying each other's company. They have leaned into connectionalism and opened the offer to other UMC congregations in the area, including Hinsdale UMC, Bolingbrook: Friendship UMC, and Lombard: First UMC. Over 110 campers and volunteers joined together for Bible study, camp activities, and community.

"For many years, the camp was attended by members of our church along with their friends," said John Smoke, Deacon at First UMC in Downers Grove. "In the years coming up, we look forward to welcoming more churches to join together for our summer church camp at Wesley Woods."

continued on page 5, see Summer



From Your Bishop:

Resisting injustice through grace and love

There is therefore, neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free... - Galatians 3:28

'Racism is incompatible with Christian teaching.' 'We are God's daring alternative to fear and hate.' 'We walk the path of vulnerable love with the help of vulnerable love.' 'United Methodists have an expansive view of grace.' 'Beloved community is the only framework that can heal us.' I have been saying these things in my videos and in pulpits, and now to you in writing.

Unfortunately, I just got off the phone with another pastor experiencing the impact of racism in her community. I believe people have been emboldened by talk of mass deportation, removing birthright citizenship, and those peddling White Christian Nationalism. I could be wrong about that. I am also concerned this will only worsen in the current environment.

I am grateful our churches and clergy are challenging systems and partnering with

authorities to make communities more clearly anti-racist. I am so grateful for our local leaders and Staff Parish Relations Committees. That said, can you reach out to

those in cross racial appointments with a call or note? Can we teach and lead and make our solidarity clear? Can we speak of our appreciation to our brothers and sisters across race and culture and let our appreciation for our common witness be known? Can we attend to the upbuilding power of the means of grace? Can we, as Wesley dreamed it, grow in love?

I am so grateful for our Northern Illinois Conference efforts to share table, continue anti-racist programming, and support clergy leaders in cross-racial appointments. Yet, I am saddened that our national tone and local temperament is harming our clergy and their families.



Some say Galatians 3:28 is early creedal material. Some say it is from an early baptismal liturgy. Whatever the source, resisting injustice is done by the power and love we know as Christ, and our strength is renewed by our baptism. The water never dries on our baptism. It is new every day. God's love for us is refreshed, and God's love for neighbor is renewed. May we offer more grace and more love in light of the tone in our days?

It is so good to be in ministry with you.

Your giving to General Church apportionments support the Episcopal Office.



Work needed to fulfill our commitment

by Rev. Seamus Enright, past NIC CCFA member

I remember how when I first heard that a group of United Methodists had come together to work on how the church could support those who had suffered abuse in the Boy Scouts, I was so grateful. I was glad to be a part of a church that wasn't waiting but recognized our calling and obligation to pursue healing in the face of a breach of trust.

Recognizing that abuse imposes not just emotional, psychic, and social costs, but real material costs on those who endure it, The United Methodist Church collectively committed 30 million dollars to caring for survivors, meeting their needs, and helping them toward healing and wholeness.

The Northern Illinois Conference (NIC) campaign was launched called "Repair the Harm to Children," based on Isaiah 58:10-14. This stems from an agreement that centers the survivors, with concrete steps for preventing future harm and providing for their care. When we launched in 2023, we understood that the NIC share was \$754,348. We asked for pledges from every congregation, whether you chartered or hosted a Boy Scout Troop or not, for your commitment to repairing harm. The suggestion for congregations was 1% of the annual church budget, payable over three years.

In my June update to the Annual Conference, I reported that at the beginning of 2024,

we discovered that our share, corrected to \$742,429, was due "now." We can rejoice that the United Methodist Church has fully funded its financial commitment to the survivors even as we continue to live into our work of listening, healing, and protecting.

Convinced that our Conference would meet this need, funds were advanced to cover our commitment. There is no interest, but the advanced funds MUST be repaid. As of June 15, 2024, we have pledges and receipts which, confident of your faithfulness, would bring us to \$301,987.44, leaving \$440,441.56 to raise.

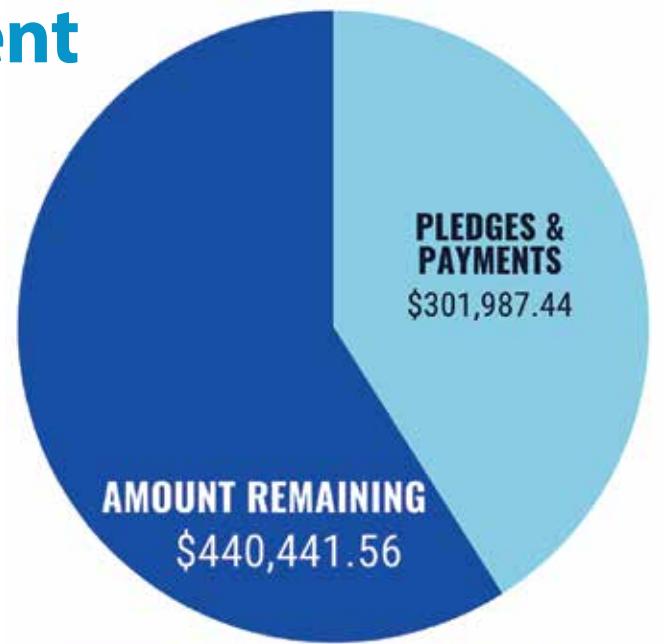
We have pledges from fewer than one-seventh of our churches, but we are over two-sevenths of the way to our goal.

WE CAN DO THIS.

Beloved, I ask again for your commitment:

- First, remember the children and pray.
- Consider, "What would you give to help the wounded heal?"
- Then, commit. Make your pledge.

If you can't pledge or give right now, commit now to making sure your congregation has pledged, has given, or will have the conversation about being part of repairing this harm.



Commit now, for the sake of children, past, present, and future, to the conversation of how much and how soon can we give? If you're able to meet your pledge early, please do so. Pledges and online payments can be made at umcnic.org/repairtheharm/pay.

Finally, commit to ensuring that your church follows the best practices to keep children and other vulnerable community members safe. If you're not sure where to start, visit the Safe Sanctuaries page at umcnic.org/safesantuaries.

May God bless your faithfulness.



The Northern Illinois Reporter is printed 6 times year by the Northern Illinois Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. Original material is copyright © Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Resident Bishop
Director of Communications
Communications Specialist

Dan Schwerin
Victoria Rebeck
Lisa Smith

How to Contact Us

For editorial content, subscriptions and address changes:
The Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church
303 E. Wacker Drive, Suite 2020, Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 346-9766 umcnic.org
communications@umcnic.org

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

Deadlines for submissions Feb. 5, April 5, June 5, Aug. 5, Oct. 5, and Dec. 5. Include your name, address, email, phone number and name of local church. Space is limited. Electronic submissions are preferred with high-resolution attached jpegs. Submissions will be edited at the discretion of the Communications staff.

Job Openings

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

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports this publication.



Bishop Dan Schwerin assigned to Northern Illinois-Wisconsin Episcopal Area Sept. 1

by Victoria Rebeck, director of communications for the Northern Illinois Conference, and Lisa Wink, director of communications for the Wisconsin Conference.

The North Central Jurisdictional Conference of The United Methodist Church, meeting July 10-13 in Sioux Falls, S.D., celebrated the assignment of Bishop Dan Schwerin to the Northern Illinois-Wisconsin Episcopal Area, effective Sept. 1, 2024.

The NCJ Committee on Episcopacy, which determines the bishops' assignments, announced them on July 13.

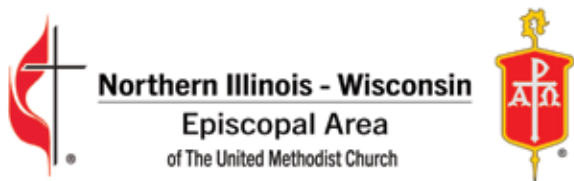
"We are excited to welcome Bishop Dan Schwerin back to Wisconsin; this time as our bishop!" said Jessica Gobel, chair of the Wisconsin delegation. "The Wisconsin Conference is looking forward to experiencing all the blessings and gifts that Dan has to offer and beginning our partnership with Northern Illinois as a shared episcopal area. Please join our delegation in welcoming Bishop Dan to Wisconsin."

"I am delighted that Bishop Dan Schwerin is returning to Northern Illinois," said Rev. Alka Lyall, chair of the Northern Illinois delegation for this year's United Methodist General Conference and the NCJ conference. "We have begun some good work in our conference, a spirit of trust is being felt, and we can now build onto momentum. I invite us to partner with him and grow the beloved communities in our conference."

"The Wisconsin Conference has enjoyed so many gifted and impactful episcopal leaders," said Bishop Schwerin. "Julie and I feel humbled and blessed to be assigned to serve among you, now assigned as one bishop shared by two conferences as the Northern Illinois-Wisconsin Episcopal area."

"Julie and I have been blessed by the kindness we have received by the Northern Illinois Conference," added Bishop Schwerin. "We have been blessed with eighteen impactful months in ministry. Now we have the chance to experiment and innovate with two conferences sharing one bishop."

I can't wait to see what God will do through us."



Bishop Schwerin preached during the Retirement Service for Bishop Julius Trimble and Bishop Gregory Palmer.

North Central Jurisdictional Conference highlighted Wesleyan spiritual growth

by Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

Assignments of bishops and learning opportunities were the focus of the North Central Jurisdictional Conference of The United Methodist Church, which met July 10-13 in Sioux Falls, S.D.

Usually, the election of bishops is the primary activity at jurisdictional conferences, which take place during the July following each denominational General Conference.

However, given the significant reduction in apportionment receipts, General Conference delegates found they had to pass a much smaller budget. This meant that like all the denominational funds experienced deep cuts. The church's Episcopal Fund—which covers bishops' salaries, housing, office and travel expenses, pensions, and health insurance—is no longer able to support as many bishops as it has in the previous two quadrennia (2016-2024).

Therefore, the NCJ affirmed the assignment of some bishops to more than one annual conference, while observing the retirement of two bishops and learning that another (Bishop Frank Beard) would be taking a long-term disability leave.

These episcopal assignments are effective Sept. 1:

- **Dakotas-Minnesota Episcopal Area** (Dakotas Conference and Minnesota Conference): Bishop Lynette Plambeck
- **Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference:** Bishop David Bard and Bishop Kennetha Bigham-Tsai
- **Indiana Annual Conference:** Bishop Tracy S. Malone
- **Iowa Annual Conference:** Bishop Kennetha Bigham-Tsai
- **Michigan Annual Conference:** Bishop David Bard
- **Northern Illinois-Wisconsin Episcopal Area** (Northern Illinois Conference and Wisconsin Conference): Bishop Dan Schwerin
- **The Ohio Episcopal Area** (East Ohio Conference and West Ohio Conference): Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

Bishop Schwerin lauded the ministries of two retiring bishops, Bishop Julius Trimble and Bishop Gregory Palmer, during a service on July 12. He said that what he most appreciates about them—besides their tireless passion for helping the church—is their courage.

"Your leadership has been courageous," Bishop Schwerin said. "It encouraged the church to be courageous. It takes courage to imagine the abundance out of which God calls us. It takes courage to get up the next day and imagine the abundance that God will work through us."

While they will no longer oversee episcopal areas, the bishops will transition into two new areas of leadership. Bishop Trimble became general secretary of the UM General Board of Church and Society on Sept. 1. Bishop Palmer will become secretary to the Council of Bishops.

Because delegates did not need to elect new bishops, they were able to spend more time learning together.

During their midday meal, delegates met for "lunch-and-learn" sessions on practical topics: clergy well-being, community development

and ministry, innovation in ministry, interpreting the regionalization plan awaiting ratification by all UMC annual conferences' session members, and an overview of Dakota Wesleyan University's Practical Church Leadership graduate certificate for clergy.

Rev. Dr. Paul Chilcote, a Wesley scholar and prolific author on the min-

istries of John and Charles Wesley as well as leading Methodist women, led three sessions. In his first presentation, Chilcote focused on practical theology in the Wesleyan tradition, specifically addressing how to teach the concept of love as central to United Methodist discipleship. He urged delegates to think of love as a verb, demonstrated through action and relationship, rather than an abstract idea.

In the second, he addressed the importance of spiritual practices in the Wesleyan tradition. The key spiritual practices are interconnected, he says: prayer (as the foundation), scriptural engagement, Christian fellowship, and the Eucharist as nourishment for mission. He emphasized that these practices are not solely inward-focused but

shape believers into loving individuals who serve the world. In the final session, he emphasized the importance of compassion, justice, and living out the *missio dei* (mission of God) as Wesleyan Christians.

Video recordings of the sessions can be found at vimeopro.com/dakotasumc/ncj2024-videos. The Chilcote presentations are particularly engaging for adult faith-formation groups.



Attendees, including Bishop Dan and Julie Schwerin, attached hearts with written ways to love others onto a wire cross during the Friday morning devotion.



Rita L. Smith, one of NIC's Lay Delegates, leading opening worship on Wednesday.

Your giving to General Church apportionments supports North Central Jurisdictional Conference and Episcopal assignments.



Bringing summer joy and learning with VBS

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

Vacation Bible Schools programs are fond memories in many hearts. Churches across the Northern Illinois Conference offered vibrant and enriching experiences this summer.

“Camp Firelight,” a Cokesbury program, was a favorite of many in the conference this year. It focuses on creating a fun and engaging camp experience where kids explore God’s love through nature, adventure, and community activities. The theme emphasizes a sense of belonging and connection. The team at Grace UMC in Naperville extended the theme into the next 5 weeks with a sermon series called “Campfire Stories.” Other popular themes were the “SCUBA” and “Stellar” programs from Group Publishing.

Many churches also created their own themes. Apple River UMC is blessed to have a retired teacher creating their programs with “Loving God, Loving Others and Loving Ourselves” as this year’s theme. In their second year, First UMC of Morris’s Art Camp created projects based around God’s creative power. Guest readers were brought in by Faith UMC in Freeport’s “Fruit of the Spirit” Day Camp, who also made Kindness bags to give out to the community.



A llama was one off the many farm animals that joined the VBS fun at Grace UMC in Rockford.

Creativity was also showcased in breaking from traditional weekday or morning camps. Many camps were hosted at night to offer options for parents who work, or kids who were busy with other activities during the day. Grace UMC in Dixon started a Carnival themed Vacation Bible (Sunday) School hosted over 8 weeks on Sundays, in addition to a traditional 3-day camp. “Art and Soul” camp in Aurora at Wesley UMC, met at night with dinner and had kids making over 100 sandwiches for the community fridge. Gary UMC in Wheaton hosted both a traditional VBS for younger children and a BLAST camp for middle-schoolers to work on fostering connection.

From collecting food pantry items to supporting clean water initiatives in Honduras, each VBS fostered a spirit of giving and connection.



Campers had a wild time at Kingswood UMC.

Gary UMC in Wheaton and Kingswood UMC in Buffalo Grove/Deerfield encouraged

giving by offering up the faces of their counselors to get pied. Camp scholarship money was collected at Erie UMC for Fellowship of Christian Athletes and at First UMC in Savanna for Camp Benson.

Nine-hundred and two items were collected for Carrie Lynn’s Center, a local organization that helps children who have experienced abuse, by Christ UMC in Rockford. Over 300 children were helped with money raised by Cary UMC collected for Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). A farm theme at Grace UMC in Rockford, complete with a llama in the sanctuary, helped raise money for 17 goats for families in Tanzania.

The United Methodist Church of New Lenox collected over \$800. They then purchased items for Personal Dignity kits that were assembled later by the whole church for Midwest Missions. Midwest Missions was also the recipient of over \$600 from the “Heavy Offering” contest at Plainfield UMC.

Many VBS weeks culminate in joyful celebrations, reinforcing faith and creating lasting memories for all participants. The campers at Community UMC in Naperville’s arts camp provided the community with a performance. Wesley UMC in Sterling’s week culminated in a joyous cookout. A friends and family program was the final event of



Counselors got pied in the face at Gary UMC in Wheaton after the campers raised over \$850 for clean water in Honduras.

the week at Scales Mound UMC and First UMC in Belvidere.

Programs like the ones mentioned here and other VBS programs across the conference successfully brought children and families together for memorable activities, spiritual growth, and community building. Read more of the stories and view many photos of VBS programs celebrated in our conference at umcnic.org/news/bringing-summer-joy-and-learning-with-vbs.



Campers from First UMC in Morris’s Art Camp share their master pieces.

Building faith & friendship at camp

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

Church camps offer a mix of outdoor adventures and spiritual growth, creating cherished memories and deepening faith. Beyond the fun, these camps are where many Northern Illinois United Methodists experience profound spiritual moments—feeling God’s presence on a morning hike, learning about Jesus during devotions, or sensing the Holy Spirit around the campfire.

Building Lifelong Bonds

J.O.Y. Camp has grown to be a second family for almost all who attend.

J.O.Y. Camp is a United Methodist camp that was founded by NIC pastors first as “Shalom Camp” in the 1980’s. Hosted at Camp Reynoldswood in Dixon, it teaches the campers ways to engage their faith, rotating through three themes: Jesus, Others and You. Going strong for the last few decades, the

camp has touched hundreds of lives and has developed a safe place for campers to be themselves and experience the love of God. Two years ago, a change in leadership was taken on by two previous campers and one additional director. They felt called to serve because of the impact they had seen in their lives and in the lives of others while attending the camp.

J.O.Y. Camp 2024 was a week filled with lessons about how Christians are called to constantly seek out and care for “Others”. Campers used this year’s theme song “Give Me Your Eyes” by Brandon Heath to identify who

(continued on page 5)



J.O.Y. Campers enjoying a fun game.

Involving Everyone

Grace UMC in Naperville found a way to involve more than just those that served on their mission trip. The 22-member Grace UMC group was joined by three from the United Methodist Church of Antioch. They traveled to serve with Habitat for Humanity, the Church of the Resurrection (Leawood), and the city of Lawrence, Kansas.

Participants shared morning devotions, worked together, ate together, played silly games, spent time in prayer partner/Connect groups, and worshipped. This multi-generational group included adults, college students, and youth who had completed 8th grade through high school. But their group was not just those physically on the trip.

"Approximately 200-250 people were involved in our mission trip in one way or another," said Gaye Lynn Loufek, Director of Youth Ministries at Grace UMC. "We had 25 from our congregation who served as "at home" prayer partners, 125 individuals who were shareholders and provided monetary or in-kind support, and a planning team of folks who helped prepare for the trip."

While the summer months often bring challenges, they also open doors for meaningful connections. Whether it's through innovative camps, community partnerships, or mission trips that involve everyone, these efforts remind us that when we adapt and engage with the heart of Christ, we can make a lasting impact.



Workers from Grace UMC in Naperville worked with those in Lawrence, KY, but were also supported by prayers and actions of their congregation back home.

Mission trips extend our reach

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

Communities in our neighborhoods, in other states, and abroad are finding relief as volunteers from Northern Illinois serve on mission trips. Both youth and adult volunteers are engaging in meaningful service, fostering community and personal growth.

Serving with the Appalachia Service Project is a tradition in many churches, some in our conference have even participated for over 40 years. ASP mission trips involve volunteers traveling to the Appalachian region to assist with home repair and improvement projects for low-income families. This year, First UMC in Arlington Heights, First UMC in La Grange, First UMC in Morris, Grace UMC in Joliet, Geneva UMC and Kingswood UMC (Buffalo Grove and Deerfield) were a few of the churches that engaged in hands-on work with ASP across the region. Grace UMC in Dixon was also working in the region, partnering with Red Bird Mission in Kentucky.

Being the hands and feet of Christ helping with indigenous organizations was also a missional focus. Workers from Oregon UMC and Gary UMC in Wheaton were in South Dakota at the Lake Traverse Reservation, home to the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate. Tree of Life Mission, also in South Dakota hosted Barrington UMC as well as Steve Meister of Grace UMC in Joliet. The team from Journey of Hope in Elgin and Bartlett worked on a library project and taught VBS at Spirit Lake Ministry Center in North Dakota. In addition to serving, the teams learn from and immerse themselves in the culture of the people they serve.

Several churches focused their service in the Midwest. First UMC of

Downers Grove joined forces with North Street Mission in Wooster, Ohio, where they served breakfast, tended gardens, and helped with community projects. Meanwhile, Community UMC of Naperville and Our Saviour's UMC in Schaumburg both traveled to Detroit, Michigan, working with Motown Mission and Cass Community Social Services, respectively, on community development and disaster recovery. The Plainfield UMC youth contributed by partnering with Covered Bridge Ministries in Jefferson, Ohio.



Each morning workers from First UMC in Downers Grove packed breakfast for the community in Wooster, Ohio.

The NIC's mission reach also went global. Roscoe UMC's mission trip took 14 youth and 6 adults to Dublin, Ireland to work with a local community center, St. Michans that is keeping local kids out of the gangs and in school.

Some churches focused their mission work right in their own communities. Wesley UMC in Sterling joined in a day of volunteering with Habitat for Humanity in Dixon. In Rockford, Christ UMC collaborated with Centennial UMC, for a workcamp that successfully completed 13 projects across 10 worksites with those in need in the Rockford area.

These trips allow participants to address tangible needs, such as home repairs and community support, while also building relationships and understanding across different cultures and backgrounds. Read more about mission trips at umcnic.org/news/summer-mission-trips-serving-communities-in-need.



Counselors and campers displaying the J.O.Y. Camp scripture.



Families enjoyed canoes during the Family Day Camp at Camp Reynoldswood.

(continued from page 4)

the "Others" are in their lives to show love and share the gospel with. To continue the theme of "Others", many of the arts and crafts projects completed by campers were donated to nursing homes, hospital patients, and shut-ins of churches around the conference. View the 2024 closing video to capture the essence of Camp at umcnic.org/news/building-faith-and-friendship-at-camp.

Planning is already underway for the Second Annual J.O.Y. Camp Winter Weekend. Dates are still being finalized but the event will stretch from a Friday afternoon to Sunday afternoon in December or early January. It is open to campers who previously attended and to new

campers. Information will be shared once it is available at umcnic.org/calendar.

Life-changing work happens at J.O.Y. Camp, and it would not have been possible without the support of congregations within the Northern Illinois Conference. If individuals or congregations would like to assist financially or with future service projects, please contact volunteer@joycamp.org.

Joining together

Hosting a camp for your church can be difficult, but local churches are finding that joining together is not only a way to share the load, but also a way to foster connection. Rockford churches, Christ UMC and Beth Eden UMC, joined their

children and family ministries together for Family Day Camp. They journeyed to Camp Reynoldswood in Dixon for fun, sun and connection.

For countless attendees, camps have been pivotal in shaping their spiritual journeys and lifelong faith. Both Camp Reynoldswood and Wesley Woods are available for churches to host their church camps over the summer and with limited capacity for winter options. Reach out to Jeff Casey, Director of Outdoor & Retreat Ministries at jeffcasey@niccamp.org or (262) 245-6706 for more information.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports creative ministry and rural grants, camps, VIM, and more that help churches work creatively and reach out to their community and beyond.





by Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer,
NIC Director of Connectional Ministries

August and September are “Back to School” months. As a mom of pre-teens, I diligently prepared everything they needed to be ready for their

first day of school: I checked their clothes and shoes, bought school supplies, and checked their books. I went with them to the “meet and greet” the teacher because I wanted to see the space where they would be for the next school year. I experienced the dedication and preparation that teachers, administrators, and school staff invested in order to offer a safe and hospitable environment for the children.

This is also a season when many churches return to children’s and youth programs such as Sunday School, Youth Groups, Messy Church, Parent’s Night Out, Childcare, etc. I believe this is a good time to stop and think about the safe space we are offering to our children and youth in our churches.

As a church, we are responsible for caring for our little ones. We are called to take responsibility, set the tone, learn from the painful lessons of the past, and ensure a better experience for future generations.

The term Safe Sanctuaries became familiar to United Methodists in the early 2000s with the publication of a guidebook from Discipleship Ministries by Joy Thornburg Melton. Ten years earlier United Methodists were already working on the prevention of child abuse in the church through a variety of resources and educational events.

All clergy and volunteers who work with children and youth in the church, in the community, in a music or sports program, or in any setting should be trained in Safe Sanctuary, a certification that lasts three years. We have made good progress in training our clergy and volunteers at our conference, but we still need more people to be trained.

If you have not been trained or if your church does not have a Safe Sanctuaries Policy or if it is time to update the one you have, please take action immediately. Visit our website at umcnic.org/safesanctuaries and click on the link for Safe Gatherings to find resources and a self-guided online course you can take at any time to equip yourself to be an even better guardian of our future. If you

want to have in-person training, please contact me. We can deploy trainers to your congregation, cluster, or district.

Children and Youth are a treasure for us, and we need to take care of them with dedication, passion, and love, so let’s continue to create a safe sanctuary for them and the generations to come.

Please take the time to assess the situation in your congregation regarding Safe Sanctuary. If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to contact the Office of Connectional Ministries.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports Safe Sanctuaries and Safe Gatherings trainings.



Achieving top commitment

148 churches in the Northern Illinois Conference have met the highest level of commitment to provide safe spaces for worship! To receive this recognition, an organization must have at least four percent of average weekly attendance trained. In addition, churches must have at least 3 people trained, and this applies to the smallest churches. View the list of churches at umcnic.org/news/stronger-together-creating-a-safe-sanctuary.

Radical hospitality provided to the SCD participants

by Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer,
NIC Director of Connectional Ministries

The first week in August was a powerful week for our United Methodist connection. The School of Congregational Development, organized by Discipleship Ministries, returned after several years as SCD (SEE CREATE DISCIPLE) and we, as Northern Illinois Conference, had the honor to host it in Schaumburg. More than 450 participants attended this event, which provided exceptional learning and networking experiences for church leaders including inspiration and empowerment as we move forward in our mission to make discipleship of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Several workshops were offered to provide practical tools, processes, and frameworks for discipleship formation. Attendees also had the chance to dive into disciple-making with hands-on, practical insights from episcopal leaders, ministry cultivators, and practitioners across the world-wide connection.

Our Bishop, Dan Schwerin, was the preacher at the Opening Worship. He used the text from the Road to Emmaus and affirmed that the road to transformation is a strange road, but the strange road is our home. He affirmed that the way of discipleship is a path of vulnerable love and, from Ephesians 4:15, that we walk this truth on the path of love. He told stories from his own work as a planter and asked us to look again at our metrics so that we see our work as transformational. “I believe we have a fundamental decision today, to get on the road

of transformation, to risk and work out new hope, to get on a strange road and walk until we all arrive at an Emmaus newness. Until we arrive at the table of love,” said Bishop Schwerin. “Decide to risk. Decide to experiment. Decide to have each other’s backs.”

Rev. Bener Agtarap, Executive Director, Community Engagement and Church Planting/ Path1 Director, Connectional Mobilization, oversaw this event. His remarkable and visionary leadership has taken SCD to a level of excellence. “As an immigrant and person of color, being entrusted with the responsibility to oversee an extraordinary group of leaders within the United Methodist connection for the SCD2024 event has profoundly reignited my faith, hope, and love as a disciple of Jesus Christ,” shared Rev. Agtarap. “This event has been a life-changing and heartwarming experience, not just for me, but for many others as well.”

As a conference, we had the honor to provide logistics support through the office of Connectional Ministries and radical hospitality through a group of 40+ volunteers, both clergy and lay.



One of the volunteer’s jobs was to welcome participants and share about what we do in Northern Illinois.

“Every one of the volunteers was cheerful, bubbly, and willing to offer their best to offer great hospitality to all SCD attendants. Our hospitality team was a very diverse group from all walks of life. Everyone did the big and small things with excellence and went above and beyond their roles,” shared Rev. David



The NIC volunteers gathered before the event for orientation.

Lagos Fonseca of Our Saviour’s UMC in Schaumburg, coordinator of the volunteers. “We had great fellowship and the opportunity to meet lots of people and to make connections.”

We are very thankful to all the volunteers who gave their energy, time, presence, and lots of smiles to create a truly welcoming atmosphere. Thank you to all the churches that were involved in different ways: donating candies for the goodie bags, knitting prayer squares for participants, providing communion elements, providing worship instruments, praying for this event, and sharing about their ministries through the experiential learning. Among them were Schaumburg: Our Saviors, Schaumburg: Our Redeemers, Roselle, Mt. Prospect: Trinity, Elk Grove: Prince of Peace, Elgin: First, Barlett: Journey of Hope, Naperville: Community, Franklin Park: The Movement in the City, Oak Park: Euclid Ave. and Sycamore.

That’s practicing Jesus-like ministry looks like. Well done good and faithful servants! Praise be to God!!

Your giving to General Church apportionments supports Discipleship Ministries and SCD.



Leading the Laity

Transformed and transforming with love



by Eugene Williams,
Conference Co-Lay Leader

Grace and peace unto you, my Siblings! On behalf of the Laity of the Northern Illinois Conference, I greet you in the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ!

What a blessing it is to be on this faith journey with each of you as we, both Laity and Clergy; continue to learn, grow and transform with the help of the Holy Spirit. The mission that Christ set before us has not changed over the many years. I don't believe that Jesus ever wanted us to make it to the pearly gates alone. I'm sure He would want to know where are all of the others that we were to make disciples of for Him.

Sisters and Brothers, there is no way we can accomplish the mission that Christ has tasked us with if we don't love all the people. Disaffiliation, budget crunch, declining membership, and political posturing has stoked divisiveness to the point of stagnation and immobility. We cannot walk around with blinders on, hoping to weather the storm and push on through to the other side. I don't believe that is what Christ is calling us to do. We can't become dispassionate, immobile or complacent with a mentality of scarcity while we serve a God of abundance.

We aren't transformed or transforming if we don't recognize that all people are members of Christ's beloved community. We must move from a mind-set of, "If we build

it, they will come," or "If they come, we will embrace them."

Our God is not a respecter of declining membership, disaffiliating churches, church closings/decaying buildings and reduced budgets. He has still provided us with all we need to be transforming and to be transformed. We are not a broken church, rather, we are a transforming church. We must be intentional in our efforts to love all the people. We can't wait for them to find their way into our sanctuary. We must search them out, embrace them, meet them where they are and tell them we love them! Jesus has never stopped working on our behalf. We must do our part by loving and fully embracing each of God's precious children as our sisters and brothers. We don't get to pick



and choose or play favorites. Our love and respect must be unconditional just as Christ's love was, because, but by the grace of God, there go you and I.

God wants us to depend upon Him. All too often, we act as if we made it to where we are today on our own. My Siblings, by sharing radical love, my prayer is that we will all lean into this season of transformation with an attitude of abundance rather than scarcity. Jehovah Jireh, you are truly more than enough.

Thank you for being a God of plenty, whose promises have never been returned: "NSF, non-sufficient funds."

Blessings to each of you during this season of transforming and being transformed. Go with Christ and be well.

Amen.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Board of Laity.



Reimagining Church Measuring vitality?

by Rev. Christian Coon, NIC Director of Congregational Development

There was something a bit off about the water bill at Brooke Road UMC in Rockford.

Violet Johnicker is the pastor at Brooke Road and, like any attentive pastor, keeps a close eye on the finances of the church, including noting changes in the church's utilities. The water bill seemed higher than normal a few months ago, but she wasn't quite sure why. She reached out to her trustees and they first thought that there might be a leak somewhere in the building so they did their due diligence of the church's plumbing, but didn't find anything unusual. And then it dawned on them.

Brooke Road has transformed their church building into a community center so that neighbors in their area can use the building from everything to computer classes to AA meetings in Spanish. More people in the building, of course, means increased water usage. When Violet told me this story, I immediately thought of a way to measure church vitality: an increase in the number of a church's toilet flushes!

I say this somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but only somewhat. For years, I've been trying to figure out and codify ways that we can put together creative metrics to help get a sense



of a church's vital ministry. Worship attendance and financial giving are still important measurements, but there are other ways that we can ascertain life in a faith community.

It's been a joy and inspiration to travel around the conference in my first six weeks as Director of Congregational Development to listen to leaders and hear about the creative ministries that our churches are engaging in. (I'm doing my best to record these on my Facebook and Instagram accounts so follow me there @make_a_joyful_Illinois).

Can we also be creative in how we measure these ministries? Disciples UMC in Mount Morris has a monthly potato bar that brings people from around the area. Can we measure vitality by the number of potatoes shared with newcomers? South Shore UMC in Chicago is opening up its gym to youth in the community, including playing basketball and, this month, experimenting with archery. What if we counted the number of arrows that neighborhood youth are shooting at targets?

Bishop Schwerin has emphasized that we are in a time of ministry experimentation, including creating new ways of measuring church vitality. Part of my job is to encourage new ways of connecting with our communities, provide resources for out-of-the-box thinking, and communicate what we're attempting, both the things that go well and the things that don't turn out like we'd hoped. All of this is part of our efforts to reach new audiences with the good news of Jesus Christ.

I'm excited to be on this journey with you. One flush at a time!

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports Congregational Development.



Jesus quelled the storm through connectionalism

by Rev. Linny Hartzell, Harvey: Transformation Community UMC

The work of God through our United Methodist's Connectionalism was in full effect the week of July 15th when the thunderstorm struck through Transformation Community United Methodist Church (TCUMC) in Harvey, Illinois. TCUMC is at the center and heart of the community in location and with missions and ministry. Those in the community are reliant on the resources we bring for spiritual needs, prayers, resources for social change, economic relief, community improvement, and revitalization. We are at the core of serving the impoverished neighborhood of Harvey.

On Monday, July 15th, the storm brought down the post and the powerline across the church's parking lot, causing the church, along with many of its neighbors, to be

without electricity. As unsafe and problematic as it was to lose the power and to have a potentially live power line on the ground already, we faced the additional problem of many of our neighbors who are reliant on our Food Pantry going without food for the week.

At TCUMC, we receive over 6,000 pounds of perishable and non-perishable food each week from Greater Chicago Food Depository and serve over one hundred twenty families who are in great need. Many rely on our food pantry for sustenance and household needs

we provide, serving with dignity and respect. This is also the church many who come to the Food Pantry come to worship and are coming a part of the ministries in the recent months. With the concern of the safety in operation and the challenge of keeping the food safe, we immediately went to work finding a solution.

Jesus quelled this storm with support from our Northern Illinois Conference. NIC's support staff, Dwayne Jackson and Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer, responded quickly and procured the funds through Solidarity Grant from UMCOR for the purchase of the power generators. Our Northern Illinois Conference's Disaster



Through connectionalism, quick work, volunteers and a generator, the food pantry was able to stay open.

Relief team, headed by Colin Monk, was dispatched to TCUMC immediately. Our dedicated Food Pantry coordinator, Donna Owens, and TCUMC volunteers moved swiftly to

work through the challenges through generators, flood lights, and many adjustments.

With everyone's coordination, we continued caring for and serving those who are in need. We are grateful for all who diligently, passionately, and compassionately seek to serve all God's people with the resources that we have. We were without electricity but were not without Power. This is God providing through all God's passionate and compassionate people.

This is Connectionalism.



Being made in the image of God as giver

by Rev. Chris Walters, President Midwest Methodist Foundation

There are many reasons and motivations for “why” people give to churches and charities. Consistently, donors identify among the top reasons they give financially as belief in the mission, regard for leadership, and the soundness of the organization’s financial management. Those are important reasons, but they are focused on the recipient of the giving, the churches and charities.

The most well-known passage in the New Testament, John 3:16, rightfully puts the focus on God as the ultimate model of being a giver: “For God so loved the world that he gave...”

Humans are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), so we should do more than wonder about this identity we have, being made in God’s image as a giver. We should exercise our souls by actually giving, so that we build up our spiritual health by practicing God’s creative purposes as givers.

I hear your skeptical hearts murmuring, “But the world isn’t that loveable ... look at all the bad things going on.” Maybe the world is the way it is because we humans aren’t exercising our spiritual heart muscles enough as givers?

Consistently, regardless of economic circumstances, the U.S. gives about 2% of GDP to charitable causes, including churches. Currently, the share given to religious organizations, like churches, is less than 30% of total charitable giving. Prior to 1990, the religious share was more than 50% of total giving. Imagine if we Americans tithed 10% of the economy to charitable causes?



I have often preached on the false dichotomy of this theological puzzle, thinking that love comes first and then giving. Or, considering Matthew 6:21, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” that getting your heart right precedes placing your treasure somewhere. Both of those claims may feel right and may even work, but deeper spiritual growth is found in the mere mindless and heartfelt exercise of giving and placing your treasure without overthinking or over-theologizing.

The saxophone legend Charlie Parker is credited with two pithy quotes that illustrate the fundamental spiritual truth I am trying to communicate:

- “If you don’t live it, it won’t come out your horn.”
- “Don’t play the saxophone. Let it play you.”

Charlie Parker lived a troubled life, but one thing was clear about his life: he and his saxophone and the music were one. There was no false wall of separation between them while he was playing.

One of the simplest, and yet most profound, spiritual disciplines to practice is giving financially, especially with today’s technology that can automate your spiritual discipline of regular giving. I guarantee that if you are giving less than 5% of your gross annual income to church and charities through regular and automated means, you can double your giving and your lifestyle will not be significantly hampered, but the muscles of your spiritual heart will strengthen over time, and you will find new meaning and purpose in your God-given image as a giver.

Have you made your contribution?

In an effort to be more transparent, the Finance and Administration office is going to be consistently sharing where we are as a conference are in regards to the giving versus what is needed for us to continue our impact. This giving supports our ministries, outreach programs, employees and daily operations.

See the chart to the right for where we stand as a conference as of the end of July. Currently our collection rates are as follows:

- NIC Apportionments - 70%
- General Church Apportionments - 39%
- Health and Pension - 79%
- Property Insurance - 72%

Every contribution makes a difference in sustaining our conference’s mission and impact in the community. If you are not sure where your church stands on their contributions, please reach out to your pastor or church treasurer. All checks for these items should be mailed to the Conference Lockbox, PO BOX 5646, Carol Stream, IL 60197-5646. Mailing checks to the Conference office or any other lockbox delays applying the check to your account. The correct address is conveniently located on all invoices you receive for the church.

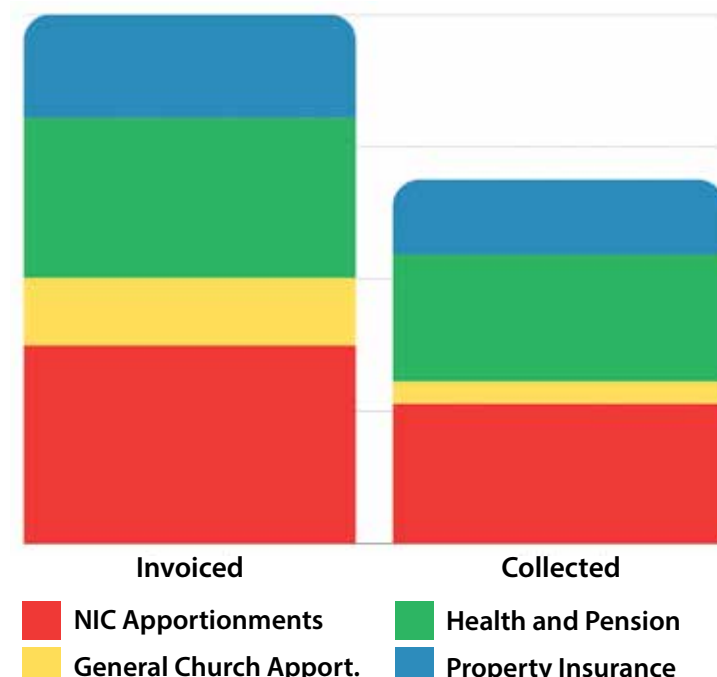
You can contact the Conference Finance Staff with questions. To

ensure you are talking to the correct person, please reach out following:

- Apportionments: David W. Quinn, dquinn@umcnic.org
- Health and Pensions: Lameise Turner, ltturner@umcnic.org
- Property Insurance: Dwayne Jackson, djackson@umcnic.org
- Conference Treasurer: Elaine Moy, emoy@umcnic.org

Together, we can ensure that our church continues to thrive and serve others.

Connectional Giving Update



Upcoming Events

See the full calendar at umcnic.org/calendar

September

19 United Voices for Children Raising Our Voices Event

6 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Wesley UMC
201 E. 95th Street,
Chicago, IL



Free event - includes lunch

More information: unitedvoicesforchildren.org/programs/raisingourvoices.

21, 22, 23 General Conference Debriefings

9/21: 10 a.m. to Noon

Arlington Heights: First UMC

9/22: 3 to 5 p.m.

Rockford: Christ UMC

9/23: 6 to 8 p.m. via Zoom

A time of debriefing, conversation, and Q&A about the recent General Conference.

More information: umcnic.org/calendar/general-conference-debriefing.



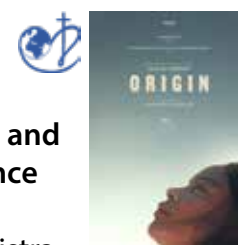
October

2-6 Origin Movie Screening

Multiple locations, dates, and times across the conference

Cost: Free

More information and registration: umcnic.org/origin-movie-screening.



13 NIJFON Fall Fundraising Dinner

10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Two Brothers Roundhouse,
Aurora



More information: nijfon.org/fallfundraiser2024.

14 Indigenous People’s Day Celebration

10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Starved Rock State Park,
Oglesby
Free Event



(\$10 meal available for purchase in advance.)

Indigenous presentations, activities for children, and displays. More information: umcnic.org/IndigenousPeoplesDay2024.

19 CELEBRACIÓN DE LOS MINISTERIOS HISPANOS/LATINOS

NIC Hispanic/Latinx Ministry Celebration

Worship 10 a.m. to noon,
followed by lunch and music
Franklin Park UMC,
9857 Schiller Blvd. Franklin Park

Cost: Free (A free-will offering will be taken to support Hispanic/Latine Ministries.)

More information: umcnic.org/calendar/hispaniclentine-celebration-2024.

* For invoices and payments through July 31, 2024