BISHOP'S COLUMN: Giving witness at the U.S. - Mexico border

At the end of August, I went to the border of Mexico at McAllen, TX with the General Board of Church and Society to witness, and to give witness, to the plight of those who are seeking asylum and refuge in the U.S. from Mexico and Central America. A group of six—three GBCS staff and three bishops from the board—gathered with the resident bishop, Robert Schnase (who grew up and served churches along the border before being elected a bishop in 2004), and several others from the Rio Conference.

First, we went to Anzalduas Park in Mission, TX overlooking the river where we met with several officers of the Border Control. These second-generation Mexican-Americans shared with us about their work. They search out the river for those who are crossing it (a U.S. federal crime) by boat, horse, ATVs, and patrol cars. They talked about how it’s their job to track down those who are trying to make it across the river or through the high grass or trees. Usually, when someone is apprehended by them, the first thing they ask for is water; some of them dying of dehydration. The Border Control takes the people they apprehend to the Ursula Processing Center.

In the Processing Center, we saw hundreds of men, women and children. Mostly young adults with children; I don’t remember seeing many if any older people. Children older than 10 are separated from their parents in the Processing Center. They are all in big wire cages, lying on thin mattresses on the floor with space blankets made of mylar to keep warm in the heavily air-conditioned room which hummed with the sound of rustling space blankets. Other than that, there was very little noise. The officer said it was because they spend most of their time sleeping, finally resting after being on the run. Even children were very subdued. When those who spoke Spanish put their hand up to meet the hand of someone inside the cage, they would offer to pray for them. Tears would flow. They seemed more than physically tired.

Restroom facilities were in the middle of the cages where you could see the feet and often the head of anyone going into them for security reasons. Showers were off to the side. They were allowed to shower when they first got there. They were supplied with clean warm-up clothes while their own clothes were being washed and then returned to them. Supposedly they only stay about three days before they are transported to a bus station or respite facility or their families give them tickets to a destination near them.

The respite center that we visited was across from the bus station in McAllen. It began its work in 2015 when the city runs it, and played with us. They were rambunctious but well-behaved; in the Processing Center they were lethargic and looked scared. Across the street was the bus station where they would go when contact was made with family or friends and tickets were given. The respite center sent them on their way with whatever clothing items they needed, diapers, water and a sizable lunch. I can’t imagine how scary it must be to have a stack of bus tickets for the next couple of days and unable to read English.

Yet the journey through uncharted and sometimes dangerous waters doesn’t end when they arrive in Chicagoland (or anywhere else in the U.S.). They face the uncharted waters of a language they may not know or still struggle with. But maybe all of this pales in the face of yet more uncharted and dangerous waters that people of color in our country face: the imposing and massive boulders of racism and prejudice. My family came to this country due to religious persecution, but we never had to worry about racism. As I’ve said before, what if our church had spent so much time, energy and resources addressing racism as we have homosexuality? Some might rightfully argue that our obsession with sexuality has in fact successfully diverted us from facing our racism.

In McAllen, we were with a number of people whose work relates to immigration at the border, but perhaps the
We agree with removing the incompatibility clause, as
Continue to pray.
We are devoted to the United Methodist Church and
We do need a way forward for the church just as
November 10 – 9:00 am
Read the report and let us know what stands out to
October 6 – 9:00 am
October 20 – 9:00 am
They with Bishop Dyck in August, and met with the
delегations from the North Central Jurisdiction and the
College of Bishops in September to further discuss and
learn about the legislation before we have our conversations
with the conference.
We are still waiting on other proposals that have been
submitted from individuals and groups, which will be
mailed to us later this fall. Other documents will be
presented from the floor of the special session in February.
Right now, we are keeping our minds open, listening
to all of the information coming our way, praying for
discernment, and waiting for yet another declaratory
decision of the Judicial Council as requested by the Council
of Bishops. We are working through our understanding,
thoughts, and strategies, and we are refining our thinking
as the conversations continue. We do have consensus on a
few things:
• We agree with removing the incompatibility clause, as
  the One Church Plan does.
• We are devoted to the United Methodist Church and
  we do not wish to see it break apart. We will work to
create a way for the UMC to be the church for all of
God's children because unity does not exist if some are
excluded.
• We cannot continue to let this divisiveness get in the
  way of us doing God's work through the church. We
continue to seek a way forward that does not elevate
either unity or justice over one another.
• We do need a way forward for the church just as
  urgently as we did when we approved the creation
of the Commission on The Way Forward at General
Conference 2016, and we continue to seek to be the
church through this process.

The Methodist Church has been in crisis before.
Hindsight tells us we did not always choose the best
path, and people were hurt in the process. In many
cases, the hurt still continues. We are keenly aware of the
responsibility before us, and we commit ourselves to lead as
God is calling us.
We need YOUR help as well. We urge you to:
• Read the report and let us know what stands out to
  you.
• Have conversations in your own congregation.
• Continue to pray.
• Plan to come to one of the conversations with the
delagation that will take place in each district (see
Listening Conversation Sessions)
We will continue to keep you updated as we get closer to,
throughout, and following GC2019. Follow the delegation
on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NICDelegation.

After much anticipation, the report from the Commission
on The Way Forward has been released. If you have not
seen it but would like to read it, it can be found at
Delagation members are studying the legislation and beginning
strategy discussions.
We met with Bishop Dyck in August, and met with the
delегations from the North Central Jurisdiction and the
College of Bishops in September to further discuss and
learn about the legislation before we have our conversations
with the conference.

Sixty persons representing 25 congregations in northern
Illinois gathered on Saturday, August 25, for a lively
conversation about how to confront and challenge racism
as it impacts the lives of our children and youth.

The Colors of Love: Raising Children in a Racially Unjust
World workshop featured a presentation from Dr. Jennifer
Harvey, professor of religion at Drake University, whose
research addresses the encounter between religion and
ethics, race, gender, activism, politics and spirituality in the
U.S.

Dr. Harvey challenged parents, clergy, and educators to
consider how to be effective in making their children aware of
U.S. racial realities, while simultaneously nurturing their children's emotional resilience and a healthy sense of
racial identity. In particular, Harvey used personal
stories to illustrate how the common approaches of
"colorblindness" and "diversity" fall short in responding to
our deeply racialized and hierarchical society. She offered
suggestions for how parents and church leaders can stretch
to adopt "antiracist" ways to communicate with
and empower our children and youth.

Following Dr. Harvey's provocative presentation, three
high school youth shared their personal experiences and
reflections on how they have confronted racism in their
lives and relationships. Lucy Hermann (Trinity UMC, Mt.
Prospect), Abigail Mendoza (First UMC, Park Ridge) and
Jaelyn Pirtle (Gorham UMC, Chicago) talked insightfully
about what they have learned and who has influenced
them in observing and challenging racism at their schools,
churches, and home.

Rev. Darneather Murph-Heath, Elgin District
Superintendent, opened the workshop with a prayerful and
impassioned invitation to the attendees to be open to being
changed by what they heard that day—and then to be that
change they want to see in their families, communities,
and society.

“I appreciated Dr. Harvey’s caution that if parents,
teachers, church leaders and other caring adults practice
‘white silence,’ our children’s default formation about race
will come from TV, friends, school, social media, and
others. White silence occurs when white people become
slient in the face of racism rather than engaging our
children by stepping in and stepping up to name, confront,
and challenge actions as racist. Ignoring manifestations of
racism by silence fosters and festers racism,” reflected Kim
Coffing, United Voices for Children (UVC) President.

UVC board member Ed Miner left the workshop realizing that, “We need to talk to kids about our attitudes about
race. They know more than we think they do and they
learn it earlier than we think. Our own attitudes may be
incomplete but we need to talk to our kids anyway.”

Another UVC board member, Meg JungEun Park,
succinctly identified helpful components of Dr. Harvey's
parenting strategy: 1) create a race-conscious schema in
children's early development by talking about difference
and often; 2) develop "racial scripts" to become
attentive, careful interpreters of the
stories of/from others; 3) develop an
anti-racist “agency” by complicating
history (and stories people tell) at every
turn. Park noted that "Our kids need
to wrestle with the complex stories of
what actual people have done and what
people actually still do.”

Christine Hides, UVC board member,
expressed hope for what we can do:
"What was most powerful for me was
seeing a diverse group of faith-filled
people confront an issue that impacts
the lives of all our children. With
practical tips and resources like this
workshop, churches can and should
place where the evils of racism are
identified and actively resisted.”

UVC President Kim Coffing also
looked ahead to next steps after the
workshop: “UVC is committed to confronting the issues
that put children at risk in all of our communities and
equipping churches to advocate for our children's well-
being. Racism puts us at risk of losing our children. Racism
in our churches destroys our credibility of being witnesses
of a God who loves us all. It is our task to let God make a
difference through us.”

Colors of Love: Raising Children in a Racially Unjust
World was sponsored by United Voices for Children (www.
unitedvoicesforchildren.org) in collaboration with First
UMC Elmhurst, Christians Engaged in Faith Formation,
Commission on Religion and Race in Northern Illinois and
the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist
Church.

Dr. Jennifer Harvey's 2017 book, Raising White
Kids: Bringing Up Children in a Racially Unjust
America is published by Abingdon Press and available from Cokesbury.

Listening and Conversation Sessions
The NIC General/Jurisdictional Delegation will be
holding listening and conversation sessions this fall
leading up to the General Conference Special Session.
You can choose to attend any one of the locations:

- October 6 – 9:00 am Rockford District (Freeport:
  First) 1:00 pm Dekalb District (Sterling: Wesley)
- October 20 – 9:00 am Chicago NW District
  (Park Ridge) 1:00 pm Chicago Southern District
  (Chicago: St. Mark)
- November 10 – 9:00 am Elgin District
  (Barrington) 1:00 pm Aurora District (Aurora:
  Bethany Fox Valley)

www.
Oak Park Producer discusses “America to Me” documentary

By Linda Hendelman

"America to Me" is an eye opening documentary on the Starz network which goes inside the Oak Park and River Forest High School where students and teachers navigate issues of race, equity and education.

In addition to chairing the education committee, Sanders-Weir has served on First UMC’s worship committee and as lay mentor to the church’s Education Director. Although she attends church regularly, she says she’s never considered herself a “religious person.” In speaking about her racial views and being a United Methodist, she says: “My experiences taught me to look beyond myself or my immediate group when seeking answers to tough questions. Other churches seemed to be saying that they were the ‘right’ way or had all the answers, but I didn’t see the problems being solved. I appreciated the United Methodist openness to listening and valuing lived experiences. I value the struggle to make the world a better place - that’s why I am here.”

Filming

The documentary, which takes place over the 2015-2016 school year, follows 12 students—seven African American, three bi-racial, and two White, as well as a bi-racial teacher. In selecting students for the documentary, Sanders-Weir explained, they looked for a matrix of age, socioeconomic and academic levels, household makeup, and extracurricular activities. Some 40 students were interviewed over the summer, along with parents because they wanted parental support from the beginning and also to film the students at home. Finding the right mix of White students was the most difficult, she said. They sought students who were racially aware and able to talk about race in a way that was helpful for the documentary. However, she says: “Most White people, myself included, don’t go through our days assessing the world on the basis of race. It’s a privilege that I’m only now becoming aware of as I should be. By the end of the first semester, we’d found two White students who rounded out our selection of subjects.”

Reactions and Race Relations

The students basically became accustomed to the filming in their classrooms several times a month and eventually largely ignored the cameras, Sanders-Weir noted. She also noted that while the White, progressive population of Oak Park had mixed feelings about the idea of the filming, she said, it was generally positive. She explained: “There was a layer of concern that Oak Park would be held to some sort of standard that virtually no school in America has been able to achieve. That somehow the documentary would damage a good thing that is the high achieving high school in town.”

In discussing her perceptions about race relations in Oak Park, which is noted for its liberal and successful diversity, Sanders-Weir says: “Oak Park is a progressive place, where I feel, very few people would say that all our culture’s racial problems have been solved. There is an awareness that work needs to be done. But I do think that there is a lack of understanding on the part of White people, myself included, to what needs to be done.”

She explained that the school’s vice principal for instruction, Chala Holland, who was interviewed, early in the series, says “people move to Oak Park for diversity, but not for equity.” Giving that comment some thought, Sanders-Weir says: “When I first heard that comment, I had to take a hard look at myself. We had chosen Oak Park because it had both economic and racial diversity, but now that we live there, what concrete actions were we taking to further the goals of equality?”

Resources for Discussion

Sanders-Weir explained that part of the reason for the discussion guide accompanying the series is to get people talking about the issues presented. For churches or individuals who wish to continue examining the issues in the "America to Me" series, Participant Media has developed an episode-by-episode guide available at americatomeedutalk.com. The materials are appropriate for teens and adults, Sanders-Weir says.

Like Langston Hughes, Sanders-Weir offers hope for improved racial relations from the "America to Me" series: “We hope that the series goes beyond the original broadcast and has some deeper impact. We plan to make it widely available. Some churches are watching it each week and doing a discussion. It is our intention for this series to live beyond the viewing and for it to start needed conversations in our culture about systemic racism and our need to continue to strive for justice for all.

O, let America be America again—
The land that never has been yet—
And yet must be—the land where every man is free.  
***
O, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!  
***
Let America Be America Again, Langston Hughes

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From the Cover

Ephraim Guerrero, Attorney of the Eastern Conference of the Methodist Church of Mexico and Coordinator of Immigration Affairs in Monterey, Mexico and Azalea Altman-Bendix, Assistant Federal Public Defender, talked about the immigration situation from the Mexican side of the story. Photo courtesy of Sally Dyck.

most impressive to me was at the Federal Courthouse where we met with Ms. Azalea Altman-Bendix, Assistant Federal Public Defender. And she's United Methodist! She and her assistant told us how it is their job to defend and work to find a solution for those who have been apprehended at the river. In order to defend them and with the number of people they process, they have no more than one minute to talk with them before they go before a judge. We left Azalea and her assistant by praying for them and that they come through to leave home. Let us pray for our nation that it may truly be great and have a fair and humane immigration policy that benefits all of us, including those of us who rely on the work of immigrants on a daily basis. Let us pray for our president and his administration, including Attorney General Jeff Sessions (a fellow United Methodist), that reason and compassion will provide motivation to work for a comprehensive immigration policy.

October 2018 | The Reporter | 3
Senior Pastor at Grace UMC in Naperville the Rev. Cindy Marino says their church is seeing a turnaround. “Over the last 28 months approximately 62 people have become Grace family members,” said Marino. “We are presently working with another 15 family units that we believe will become members over the next 90 days that would equate to approximately 25 new Grace family members.”

Naperville Grace once worshiped 900 congregants weekly. Rev. Marino recalled. She said, “As a larger Methodist congregation Grace has been slower to feel the decline experienced in many churches, but the decline is just as real.”

She said the people of Grace have employed three one- on-one strategies to address a changing culture that no longer sees church attendance as a priority.  
1. The first shift is to change focus from programs to people: just as everything in culture is now customized. From lattes to the online shopping experience, we can’t assume great programming will bring people to church or to Christ. We are learning to focus less on programs and more on new ways to facilitate relationships of trust and transparency.
2. Through trusted relationships a second shift begins, the shift from education to faith formation. Learning has always been important to this congregation, but learning about God doesn’t always bring us to be formed as a disciple in the image of Christ.
3. Faith formation leads to the third shift: moving from an inward to an outward expression of faith. The people of Grace have always been community-oriented and active in issues of justice and mercy. Renewing our inward faith reignites our outward passion for love of God and neighbor.

According to Rev. Marino, offering a one on one conversation with a pastor as the first step—from program to people—provides the basis for deeper connection. A pastor offers a safe place to wrestle with issues of faith and life and allows people to move confidently into participation.

One-on-one meetings are easier to schedule than a class and give newcomers needed support in a personal and timely manner. We are scheduling persons to join as they are ready and not when we have reached critical mass for a class. Meetings with newcomers are scheduled with the pastor within the first week of their first visit. Most meetings take place on Sunday mornings, when newcomers are likely to be available. Rarely have they turned down the offer to meet. Out of these conversations we find pastoral care needs and the passions and gifts of the newcomers. We can connect them with others accordingly and they see familiar faces when they return on Sunday.

Along with this one on one care for newcomers, we also have begun what we’re calling Church Community Builders. The idea is to gather a group of at least six persons who will each meet with one other member of the group over a five-week period. The sixth week there is a gathering of all six members, who now have spent one-on-one time getting to know one another. With several groups meeting on an ongoing basis, we’re seeing new relationships and new connections growing. There are no perfect or grand programs that will ‘fix’ the church. We are seeing the need for adaptability, collaboration and trial and error, and will continue to do our best to discern God’s call to reach out to those who need to know the love of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, Rev. Marino said.

Grace UMC was one of six churches in the Northern Illinois Conference which received a One Matters Discipleship Award plaque and a $1,000 grant this year. If you would like to submit a suggestion for a “Ministry Makers” upcoming column, please send your ideas to agerhardt@umcnic.org.

On Sept. 9, Faith United Methodist Church of Orland Park celebrated 10 years of being a new church. In 2008 Orland Park UMC and Pathway UMC (Oak Forest UMC and Midlothian UMC) voted to merge congregations. A third Methodist church had been asked to join the merger but their vote fell short of the required 66% by seven votes. And so began the task of choosing a new name, finding a new church building, merging building equipment, and combining laity leadership. Newly appointed Pastor Caleb Hong has led us in becoming a growing and dynamic church. Former Associate Pastors Melissa Meyers, Kelli Beard, and current Associate Pastor Caitlyn Butler have also helped us grow.

It took us two years to accomplish the nitty gritty of moving, and during part of that time we actually met in a local theater on Sunday mornings. As the months wore on, we knew that if we could put up and take down in a movie theater for Sunday mornings, we could handle anything else that got in our ways.

Finally, a local church was available for sale. We raised

If your church would like to host Bill Buchholtz or is seeking help with a Native American Sunday service, contact Michelle at: mickiol@aol.com, 630-336-2317.

For over 25 years the Committee on Native American Ministries (CONAM) has helped to support the St. Kateri Center of Chicago, the city’s only Native American Christian church (www.facebook.com/stkatericenterofchicago), through a ministry of presence. CONAM helps with the Kateri Center’s many cultural events, facilitates the presence speakers such as Dr. Casey Church (Potawatomi), and participates in their Leadership circle.

CONAM also supports the ministry of Chicagoland’s well-known Native flute players, Bill Buchholtz. Bill has participated since the 1990s through organizations such as the American Indian Center of Chicago, Midwest SOARRING, and the Anawim Center. Music has always been an aspect of Bill’s life, especially when he was gifted a Native American flute by a Lakota elder. He has been taught by Elders to accept a gift with gratitude. He told her

CONAM also supports the ministry of one of Chicagoland’s well- known Native flute players, Bill Buchholtz.

Highlighting local church outreach ministries which are making a difference and transforming lives.
An Early Response Team (ERT) of six volunteers from First UMC of Morris headed to Elroy, Wisconsin for five days in early September to help in flood cleanup. The team was invited by the Wisconsin Conference to assist after heavy rains caused the Baraboo River to overflow its banks and flood the town.

Here are excerpts of their experiences by the team’s leader Colin Monk posted on Facebook:

**Day One:**
Sept. 3 The ERT group arrived in the Elroy, Wisconsin area. The first day was spent assessing flooded homes. The area received an additional 6-7” of rain. More flood damage and road closures. Due to the excessive water and flash flood activities the area is not accepting any other volunteers now. More rain forecasted. God bless all.

**Day Two:**
Sept. 4 Today the ERTs had a busy day. After an organizational meeting we headed out to an Elroy home that needed their roof tarped and their basement pumped. The roof was damaged causing water to run thru the house and the old basement walls couldn’t hold back the 6-7” of rain we had last night. Before leaving, our crew dug a drainage path in the gravel driveway to divert water away from the house foundation. Our next project took us to a house in Kendall that flooded. The crew helped the family remove the bottom 18” of plaster, lathe, drywall, plywood and wet insulation from all walls of the house. Mold retardant was sprayed on all wall surfaces. Part of our crew went to LaFarge to deliver a truck full of flood clean up kits and we did damage assessments on 5 houses. We enjoyed a wonderful chicken dinner at the Lutheran church in Elroy. Back to Winding Rivers UMC in New Lisbon for a well deserved mini shower and some rest. Heavy rain is forecast for late tonight.

**Day Three:**
Sept. 5 This morning the ERT group awoke and surveyed the rainfall damage from last night. The majority of the rain missed our area and we only received 1-2” of rain. After a quick breakfast, from our wonderful host church Winding Rivers UMC, we set out for a day of work. Our first stop was in Kendall to finish mold remediation work at the house we worked on yesterday. The house was drying out and the family seemed to be in good spirits. We traveled to La Farge, a small community of 746 friendly people. After a quick lunch we started a big project. The house had been flooded with almost 2’ of raging water as a wall of water swept through part of La Farge. We removed 4’ of drywall on bottom of all the walls. Then we removed plaster and lathe so we could remove the soaked wall insulation. We also removed the kitchen cabinets and some of the plywood flooring. We plan on finishing that job up tomorrow. We had a wonderful dinner at Lutheran Church in Elroy. Then we returning to our host church to clean up in our mini shower and relax a bit before bedtime. Thanks for all the prayers and God bless.

**Day Four:**
Sept. 6 This morning the ERT gang was pleasantly surprised by bright sunshine and clear skies. After a quick breakfast we set off to La Farge to finish the job we started yesterday. The team enjoyed working for such a wonderful family. The family rents the house but felt they should help repair ‘their home’. It is a very good feeling to be able to help out such a nice family. We missed seeing the two girls as it was their first day back to school. We finished removing the bottom 4’ of walls so we could remove wet insulation and then we treated all the framing with mold and virus killer and inhibitor. Our family was so kind as they made us brats for lunch.

After a final clean out we said our goodbyes and took a few pictures. We drove the scenic way back to Elroy. The views were stunning as drive the winding hills around Wildcat State Park. We stopped into the UMC in Elroy to get details on our final project for tomorrow. An elderly Elroy couple has been dealing with some major health issues. The flooding has left their home inhabitable. They are currently living in a nearby hotel. We have been told that this couple is very loved by the community and the church family. Our goal tomorrow is to do what we can to give this special couple their home back. God bless all those that we are so privileged to serve.

(continued on page 6, see Flood)
NIJFON Annual Benefit
October 14, 4 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.
Location: Two Brothers Roundhouse in Aurora
NIJFON will hold its annual ‘Champions for Justice’ celebration and honor Bishop Sally Dyck this year. Your presence will support the work of Justice of Our Neighbors as it continues to protect immigrants by providing free, high-quality legal services and invite allies to learn about complex immigration issues and advocate for justice.
Tickets are $60 online or by sending a check to NIJFON at PO. Box 68892, Schaumburg, IL 60168.
For more details visit nifjon.org

Paul Nixon Speaker Series
October 17, 9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
“Contextual Leadership”
Location: Evangelical Lutheran Center, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago.
Cost: $30, includes lunch & program
Spend a day with author Paul Nixon exploring ideas from his books ‘Weird Church and Multi’. Paul passionately believes that God has a better story in mind for 21st-century congregations than simply struggling for sustainability and longing for twenty years ago.
For more info and to register visit www.umcnic.org/calendar/paul-nixon-speaker-series.

Fellowship Asian American (FAA) Leadership Training
October 23, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
“Contextual Leadership”
For all clergy and lay leaders in the Northern Illinois Conference
Location: First Korean UMC, 655 Hintz Rd. Wheeling, IL
Registration Fee: $10 includes lunch
Speaker: Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana
Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana is a master of helping church bodies to articulate, dialogue, and cooperate in the contemporary contexts. Registration and Question? Pastor Hyuje Lee (224-558-3887 or email: hle763@yahoo.com)
Please R.S.V.P by Sunday, October 21.

UMW Annual Meeting
October 27, 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.
For the Love of the Child
Location: 215 N Court St, Rockford, IL
Cost: $15 lunch included
Speaker: Kim Coffing, ChildServ Director of Faith and Community Relations
Topics: Adolescent Health: What parents need to know Safe Sanctuaries, the Basics All Children Are Special

For more info and registration visit uwmnic.org.
Breaking Barriers HIV/AIDS ministry conference
October 25-27
Location: St. Luke’s UMC, 100 W 86th St., Indianapolis, IN
Cost: $125 per person (includes two lunches and two dinners plus program costs)
Registration deadline: October 1, 2018
Sponsored by the UMC Global AIDS Committee
The purpose of the Breaking Barriers HIV/AIDS ministry conference is to help create an AIDS-free world through saving lives, reducing stigma and increasing awareness. The gathering is open to anyone with an interest in reaching out to the HIV/AIDS community with a message of love.
For more information and registration visit inumc.swoogo.com/bbaids18.

Drawing Closer to God
Saturday, November 3, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.
One Day Retreat sponsored by NIC Spiritual Formation Committee
Location: Grace UMC, 1718 Avalon Ave., Joliet, IL
Cost: $25
“Praying for Discernment: Changing the Way We Do Church”
Keynote Speaker: Rev. Dr. Frederick W. Schmidt Director, The Rueben P. Job Institute for Spiritual Formation Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
To register visit www.umcnic.org/calendar/spiritual-formation-retreat

2018 TeamWorks: To Equip Leaders
Plan: Each church will send a TeamWorks Team of 3 to 5 leaders, including the lead pastor, to the four seminars with the following themes:
1st Session: Nov. 3 - Futurecasting
2nd Session: Dec. 3 - Spiritual Life of the Leaders
3rd Session: Jan. 12 - Connecting With Your System
4th Session: March 30 - Creating a Discipleship System
Location: South Suburban KoreanUMC, 1930 Kedzie Ave. Flossmoor, IL.
Registration fee: $10 (includes the guidebook) each session.
Leaders: Craig Keneden Miller, Director of Congregational Development at Discipleship Ministries (GBOD), Martin Lee, Director of Congregational Development and Redevelopment, Rev. Jacques Conway, Chicago Southern District Superintendent, Rev. Darneather Murph-Heath, Elgin District Superintendent, Rev. Young-Mee Park, DeKalb District Superintendent
For more info contact Rev. Martin Lee 312-346-9766 ext. 708 mlee@umcnic.org.
Purpose: To develop healthy, strategic teams in local churches in the Northern Illinois Conference using TeamWorks developed by Discipleship Ministries.

Want to list an event?
Contact Anne Marie Gerhardt, Dir. of Communications aegerhardt@umcnic.org

Flood (continued from page 5)

Day Five:
Sept. 7 We awoke this morning to another sunny morning. After breakfast we packed up our stuff and headed to Elroy UMC to find out what home we would work on today. The owner of the house that we were asked to work on wouldn’t be at the house until 10:30 a.m. We met up with a guy who also lived on the same street as the couple that we would be working for. The homes on the street and the adjacent street were heavily damaged by the rapidly moving flood waters. I spent part of the day assessing the damage to each house and talking with the homeowners. Unfortunately, many of the homes had extensive foundation damage and will be destroyed. The rest of the crew helped fill several large dumpsters with stuff stacked along the curbs.
When the homeowner arrived, we quickly began to remove flooring and the bottom 16” of all the walls along with the wet insulation. Being able to help another person in need is a wonderful feeling. We finished our work, said our goodbyes and hit the road back to Morris. Again the crew would like to thank all those who helped us in our mission to serve those in need and show what God’s love is all about. We have been blessed to meet some of the nicest people. We wish all those affected by the torrential rains the best in their recovery and you will remain in our prayers. God bless.

Midwest Mission Distribution Center sends supplies to Wisconsin
The first call for supplies for the heavily flooded areas in Wisconsin came in on the morning of August 30 and by noon, a crew from the Midwest Mission Distribution Center was headed to Baraboo, WI with a load of Hygiene Kits and Cleaning Kits. On the 31st, a semi picked up 2,016 more buckets for Baraboo and the box truck headed out a second time with buckets for Viroqua and Gay Mills, WI.
In two days, 2,916 Cleaning Kits and 2,555 Hygiene Kits were shipped out to help flood victims in Wisconsin. Nearly $250,000 worth of relief supplies were delivered! The following week, the team from Coldwater UMC in Coldwater, MI started filling more buckets to restock the shelves.
Early Response Teams are still needed in Wisconsin to respond to the recent tornadoes, heavy rain, and straight line winds. ERT Team leaders contact Lynnette Jordan by email at lynnette.jordan0707@gmail.com.

Anniversary (continued from page 4)
the $275,000 needed to acquire a bridge loan and the endowment funds from the two churches loaned us over $1 million to purchase the church. We are currently repaying the interest on the endowment fund loan.
During the past year our Mission Committee challenged the congregation to undertake 10,000 hours of volunteer service in honor of our 10th celebration. Individuals and committees worked hard to accomplish this goal. We reached it and even surpassed it with more than 11,600 hours being documented. Throughout the year we have spread the news of Faith UMC through our work and projects.
At the September celebration, our Endowment Committee presented Bishop Sally Dyck with a check for $10,000 for her Bishop’s Appeal to benefit the Global Migration Fund. We celebrated with verbal reminiscences and a power point presentation documenting our 10 years. Several pastors who had served at the merged congregations joined in the celebration. At the close of the service we celebrated like good United Methodists do -- with a potluck luncheon for 250.
We’re strong and moving to the future.

*Submitted by Sandy Ward, Faith UMC Program Coordinator
In 2010, more than 130 United Methodists went through HIV/AIDS testing during that spring’s Council of Bishops meeting to draw attention to a major global health issue and express solidarity with those suffering with the disease. These days, such attention — from both the faith community and society at large — has diminished, says Indiana Area Bishop Julius C. Trimble, committee chair of the United Methodist Global AIDS Committee.

“It’s what I call apathetic neglect,” he explained. “It’s another form of discrimination.”

Trimble hopes that an upcoming denominational conference will “generate some tangible commitment to re-prioritize HIV and AIDS in our overall concern about global and national health.”

The goal of the “Breaking Barriers” HIV/AIDS ministry conference, from Oct. 25-27 at St. Luke’s United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, is to save lives, reduce stigma and increase awareness. Scholarships, supported by the Indiana University Health Network, a co-sponsor, are available to help participants with registration and hotel costs.

The intent, Trimble said, is to both sound the alarm and extend an invitation for faith communities to join with those who have had some success in reducing HIV/AIDS deaths and increasing prevention. Sponsored by the Global AIDS Committee in partnership with the Council of Bishops and the denomination’s general agencies, other co-sponsors include seminaries, annual conferences and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Keynote speakers and worship leaders for Breaking Barriers include Ambassador Deborah Birx, U.S. Global AIDS coordinator; Hydie Broadbent, an HIV/AIDS youth activist; Bishop Minerva Carcaño, San Francisco Area; Bishop Tracy Smith Malone, East Ohio Area, and Trimble.

Trimble said the conference has attracted support “because it is rare that a mainline denomination, in collaboration with partners, has raised the clarion call regarding the over 1 million persons living with HIV in America and 36.7 million globally living with HIV/AIDS.”

The target audience is people of faith, health professionals and advocates, community leaders and volunteers and, especially, those living with HIV, said Linda Bales Todd, a committee member and conference organizer. “We want to hear from them, share their stories and say, again, this is a safe place for you to be.”

A major focus at the conference is the need for more testing, Todd noted. While there are statistics on who is living with the virus, a significant part of the population is infected and doesn’t know it, she said.

“For those who have been tested globally, about 50 to 60 percent are getting treatment, she said, “but there’s still a huge chunk of people who aren’t.”

Stigma and complacency still present barriers to overcoming AIDS, as pointed out this summer during the International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam and at a pre-conference faith-based gathering.

“Medical advances have been significant in the battle against HIV and AIDS, but progress dealing with stigma is still very limited,” declared the Rev. Donald Messer, executive director of the Center for Health and Hope, Centennial, Colorado.

“People are still afraid and ill-informed around the world,” said Messer, who has been involved with the Global AIDS Committee since its beginning.

In the U.S., he believes, the stigma has gone underground. “It keeps people from getting tested, treated and also from revealing their status to others,” he said.

While there was a period of time when certain churches were very vocal about the poor treatment of those with HIV/AIDS, an attitude of sin around the disease still prevails.

“There’s unnecessary fear and misinformation and a lack of real information of telling how people can avoid HIV,” Messer said. “Silence doesn’t help anybody.”

It is significant that the conference is being held in a state where the late Ryan White — a teenager who contracted AIDS through medication for his hemophilia — fought against stigma after being expelled from his school. Messer noted that White and his mother were United Methodists but were mistreated by the church because of that stigma.

More recently, said Trimble, Scott County in Indiana is “the intersection of the opioid crisis and HIV/AIDS meets” with a spike in injections of IV drug users. Just “being willing to talk” and become better educated can help reduce stigma. Sponsoring organized programs is another step in the right direction. “We’re hoping to promote some of what I call these ‘can do’ things,” the bishop said.

For example, the West Ohio Conference has annual HIV/AIDS healing weekends to offer rest, respite, acceptance, affirmation and love. About 100 attend, most of them HIV positive but not connected with the church, Todd said. “It means a lot to the people who go to that retreat.”

One of the workshops at the Breaking Barriers conference, repeated twice, will focus on how to organize retreats and healing weekends.

Trimble pointed to the need to get beyond the “quiet assumption” that, overall, HIV/AIDS is not really a problem.

“The church has never elevated HIV/AIDS as a sustained priority that allows us to embrace social holiness at the intersection of education and advocacy with compassion,” the bishop said.

“This must change and I, for one, am committed to repenting for our quiet neglect as we accept the challenge to reduce infections, deaths and remove stigma.”

Bloom is the assistant news editor for United Methodist News Service and is based in New York.

Churches can help erase stigma of HIV/AIDS

By Linda Bloom

In 2010, more than 130 United Methodists went through HIV/AIDS testing during that spring’s Council of Bishops meeting to draw attention to a major global health issue and express solidarity with those suffering with the disease. These days, such attention — from both the faith community and society at large — has diminished, says Indiana Area Bishop Julius C. Trimble, committee chair of the United Methodist Global AIDS Committee.

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As fall settles in, Sunday School and youth ministries ramp up. At the same time, news stories of child abuse in the church remind us that we all need to provide safe space for our children, youth and vulnerable adults. This fall is a good time to refresh Safe Sanctuaries policies and practices in every local church.

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.

We have long acknowledged that there is no “magic bubble” of protection for our children and youth when attending church functions. It is our responsibility to screen and train our staff and volunteers, doing everything we can to ensure the churches care for those who trust and need our protection.

I know that our churches are thinking seriously about these issues. In the past month, we have received numerous calls and emails asking for assistance in updating Safe Sanctuaries policies. This is a great start! Policies that sit at the back of the file drawer are not very effective. Policies that were written 10 years ago probably need some refreshing. Policies that are not shared annually with staff and volunteers fade away over time.

If your church does not have a Safe Sanctuaries Policy or if is time to update the one you have, there are resources links on our conference website at: www.umcnic.org/safesanctuaries to assist you in this work. One of those links will take you to resources at United Methodist Discipleship Ministries. There you will find tools for designing a Safe Sanctuaries policy as well as sample policies for large and small congregations.

Following the initial work in the 2000s when churches began to write Safe Sanctuary policies and train their volunteers, the conference realized it needed a more consistent, sustainable way of bringing quality training and screening resources to every local church. It was out of this need that we developed a partnership with Safe Gatherings in 2014.

Safe Gatherings is an organization designed to meet the needs of our churches through low cost, high quality, consistent and easily accessible online training and background check processing. This resource began in the Kansas East Conference of the United Methodist Church in 2012 and now serves 4,000 churches and organizations across 40 states and multiple denominations.

We use the Safe Gatherings training and background check process for our Northern Illinois Conference camping staff and volunteer leaders in conference level events. Last year 37 of our churches also turned to Safe Gatherings for their training. Over 125 volunteers were trained, but this does not cover every congregation engaged in ministry with children and youth.

We need to do better. More congregations need to establish or refresh their policies and practices, train their staff and volunteers. We have been offered the precious opportunity of welcoming children and youth into the family of faith. We want our faith community to be a place of security and safety so the stories of Jesus gathering the little children around him are stories of hope and love and safety. You can find more information on Safe Gatherings also on our website at www.umcnic.org/safesanctuaries. I encourage you to assess where you are as a congregation and make plans now to become a Safe Sanctuary community this fall.

More than a hundred people gathered at Epworth United Methodist Church in Elgin on Sept. 8, 2018, to celebrate the many Hispanic/Latinx ministries in the Northern Illinois Conference. The day included testimonies from five different pastors, one from each district, serving Hispanic congregations, workshops, and worship with communion. Music was led by Dr. Rev. Tercio Junker who put together a team of musicians from different churches and the Liturgical Dance Academy from La Luz de Cristo performed in the closing service.

The NIC Hispanic/Latinx Ministry Team organized this event as an opportunity to celebrate the 24 Hispanic Ministries/Congregations in the conference. “This was an opportunity to get together to worship, to have fellowship and to support each other,” said Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer, Chair Hispanic/Latinx Ministry Team. “It’s not easy to be a Hispanic/Latinx in this country, but when we get together as one body, we listen to others’ testimonies and we realize that we are not alone in this journey.”

How does it help our local ministries be connected as Hispanic/Latinx in our Conference? “Being organized and integrated in the Conference helps us to get to know each other, gives us identity, keeps us united and at the same time we receive support, advice, and tools that we need as Hispanic leaders,” said Omaira Mora, Pastor at “Ministerio Fe Y Esperanza” at Elgin-Wesley UMC. “It also strengthens and consolidates the participation of Hispanics within the Conference by giving us the opportunity of voice and vote.”

“Think that having organized events in which churches come together are a big benefit to the church. Being together, even if only for a day, is a benefit because we are reminded of God’s worldwide mission for the church. Sharing our difficulties, I believe is extremely important because not everything is perfect all the time. As the body of Christ, we are called to be in fellowship, be honest, and encourage each other in faith and mission of making disciples and nurturing those already in the faith,” said Paula Hernandez who is a 20-year-old member from First UMC in Crystal Lake.

Pastors shared their ministry highlights, struggles, and successes leading Hispanic churches including Nino Espinoza who said celebrated seven years of mission work in the Blue Island area with 50 people in the church, Jesus Molina of Stone Park Mission in Melrose Park celebrated 16 years of ministry and the attraction of millennials to the church while also helping to encourage several clergy leaders to go out and serve on their own.

Bishop Sally Dyck delivered the sermon in the closing worship and shared her experiences from her recent trip to the U.S./Mexico border with the General Board of Church and Society (read more in this month’s column.) The Hispanic/Latinx ministries continue to grow and flourish in the Northern Illinois Conference and have spawned new traditions along with longstanding programs such as the Hispanic Women’s retreat which started more than 30 years ago. Follow news and updates from the Hispanic/Latinx team on Facebook at www.facebook.com/HispanicLatino-Ministry-Northern-Illinois-Conference

Visit www.umcnic.org and scroll down to enter your email and name under “Sign up for our eNewsletter.”