

**CONFERENCE BOARD OF GLOBAL MINISTRIES
ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026
“Practicing Hope, Living Mission”
By Rev. Ayla Samson**



The Conference Board of Global Ministries CBGM hosted a “Lunch & Learn” event at the Northern Illinois Annual Conference 2026. We were very honored to have two amazing guest speakers who brought insight and resources to share with those who signed up to attend our lunch event.



The CBGM Board Members and guests at the Annual Conference 2026



Our first speaker was Rev. Jane Eesley, who is Senior Pastor at First UMC at the Chicago Temple. She spoke profoundly of her experience of serving in Jerusalem. Decades after serving as a mission intern in Jerusalem, the Rev. Jane Eesley returned to the Holy Land in 2023 as a United Methodist missionary assigned to the Methodist Liaison Office. Within weeks of her arrival, Hamas militants attacked Israeli communities near Gaza, killing about 1,200 people and taking more than 250 hostages. Israel responded with a campaign that has killed more than 40,000 Gazans to date. Eesley started a weekly online chat, where people around the world could dialogue with Palestinian Christians on a regular basis. She also worked to identify where emergency grants from the United Methodist Committee on Relief could make a difference in the lives of people affected by the war.

Rev. Eesley encouraged us all to continue to pray for all those who are suffering in the conflict and war in the Holy Land and to find ways to support the poor women and children who are suffering the horrors of war.



Left; Rev. Ayla Samson, middle; Rev. Dr. Tammy Kuntz, Coordinator, UMVIMNCJ, right; Rev. Jen Huff serves as the Global Ministries Mission Engagement Liaison to the North Central Jurisdiction.

Our second guest speaker was Rev. Jen Huff, who shared with deep appreciation and love of the Northern Illinois Conference, where she was raised and had youth mission experiences that formed her heart for missions. She shared her journey: *“When I joined my middle school youth group, I was eager for the opportunity to participate in the high school mission journey. I immersed myself in every service opportunity available throughout middle school, high school, and into college, driven by a deep passion for missions. The chance to travel to a place where both of my parents had been before me was incredibly meaningful, and it was even more impactful to do so alongside peers who shared the same heart for service. Meeting young adults in Senegal who were equally committed to living out the United Methodist mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world was a profound experience.”* Jen also shared many resources available to churches and individuals who have a call to serve in missions overseas and how much information, opportunities, and even funds are available to encourage persons towards mission service.



Kingwood United Methodist Church



Hope United Methodist Church

At the “Lunch & Learn” event, our CBGM Mission Link second-level per-member giving awards were also presented to two churches. The award for highest giving per member was given to Kingswood UMC, and the award for next-highest giving was given to Hope UMC of Joliet.

Our Conference Secretary of Global Ministries, Rev. Shirley Pulgar Hughes, spoke of these awards at the Annual Conference. She said, “Our first recognition is the John Wesley Award, presented to the congregation with the highest per-member giving to missions. It is my privilege to announce that the 2025 recipient is Hope United Methodist Church of Joliet, Illinois.

“What makes this award meaningful is not simply the amount given, but the commitment behind it. Hope UMC has shown what can happen when a congregation embraces the idea that mission is not something the church supports occasionally—it is part of who the church is. Through faithful stewardship and a generous spirit, Hope UMC has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to mission. Their witness reminds us that every gift, offered in faith, can become a channel of God’s grace and hope in the world. Today we celebrate their faithful witness and their commitment to God’s work in the world. Please join me in congratulating Hope United Methodist Church of Joliet.

“Our second recognition is the Philip Otterbein Award, presented to the congregation with the highest overall giving to missions. It is my honor to announce that the 2025 recipient is Kingswood United Methodist Church. This year marks the second time Kingswood has received this distinguished recognition. For more than sixty years, Kingswood has embodied a spirit of service and generosity.

“Their commitment to mission reflects a congregation that faithfully responds to Christ’s call to serve others and share God’s love in tangible ways. Their faith has been expressed not only in words, but in action. Generosity changes lives, and Kingswood’s witness reminds us that when a church embraces generosity as a way of life, it becomes a powerful instrument of God’s healing and hope in the world. Today, we give thanks for the witness of Kingswood United Methodist Church and for the example they set for all of us. Please join me in congratulating Kingswood United Methodist Church.”



The Conference Board of Global Ministry has been partnering with Midwest Missions in collecting gifts, emergency kits and many other items donated to serve those who suffer from natural disasters and other hardships.



This year the “Fill the Truck” drive had almost filled two trucks with donations and the last weight of items and kits collected was 7.000 pounds. Thank you to all the volunteers and to Larry Dunlap-Burg for being a liaison with Midwest Missions on behalf of the CBGM.