

Northern Illinois Conference
of The United Methodist Church
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A “virtual” first for Annual Conference 2020

“When did I first start zooming?” I wondered one day. I went back in my virtual calendar and to the best of my knowledge, it was September 10, 2019.

Almost to the day of writing this, it’s been a year of Zoom video conferencing.

But not all days and weeks and months of zooming are equal. Since mid-March, I have been zooming every day, sometimes for hours. My guess is that many of you have been zooming these last months (or using another other platform like Zoom). Even my 88-year-old mother zooms (when her computer works), and she’s very proud to be the only person in her senior facility to do so. Zooming is essential to living in pandemic times for both personal and work-related reasons.

And now zooming is essential in order to do the work of the annual conference. Without the ability to meet in person this past June, we will attempt the first virtual annual conference meeting in the 181 years of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference!

All NIC Clergy and Lay Members to Annual Conference should have received my call letter for this historic annual conference session, which will be held on Saturday, November 14, 2020 via a Zoom webinar. The letter provides all kinds of information about AC2020, but I want to highlight a few things about a virtual conference that I hope you will take into consideration as you prepare for it:

- Annual conference will be an extended experience. Yes, really! We will begin with Bible study with Rev. Junius Dotson, the General Secretary/CEO of Discipleship

Ministries. He was invited to be with us in June and he has graciously accepted our invitation to do a Bible study on each of our strategic goals—discipleship, anti-racism, and vital congregations. As a result, he’ll have about twice as long to teach than he would during an in-person conference. These three webinars start in October and they are all part of our annual conference experience! Recordings of the session will be made available.

- We will have pre-conference briefings that are essential for the virtual conference experience. We’re offering three of them—all the same, but at different times—with the expectation that you as a clergyperson or lay delegate will participate in only one. These briefings will prepare us so that, during our four hours of virtual meetings on November 14, we will be empowered to conduct the essential business for the NIC efficiently.
- In addition to a presentation regarding the 2021 budget during the pre-conference briefing, the Conference Committee on Finance and Administration (CCFA) will host a special, optional webinar on the financial health of our annual conference.
- There will be ways to present questions before our annual conference session and it’s very important that you participate in these webinars so that your questions are asked and answered. The presentations on November 14 will incorporate many of the questions with others posted for further information.
- We will have all the regular worship services that we normally have; they will just be different from how we’ve

done them in the past. We will begin with the Memorial Service on Thursday evening, November 12, followed the next afternoon by a carefully planned Commissioning and Ordination Service with all precautions (including a very limited number of persons participating) on November 13. Our annual conference business session takes place Saturday, November 14, followed by the online Retirement Service. We expect every clergy and delegate to attend all of these services (virtually) over these three days in addition to the business session.

- Two identical training sessions will be held so that each clergy and delegate knows how to use the virtual platform with the ability to participate fully, especially to vote! You may choose the date and time convenient for you. Please note them and make sure that, even if you’ve been zooming for six months now, you will be able to participate.

So those are all components of a virtual annual conference session (preceded at the end of June by the annual Clergy Session). I encourage you to put the dates and times on your calendar.

Having said all that, I want to acknowledge the grief, sadness and loss that accompanies this year’s virtual annual conference.

The candidates for commissioning and ordination miss out on all the “pomp and circumstance” (and I use that phrase in the utmost highest regard) that accompanies that service. Only instrumental music will be played (no singing). Only one other person associated with a

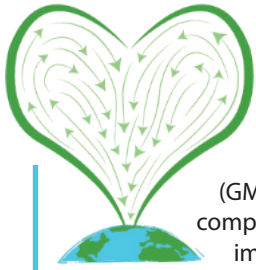
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Bishop's Appeal

By Rev. Young Seon (Christina) Kim

On Sept. 11 God's miracle happened. The first building inspection on the Global Mission Secondary School (GMSS) in Tanzania was successfully completed because God made a way in an impossible situation. When we failed to reach 75% of construction by August 2020 according to the Ministry of Education, a light of HOPE to open the school in Jan. 2021 was almost dimmed.

But God turned the situation around and used a district education officer and a chief school inspector to give me one more chance to finish priority buildings and be ready for the second inspection on November 15, 2020. A new opportunity was a sign of God's grace, will, and power. Hallelujah!!!

A lot of things need to be done until Nov. 15, 2020—constructing priority buildings (minimum requirements) as well as recruiting students, teachers, staff, etc. God's advice for me is, "One step at a time. One thing at a time." As you see a short video (below), construction resumed recently after six months' stop and additional costs'

conflict.

I would like to encourage you to participate in God's school project with your persistent prayers and heartfelt donations, knowing that God is at work and won't fail to meet all needs. Our God is the Good Shepherd.

The GMSS won't be a just small Christian school. But it will be a mission base to spread God's Word and Love. Together we can accomplish God's project and God's vision—to transform many lives and raise Christian leaders in Tanzania for God's church and mission.

Look for ways to donate through the Annual Conference online registration. Or mail checks to:

Northern Illinois Conference
PO Box 5646
Carol Stream, IL 60197-5646

Write "Bishop's Appeal" in the memo line. Bishop's Appeal gifts postmarked by November 2, 2020, will be included in totals announced at AC2020.

Learn more about how your church can support the Bishop's Appeal at umcnic.org/bishopsappeal.



Rev. Young Seon (Christina) Kim (left) walks with local officials for the first inspection of the building and property for the Global Mission Secondary School in Tanzania.

From the Cover:

candidate may attend (no groups of family, friends, colleagues and parishioners who would normally attend). There will be no warm embraces before, during and after this special service. The whole "cloud" (physical anyway) of clergy colleagues who will walk with the candidates for years to come won't be in attendance. There will be no reception complete with food, fellowship and photos.

It's a big loss but we really don't know when a group our size will be able to meet in person again, and so we have taken the precautions and limited part of the experience in order to complete this leg of our candidates' journey. Please do everything you can to support these candidates—write them notes and be sure to participate in the livestream. I've heard that some clergy are planning on robing for the livestream! And I will be asking you to stand where you are in support of these candidates! We will be listing their names and contact information over the next few weeks in the weekly NIC eNews. Make your presence as palpable as possible on this special day!

The service of retirement is always a bittersweet experience. Retirement carries for most clergy a mix of feelings, and not being able to express them (and more importantly to have colleagues and former parishioners express their appreciation) makes it all the more difficult. Again, please reach out to our retirees in the upcoming weeks to let them know what they have meant to you as a clergy person or a layperson. Again, we will be listing their names and contact information over the next few weeks in the NIC eNews. I was thinking that it would make a good spiritual practice for all of us to take the time every day to write notes to those making these important transitions.

The Memorial Service is always a touching time as we remember our clergy, clergy spouses, and lay members to Annual Conference who have died over the last year. The worship team is working hard to make that service meaningful for all of us as we lament in our grief and acclaim our hope in Christ Jesus. Contacts will be available for these families, too.

We will miss the breakfasts, lunches and dinners with one another, as well as coffee and other times of catching up with old friends and meeting new people. Conversations outside the plenary hall, in the restrooms and on early morning walks all contribute to what we enjoy about annual conference. How will you find other ways to renew and strengthen your relationships with others?

Lastly, it's a source of grief for me that I will probably not see most of you face to face before I officially retire on December 31, 2020. We are a connectional church, so I know I'll see some of you again, but it would have been nice to share a little time with you in my transition, too.

Please keep in mind that this virtual annual conference is a mix of technology and emotions! It combines traditional services with new online expressions. It allows people from all over the world to participate but we're not gathering in person. We want to allow for as much participation in our business session, but with a sense of good stewardship of time since we only have four hours to do our essential business.

This will be my 43rd annual conference since ordination (as a deacon). I remember many of them, but I'm sure that I'll never forget this one! See you on Zoom!

~Bishop Sally Dyck



Annual Conference Mark Your Calendar

Important Dates

Oct. 1, 8, and 22

Thursdays at 10 a.m. Bible Study with General Secretary of Discipleship Ministries Rev. Junius Dotson via Zoom. Attend all three sessions. Recordings will be made available to watch afterwards.

Oct. 12

Registration opens for Nov. 14 session. Registration is required to receive a Zoom link to participate in the business of AC2020.

Oct. 14

Proposed legislation and historical documents available online.

Oct. 25

AC2020 registration closes.

Nov. 1

Deadline for removal of legislation from Consent Calendar by sending an email to acddocuments@umcnic.org.

Nov. 2

Bishop's Appeal gifts postmarked by this date will be included in totals announced at AC2020.

Nov. 9

Voter ID numbers distributed to clergy and laity registered for annual conference.

Briefings and Services

Pre-Conference Briefings (choose one)

Wed., Nov. 4 at 1 p.m.

Thurs., Nov. 5 at 7 p.m.

Fri., Nov. 6 at 10 a.m.

Deep Dive into NIC Finances (optional)

Tues., Nov. 10 at 7 p.m.

Technical Training (choose one)

Thurs., Nov. 12 (time TBD)

Fri., Nov. 13 (time TBD)

Memorial Service

Thurs., Nov. 12 at 7 p.m. (video premiere)

Ordination Service

Fri., Nov. 13 at 4 p.m. (Livestream from Barrington UMC: limited attendance, invitation-only event.)

Annual Conference Session

Sat., Nov. 14 at 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., noon to 1:30 p.m. break

Retirement Service

Sat., Nov. 14 at 4:30 p.m. (Video premiere)

Visit umcnic.org/AC2020 for more information.

United Methodists respond to fire, wind and rain



Wildfires ravaging California for weeks took a dramatic turn and spread into the Pacific Northwest, feeding off dry conditions and strong winds.



An Early Response Team (ERT) from First UMC in Morris, Ill., traveled to southwest Louisiana to help repair roofs and clear debris after Hurricane Laura destroyed dozens of homes and businesses.



Amy Conyers of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, left, and her mother, Marcia Jackson of Aurora, pose Sunday, Aug. 16, with a carload of supplies Aurora-area residents collected for Iowans devastated by the Aug. 10 derecho storm. Photo by Al Benson

The months of August and September saw its share of disasters from intense Hurricanes in the Gulf Coast Region to dangerous Derecho winds in the Midwest to relentless wildfires on the West Coast—coinciding with a historic pandemic and coronavirus-fueled global recession. As for the last 80 years, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) was ready to respond thanks to your donations and ongoing support.

Hurricane Laura brought winds of up to 150 miles an hour as it made landfall along the Gulf Coast of southwest Louisiana and southeast Texas early on Aug. 27. Laura, which moved north and then east as a tropical storm, is blamed for at least 11 deaths and left hundreds of thousands of people without power. A handful of United Methodist churches were damaged and many homes and businesses were destroyed.

A week later a small Emergency Response Team (ERT) of five men from First UMC in Morris, Ill., headed south on a 16-hour drive to help repair and clean up damage the hurricane left in its path.

NIC Disaster Relief Coordinator Colin Monk led the crew working in areas around Lake Charles, one of the hardest-hit communities from the storm. Monk shared daily reports on the NIC Disaster Response Facebook page on how they were able to help homeowners.

“Our main focus was tarping roofs to prevent further damage to homes,” wrote Monk. “Hurricane Laura’s winds damaged most every shingled roof in the area. Many areas surrounding Lake Charles had no electricity and water making it difficult for residents to return home.”

After long days working to repair homes and clear debris, mostly downed trees, in nearly 100-degree heat and humidity, the crew would stay and be fed at nearby Gueydan UMC. Monk appreciated the church’s hospitality and the kindness of all those they met during the week.

“Our team continues to be amazed by the wonderful people that we meet during every disaster we help in,” said Monk. “During these crazy and confusing times of the COVID-19 pandemic, politics and natural disasters, it is so refreshing to see the good side in people and witness everyone working together for the good of all.”

Monk said even though they were able to help only 15 families in their short trip, they felt a sense of accomplishment.

“It is hard to know that there continues to be so many people still in great need but we can find comfort in knowing that we tried to help some folks and hopefully made things a little better,” said Monk. “We will be ready and willing to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ during the next disaster.”

When a rare Derecho with hurricane-strength winds left widespread damage to property and millions of acres of farmland across Nebraska,

Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois on Aug. 10, United Methodists responded to the call for help, including members of Flowing Forth UMC in Aurora, Ill. Donors loaded up a carload of supplies to help a former Aurora resident, Amy Conyers, who now lives in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and whose home was damaged by a fallen tree in the storm. What may seem like a small gesture made a big impact on Conyers and others in her community.

Thanks to continued donations to the Midwest Mission Distribution Center in Chatham, Ill., the agency was able to send 648 UMCOR cleaning kits and 672 UMCOR hygiene kits to the St. Paul’s United Methodist Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa on August 24, while also continuing to send supplies across the country for Hurricane and COVID-19 relief.

Following Hurricane Sally’s slow churn over parts of the Southeast on Sept. 16 dumping more than 30 inches of rain, the Alabama-West Florida Conference received a \$10,000 solidarity grant from UMCOR to help with damage and flooding. UMCOR has also delivered about 1,600 flood buckets to areas in Florida and Alabama.

The wildfire crisis ravaging California for weeks took a dramatic turn and spread into the Pacific Northwest, feeding off dry conditions and strong winds in mid-September. The fires have led to at least 35 reported deaths, consumed more than 3 million acres in California and almost 1 million acres in Oregon and destroyed entire towns in Washington. While the natural response for church disaster relief teams and volunteers is to spring into action immediately, Sonja Edd-Bennett, disaster relief coordinator for the California-Nevada Conference, said she’s not ready to receive non-local volunteers right now because of the dangerous conditions. Edd-Bennett said the most urgent need is cash donations and wildfire buckets, a variation of the cleaning buckets promoted by the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

“We’ve received 500 buckets and I’m hoping for 500 more,” she said. “People who are able to go back to their homes will need one as they return.”

As new named storms develop and the COVID-19 pandemic continues, UMCOR and MMDC encourage churches to consider giving to disaster relief in these unprecedented times. UMCOR says survivors of natural and manmade disasters stand to lose their homes and their health, their livelihoods and loved ones. But with your help they will not lose hope.

If you would like to help, you may give to UMCOR’s U.S. Disaster Response and Recovery Advance #901670 at umcmmission.org/UMCOR. To help the Louisiana Conference, visit la-umc.org/relief.

If you would like to offer ERT training in your church so you may respond on the ground to a disaster, contact Colin Monk at monks5mobile@comcast.net.

AC2020 Mission Challenge

The Northern Illinois Annual Conference Mission Challenge will support the Midwest Mission Distribution Center (MMDC), our United Methodist disaster relief supply center near Springfield, Ill., by collecting bulk items for hurricane relief through Oct. 20. Most requested items include 32- to 64- oz. bottles liquid laundry detergent, 16- to 40-oz. bottles liquid concentrate household cleaner (no spray cleaners), 16- to 34-oz. bottles dish soap and 2.5-oz tubes toothpaste. More information and drop-off locations will be available soon at umcnic.org/AC2020.

Cabinet apportionment dollars help strengthen ministries in the NIC

This is the second in a series of articles focused on the use of apportionments in ministries of the Northern Illinois Conference.

There are several ways to support the ministries of the church locally, nationally, and internationally, and apportionments are one way to strengthen our connection. The apportionment contributions go to several different funds in our Conference and to our General Church. The NIC Cabinet budgets twice a year for clergy and local church support to align with the appointment-making process. They distribute a portion of the apportionment funds to support ministries and local churches in our Conference.

The Cabinet considers four areas to support the local church. **Equitable Compensation** are funds paid to the church for clergy salary when the church cannot meet this obligation. **UM Presence** funds are paid to help sustain a church in a particular setting, such as a missional outpost. **Redevelopment** funds are for churches that are redeveloping in a new or different way. **New Faith Community (NFC)**

funds are for sites the Conference is planting for new churches.

Today we are spotlighting our **UM Presence** budget line. Fourteen churches are included in this budget line. Churches receiving UM Presence support can be found in five of our six districts. All the churches in the UM Presence budget are focused on ethnic communities.

Iglesia Cristiana Emerge in Belvidere, led by Pastor Cris Ramirez, is a Hispanic/Latinx Congregation in the Rockford District and is supported by the Cabinet apportionment dollars under the "UM Presence" area. Iglesia Cristiana Emerge was chartered in June 2019, and to date, there are more than one hundred people in weekly attendance. "We are blessed to receive this financial help from the Cabinet. With this help, we can continue our work among Hispanic/Latinx families in Belvidere," said Pastor Ramirez.

Sam Mool Korean in Mt. Prospect is led by Rev. Misook

Park. The congregation serves marginalized people in need in the Korean community and beyond. They also run Sam Mool House, a temporary shelter for Asian women in need.

Englewood/Rust UMC is a church in the Englewood community of Chicago. A church that has struggled for survival in a community with high poverty and crime rates and in need of the church. Englewood/Rust UMC has a well-established food pantry and various other ministries that many congregations could not even imagine. Faithful members, together with Rev. Grace Oh, are making a difference in their community.

These are just a few examples how the Cabinet invests our apportionment gifts to help build connectional relationships and witnesses across our conference to make disciples of Jesus Christ. In coming months we will learn more about the ways in which our conference apportionments make a difference.



← Pastor Toni Lucas preaches at an outdoor worship service at Albany UMC.

→ Pastor Lucas dons her "storyteller" red hat for a Sunday school video of her reading a book to the children posted weekly on Facebook.



Pastor embraces technology for ministry during pandemic

By Diane Strzelecki, NIC Communications Specialist

On a warm and sunny Sunday morning in July, Albany UMC was holding an outdoor service in the parking lot as dictated by COVID-19 safety concerns. As Pastor Antoinette (Toni) Lucas, 76, preached in front of the church's gardens, a hummingbird darted from flower to flower, a blur of wings and movement silhouetted by the sun. It was a reminder of God's creation amid a time of uncertainty, and a vision that Lucas has hung onto as she continues her ministry.

Lucas was in her third year serving Albany and her fourth year as a pastor when the pandemic hit and Illinois' stay-at-home order began. "I was sitting there thinking 'what can I do?'" she remembered. "How can I stay in touch with my people when we can't be in the sanctuary and they can't come to church and some of them don't have technology and some of them don't want technology?" Lucas began with a tool she had already been using to keep in touch with family members in the UK: Facebook.

A former legal secretary, Lucas was proficient with most office systems and software, but video recording, editing and uploading was a new thing for her. "I just tell people you can teach us old dogs new tricks but it just takes longer," she laughed.

Lucas began recording herself in her living room reading from a book of daily devotions. The first time she did it, it felt strange—and then she says had to come to terms with the idea of posting it for everyone to see. When the weather got nicer, she moved outside to her yard.

DeKalb District Superintendent Rev. Brian Gilbert describes the devotionals as having the feel of sitting on the front porch and learning about God together. "I find myself using her Facebook post every day as a way to start my own prayer time and keep myself centered and am grateful for her work both professionally and personally," he said.

Lucas describes her tech team as her, her iPhone and her laptop. She originally used her cream pitcher and sugar bowl to prop up her smartphone when filming, but found that a cross made from a railroad tie and horseshoe worked better.

Pat Reynolds, a member of Albany since 1987, enjoys the

devotionals. "Pastor Toni is good with technology – more than me—and there were some challenges involved but she pushed through," she said. "I really appreciate her doing that."

Soon Lucas began recording herself preaching a sermon and uploading it to premiere on Sunday. It turned out that uploading was the greatest challenge. "It takes forever and I lose patience," she admitted. "Sometimes I didn't go to bed until 1 am because I was waiting for the upload."

In July, Lucas discovered the church owned a video camera and Albany began worshipping in the parking lot. As a result, they film services for those who can't or who are unable to attend.

Lucas also hosts a small online study group. "We're starting our second book looking at racism and white privilege," she said. "Like the devotionals, I can have a group that includes people who could never be physically present because they don't live around here."

"She stays with it: if Pastor Toni says she's going to do it, she does it," Reynolds said. "If she says she's praying for somebody, she's praying for them. Any contact you have with her is worth it because she's just so positive."

Lucas added another upload to her repertoire in mid-September: a Sunday school video of her reading a book to the children posted weekly on Facebook. To accompany the video, the church assembles monthly lessons by age group and packages them in pizza boxes for parents to pick up.

For Lucas, it's about including everyone. For those who aren't computer literate or comfortable with technology, she mails monthly letters; for the children, she also sends letters with coupons for ice cream or other treats. For those who don't have Facebook, she either texts her daily devotion videos or attaches them to an email.

"I can't tell you how many times during the pandemic I've said out loud 'God, really? You waited for me, gave me this call so I could be a pastor now, during all this?'" Lucas said. However, she's convinced she's where she is for a reason and feels for her colleagues who've never had to engage in ministry through times like these. "I'm too dumb to know

the difference," she laughed, but then sobered immediately when considering the challenges. "How do you not let anybody fall through the cracks?" she said. "Doing a funeral without being able to give a hug is the worst thing I've ever done."

Although Lucas and the congregation are relatively comfortable with virtual fellowship and spiritual connection, she anticipates returning to in-person worship in the sanctuary. "We didn't get to have Easter in our church, so the first day back in the sanctuary it will be Easter," she said. "I don't care if it's Valentine's Day! We may even have two Easters next year."

As for her embrace of technology, Lucas remains philosophical. "It's what you make of it—as is all life: what you make of it," she said. "You do what you do and people respond. Is it polished? Was it professional? No, probably not by anybody's measure. But did it get the message out there? Yeah, and some people watched it."

"She always holds herself to a high standard and she doesn't have to—she's good enough," Reynolds said, adding that Lucas usually sends an email apology if something didn't go right. "It doesn't bother anybody, you know? But she's really humble."

"Toni's leadership in the local church is to be celebrated," Gilbert said. "During this difficult time, she has adapted and used technology to reach out into her community and beyond. What started, I think, as a personal challenge for growth turned into a great ministry offering devotionals on Facebook Live that help people center themselves and grow in their own discipleship."

Lucas encourages people to embrace technology for sharing God's message. "This is the world we live in and you're either going to get on board or you're going to miss everything," she said. "So I'm on board. I don't want to miss anything."

Albany UMC worships 10:15 a.m. on Sundays. Visit the church's Facebook page to watch the online services.



Mark Manzi

We must be the change By Mark Manzi, NIC Co-Lay Leader

The church is called to lead by example within our own lives, our institutions, and by our witness. So I ask you, are WE the church? I believe we are at a tipping point, a time where change can and must happen, and WE can move forward to “Live Out the Conviction that Racism is Incompatible with Christian Teaching,” the second strategic goal of our Annual Conference.

However, change will only happen if WE, the people, make it happen!

My name is Mark Manzi. I serve as one of your co-conference Lay Leaders, and I am a white male. I identify my background because I must take responsibility to listen, learn, and walk with those who are working to bring change. I also recognize that this time of change calls me to challenge the structures, practices, and policies not only in my local church, but in our Conference and beyond. Together, WE can challenge and change the systemic racism in our country.

I have come more fully to this realization over the past several years. First, during our Annual Conference Shepherding Team’s work creating the strategic goals for our conference. We had many possibilities for goals, but when I heard stories from clergy and lay members of the Shepherding Team who are people of color, I was convinced that we needed a goal to deal with racism. These team members, both clergy and lay persons, shared stories

about local churches they served or attended from their youth up to the present time. Their stories were surprising and shocking.

Then, the 2020 Laity Convocation brought together Judy Siaba, Chris Pierson, Richard Guzman, and Rebecca Fraley as panelists to help us “Unpack Racism.” Their stories continued my learning about how racism has affected people of color across our Conference and nation. One question from a Laity Convocation attendee really struck me. This person asked, “While this is a pretty good small step, what do you see happening or the results of this gathering? For there have been so many of these meetings or workshops. And, as a person of color, I think they are mostly for the ‘others’ to be able to say, ‘Look we are doing something.’ We had a Laity Convocation titled ‘Unpacking Racism.’ We talked about it.”

The challenge was laid down. What was I going to do?

I am a retired educator and learning has always been the first way to explore a problem for me. I began my learning with a book Rev. Chris Pierson recommended as I spoke to him about the Laity Convocation 2020. “How To Be An Antiracist” by Ibram X. Kendi opened my eyes to what has been happening for hundreds of years as well as the things we have heard most recently. I learned of the systemic nature of racism. Kendi says that “antiracist” is the opposite of “racist.” Antiracists endorse racial equality, locating the problems in power and policies and confronting racial inequity. I am also reading “The Cross and the Lynching Tree” by James H. Cone with our church’s Wednesday morning Bible/book study. In the Sunday school class I co-teach, we watched videos from the General Commission

on Religion and Race (GCORR) and held discussions.

Why has this learning been important? Because I see now that this awakening over the “past several years” has taken too long. I have learned the difference between “not racist” and “antiracist” and I have seen that I have taken the easy way and denied that I was privileged, biased and socialized. So, what does this mean?

I/We have to continue to learn, and along with our learning, listen. Listen with an open mind and an open heart. Listen for the meaning of “Black Lives Matter” and why this statement is important now. Listen to those who are willing to share stories and experiences. Hear what people, such as retired Bishop William Willimon, say: “White Christians have got to move from cost-free lament of our racism, or from fragile, defensive denials to actively, resourcefully living anti-racist lives.”

Finally, I/We must take up the call to action and do something. This can begin in the local church, but also needs to be expanded to our local communities and beyond. We can also find out what the conference Anti-Racism Task Force is doing and become an Anti-Racism champion.

In Matthew 22, Jesus said to the legal expert who was trying to test him, “You must love the Lord your God ... And... you must love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

Who is our neighbor? Every person is our neighbor. Jesus didn’t say “Think about me.” Jesus said, “Follow me!” Let us be part of the change.



Rev. Patricia Bonilla

Women of Color Scholar closes gap in seminary education By Jessica Love*

The Rev. Patricia Bonilla learned at an early age how important it is to see color and acknowledge differences.

“In high school, I was one of two Mexican students in my whole grade,” she said.

Now Bonilla, who is an ordained deacon in the Northern Illinois

Conference, is researching and celebrating those differences as part of a new generation of Angella P. Current-Felder Women of Color (WOC) Scholars. She is in her third year of doctoral studies at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill.

The Angella P. Current-Felder Women of Color (WOC) Scholars program is administered by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM), and is designed to provide financial, intellectual and personal support to United Methodist women of color pursuing doctorates in religious studies at seminaries and universities across the U.S.

When she was in middle school, Bonilla’s family moved from a working-class immigrant community to Vernon Hills, Ill., and opened a grocery store in the wealthy Chicago suburb. Bonilla noticed that while other students had the weekends off to play sports and engage in fun activities, she worked at her family’s store.

“We were a working-class family living in a middle-class neighborhood,” said Bonilla. “So, everybody in the family had to work. I didn’t have the money for after-school activities or the opportunity to go.”

It was a culture shock for her. “It was tough doing that shift—especially after doing most of my younger education in a predominately Mexican and immigrant community,” she said. “So, that’s when I realized that things were not the

same everywhere in the U.S.”

Finding the Intersection of Faith and Social Justice

Bonilla’s childhood experiences made her accustomed to acknowledging difference. When she later became interested in religion, she explored various interfaith communities as an undergraduate before defining her own faith.

“I joined the student Muslim association as an ally of Muslim students,” Bonilla said. “I was also taking Buddhist classes as well as attending Catholic Church. I was interested in interfaith experiences.”

But it was not until she graduated and started attending a United Methodist Church that Bonilla began to feel connected to a faith practice. As a community organizer working for immigrant communities in Chicago, Bonilla said she kept bumping into United Methodist clergy who talked about how their work was grounded in faith. That fellowship allowed Bonilla to discover her call to ministry.

“I got invited to participate in the United Methodist Church,” Bonilla explained. “I used to go to Bible studies, do justice ministry and explore what justice ministry meant from a faith perspective. That’s really where my intersection of being drawn to social justice work met my interest in faith.”

“Feeling Like I Don’t Belong”

Bonilla continues her justice ministry as a religious education and congregational doctoral student at Garrett. Yet, navigating higher education as a woman of color has been difficult.

Bonilla admits that because of her minority experience in the academy, she battles challenges of imposter syndrome.

“Sometimes, I feel like I don’t belong and that I don’t have the right stuff to contribute to the academy,” said Bonilla. “So, I overcome those challenges by affirming that

I do have something to contribute and that western-Eurocentric knowledge is not the only knowledge that is valued.”

The other essential element in overcoming those challenges, Bonilla explained, has been the WOC program’s continued support.

“The [WOC program] mentorship is invaluable to me—learning from other women who have navigated those spaces in the past and how they have overcome those challenges, and how they have set up an academic path for a successful career,” she said.

She added that the WOC program’s annual meetings at the American Academy of Religion research conference are a unique space for mentorship exchange, fellowship and professional and research development.

“Being able to gather with my mentor and my peers to learn about how their programs are structured and what kind of research or scholarship they are doing is important,” Bonilla said. “We present our own research and get feedback from mentors about areas that need a little bit more work and areas we have excelled in. That’s just very important.”

Closing the Gap Between the Latinx Community and Seminary

Similarly, Bonilla’s research and work attempts to close gaps in academia, particularly gaps between the Latinx community and seminary. Her research examines ways to give voice to Latinx young people connected to the Church by exploring how they practice their faith.

For several years, Bonilla has served as a mentor and coordinator of curriculum and programming with the Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy in Chicago. Bonilla, a comprehensive exam scholar with the Hispanic Theological Initiative program, is also interested in

Continued on page 7, see Women of Color

Laity Sunday: Therefore, Go! October 18



Laity Sunday celebrates the ministry of all Christians. The theme for Laity Sunday this year on October 18 is “Therefore, Go! With HOPE Through Engagement.” On Laity Sunday, we embrace our shared vocation (lay persons and clergy) to proclaim, grow in, and embody the good news of the saving love of Jesus Christ. As we welcome and offer the good news of Jesus to all, we commit to grow in love and respond to a world that needs God’s life-mending, justice-creating grace. Therefore, go (with hope) through purpose!

Some may think that we won’t be able to have Laity Sunday this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but we think we need to celebrate Laity Sunday more than ever. On Laity Sunday, we celebrate that we are all called, laity as well as

clergy, to go and make disciples. We are called to be the church together in a world so desperately in need of hope. We need to embrace the shared partnership in ministry that must occur for our church to be as vital as possible. This is a time we step together, lay persons and clergy, to let all know that the church is alive.

More information about Laity Sunday can be found at umcdiscipleship.org under the “Equipping Leaders” heading.

As your conference lay leaders, we encourage every church in our conference to celebrate the ministry of the laity on Laity Sunday. We, too, say, “Therefore go!”

~Jessie Cunningham, Elisa Gatz, Mark Manzi, NIC Co-Lay Leaders



Rev. Brian Felker Jones

thought he was some kind of spiritual misfit. Despite his Christian upbringing, his graduation from Asbury College (Wilmore, Kentucky) and Duke Divinity School (Durham, N.C.), and his calling into ministry, Jones struggled with his prayer life.

“One of the hardest things for me in my Christian walk is prayer—it’s always hard. I fall asleep, I get distracted, I space out,” Jones said. “But one of the things that helped me pray was if I did it in a group. When I’m in a room praying with people; that really helps me focus.”

Over the years, his participation in classes and bands as well as his experience in pastoral counseling showed Jones he wasn’t the only one who grappled with prayer, and he wanted to reach people who needed the same community and connection that helped him. After much thought (and prayer), in summer 2019 he began developing the “Pastor Brian Podcast” with hopes of launching in summer 2020. When the pandemic hit, the Illinois stay-at-home order necessitated creating Holy Week services online and the church threw everything into an Easter video.

“I was like, wait a second, we can’t put together another video for Good Friday—we just don’t have the time,” he said. “But maybe I can create a long podcast for Good Friday. And that’s how I started.”

Pastor launches prayer podcast amid pandemic

By Diane Strzelecki, NIC Communications Specialist

The Rev. Brian Felker Jones, Associate Pastor at Gary Memorial UMC in Wheaton, once

Based on the number of downloads, Pastor Brian Podcast began with 15 subscribers in March and has grown to 83 subscribers as of August 2020—and the list keeps growing.

Using talent and skills to help

Before he answered the call to ministry, Jones had hoped to graduate with a bachelor’s in Media Communications (Broadcast Emphasis) from Asbury and work for ESPN. “That’s what I wanted to do, and I was good at it,” he said.

But, as usual, God had other plans. After graduating from Duke Divinity and serving as pastor at Christ’s UMC in Roanoke, Ind., he took family leave to take care of his four young children while his wife’s career as a professor of theology was taking off. While a stay-at-home dad, he began listening to podcasts “just to hear an adult talk to me.”

Jones began to wonder how he could use his broadcasting journalism skills and help people with prayer. He wanted a program to be short, “aired” daily, simple, and accessible. Then he had an epiphany – he realized he could take his experience with prayer, his skills and talents in broadcast journalism, his dedication to pray-ers of all ages, and create podcasts.

The “Pastor Brian Podcast” is designed for those learning how to pray and those trying to get better at prayer. The basic structure is an opening prayer, a song or call and response, a Scripture reading and then a closing prayer.

Committed to the platform

During what Jones describes as “quarantine time,” he wrote a completely new script for each podcast, but lately he’s worked into a simple rhythm. On Mondays, he writes the script for the following week’s podcasts, which have similar prayers and openings. Jones notes that the

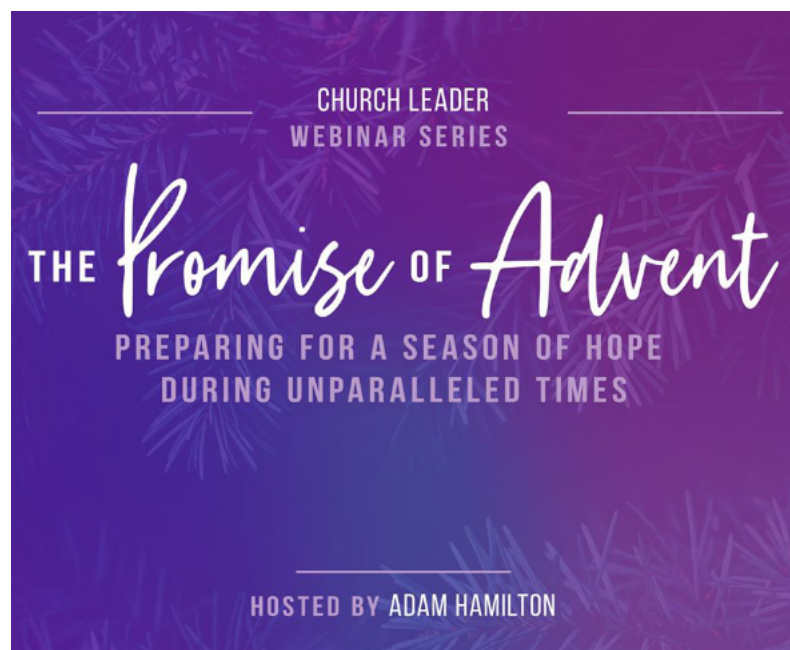
repetition can be helpful spiritually. “As you keep praying that prayer, you kind of realize new things that the Holy Spirit opens up to you,” he said.

Jones estimates he puts in about 10 hours each week for the week’s podcasts. “It’s been a real joy to do, a real bright spot,” he said. “If I can help somebody who was struggling with prayer like I was in my teens and 20s—if I can help somebody bridge that gap to a different place, it would just mean the world to me that they would come to a closer relationship with Jesus Christ. So it’s worth the extra hours.”

Jones thinks it’s a good platform for churches to try, especially during these difficult times when people are hungry for connection. “It’s something different, not necessarily new for younger people but for churches, it’s a real, different way of outreach and I think it’s especially helpful now and the situation we’re in,” Jones said. He’s received emails from families using the podcast to help their family pray together at night and from people across the country who say the podcast helped them begin to pray.

“I feel like there’s something about podcasting – and I’ve always felt this way about radio—there’s something about it that is more personal,” he said, remembering his younger days listening to Garrison Keillor’s “Prairie Home Companion” and Terry Gross’s interviews on National Public Radio. “There’s something about this person just talking in your ear and hearing their voice.”

The “Pastor Brian Podcast” is available on all podcast platforms (i.e., Apple, Spotify, Google Podcast) and at pastorbrianpodcast.com.



Promise of Advent webinar series

Hope, faith, joy, and peace. These Advent messages are needed this year more than ever before as people struggle with continued health concerns related to COVID-19, unprecedented loss, and a divided culture.

How can church leaders imaginatively plan and prepare for this beloved season without the traditions of its typical events and rituals?

In “The Promise of Advent” webinar series, host Adam Hamilton – pastor and bestselling author of the upcoming Incarnation Bible study – discusses church leaders’ hopes and concerns around Advent planning with a panel of pastors and experts. Their conversations will help resource and inspire leaders struggling with planning for Advent and staying spiritually focused on its promise of redemption.

These practical and faithful conversations will be around such topics as:

- Translating in-person services to in-home and virtual environments
- Helping children and families celebrate Christmas in a meaningful way
- Preaching Advent’s message after a year of extraordinary loss and stress

Join us as we prepare together to celebrate the coming of Christ.

To watch on demand the video series, visit amplifymedia.com/the-promise-of-advent.



Cedarville UMC discovered a new ministry opportunity during the COVID-19 pandemic to reach out to the community. They're offering a bi-monthly drive-through food pantry. Photo by Gary Rich

Ministry Makers

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

Church shifts ministry outreach in pandemic By Rev. Keri Rainsberger

Five years ago, several active laity from Cedarville United Methodist Church attended a meeting in Freeport about summer programming for the school district's students where they learned that none of the programs would be located in Cedarville. As they listened, Cedarville UMC members' ears perked up when they realized they could offer those programs! Thus began "Fun Thursdays," a summer program with activities, mentors, and meals for Cedarville's young residents.

A few years later, the Rev. Gary Rich, Pastor at Cedarville UMC, brought the idea of an after-school program to the congregation. When that program wasn't a good fit for logistical reasons, Cedarville UMC set out to find another group of Cedarville's residents who needed their hospitality and they found one. The congregation began hosting a monthly Senior Lunch program offering a wonderful meal and space for socializing and games.

Fun Thursday and Senior Lunch programs were successful in bringing the warmth of Jesus' hospitality to the community. Unfortunately, after the COVID-19

pandemic hit, the congregation realized that these very popular, much needed ministries could not continue safely.

Fortunately, through their connections to the local food bank, Cedarville UMC discovered a new ministry opportunity. Now this active congregation hosts a bi-monthly drive-through pantry. Their building seems almost made for just this kind of ministry! Volunteer teams pick up food from the food bank on Mondays; another team packs the food in bags, and they hand out the bags on Tuesdays. The quick turnaround means that this new ministry doesn't require a lot of storage space.

Many of the families served through the Fun Thursday and Senior Lunch ministries are still receiving hospitality, meals, and love as volunteers wave a greeting and pack food into their cars.

Cooperation with the village also bears much fruit, as the food pantry is advertised on the village water bill, and the local post office and gas station display a poster with more information. When Cedarville UMC was under construction, village officials even volunteered office space

for the church to continue this valuable outreach.

When these and other ministry opportunities came up, the congregation didn't know if they had the resources to do them. Yet they trusted and tried anyway. They keep an eye on their capacity and adjusted to keep the ministries sustainable. The cooperation of a faithful group of volunteers makes the workload manageable. Grants from the local food bank and from the Northern Illinois Conference Keagy/Town & Rural Board help with the financial costs. The local food bank also donates some of the food to the church.

Cedarville UMC's connections with the community—along with their congregation's big hearts and can-do attitudes—allowed the church to pivot quickly when faced with the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their faith allowed them to jump into new endeavors; their hearts saw beyond the obstacles. Today they continue to be the hands and feet of Jesus, feeding and loving their community even when the world seems to shift around them.



Planting justice and harvesting hope for NIJFON By Paula Cripps-Vallejo, NIJFON Development Officer

Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors (NIJFON) has been blessed with a \$25,000 gift from Berry Memorial UMC in Chicago through the sale of the church's historic building. As Berry UMC seeks to plant the seeds of a new church home in Chicago, they also chose to plant seeds for justice through supporting the mission and vision of NIJFON.

We at NIJFON would like to challenge the 350+ United Methodist congregations here in Northern Illinois Conference to support our shared work for God's justice, through giving to NIJFON. We are setting a goal for all 350+ congregations to raise a total of \$25,000 to match the faithful donation that Berry Memorial UMC gave. We are hoping & trusting that all together our UM congregations can support our vital mission to offer free, high quality immigration legal services to our immigrant, refugee and asylum seeking neighbors and selves.

We understand that this has been a difficult year economically for many of our churches, and families, and invite each congregation to prayerfully give at the level they are able. The work of JFON is more important than ever as there continues to be extreme challenges and difficulties in navigating the immigration process here in the United States. Our JFON legal team has not stopped working for our mission, and our full JFON network continues to be engaged in education and advocacy during this critical time for the immigrants' rights movement that Jesus is leading us to.

Every dollar given to JFON is like a seed of justice that is planted. We see those seeds of justice harvested when a family is reunited after so many years apart. We see those seeds of justice flourish when an LGBTQIA asylum seeker is able to live their full life as their full self. We see those seeds of justice blossom when a mother receiving a UVisa is able to move from the shadows of fear to shining her

light brightly for herself and children.

We know that the \$25,000 given by Berry Memorial UMC are each seeds of justice that bloom in ways that we can see and take root in ways we cannot see as we continue our mission at NIJFON. We invite you as a fellow Christian in the United Methodist tradition to help us plant even more seeds of justice as work for God's ever coming kingdom of liberation and justice.

Are you ready for the challenge? Together we can raise \$25,000 to match Berry Memorial's \$25,000. Together we can continue to plant and harvest seeds of justice. A virtual gathering to honor Berry for their gift, as well as all the UMCs who are able to contribute to JFON's work in this difficult year will be held in November.

To get more information about this matching campaign or materials to share in your own UM congregation please go to nijfon.org OR email us at paula.crippsvallejo@nijfon.org.

Women of Color (continued from page 5)

developing programs and partnerships to extend seminary resources beyond the academy for those who lack resources and training.

"I feel like there's a gap between the Latinx community and seminary because many pastors have been trained outside the U.S. and their degrees don't necessarily translate to degrees in the U.S.," Bonilla explained. "So, it's a big stumbling block for them to continue on to seminary

studies since their bachelor's degrees or associate degrees don't translate, but they want to do the work of ministry and have access to the resources."

Ultimately, Bonilla's goal is to color voices in the religious academy. "I want to bring in voices that haven't necessarily been part of the conversation in religious education and to see how the Church can respond to the needs, faith stories and practices of communities that live at the margins of the

United Methodist denomination," she said.

Help Bonilla and more scholars like her continue closing the gaps in the religious academy by supporting the Angella P. Current-Felder Women of Color Scholars Program. To give to the program directly, visit gbhem.org/donate4students.

*Jessica Love is the Marketing and Communications Specialist at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.



DYK???

Connecting the dots . . .

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

Sitting in the back pew of our home church, my mother would struggle to keep her five children quiet during worship. We were bribed with pink peppermint candies and allowed to play quiet games. Tic tac toe and connect the dots were two of our favorites. You might remember connect the dots. Drawing a grid of dots on a piece of paper, each player takes a turn drawing a line from one dot to the next. The goal is to prevent your opponent from completing a square while creating as many squares as you can for yourself. Once a square is completed, the box is yours. When all the squares are completed, the player with the most boxes wins the game.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism and son of an Anglican priest, saw the Church of England folding in on itself in the early 18th century. Congregations were only interested in their own wellbeing. Classicism was rampant in England at the time and only the literate, who could dress the part and read the Scriptures, were welcomed into the church. Wesley was disturbed by this trend. He wanted to scatter God's word beyond the pulpit. He wanted to offer hope and care for the physical needs of the masses as part of his Christian witness.

Wesley left the pulpit and went into the streets, devising ways to bring the message of Christ to those outside the church. He wasn't always successful. He failed miserably as a missionary to the colonies in the Americas. But Wesley was determined and he grounded his actions in deep faith. Today dozens of branches of Methodism can be found around the world, all the way from the Salvation Army to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, with United Methodists somewhere in-between.

One of Wesley's strengths was in making connections. Wesley knew how to "connect the dots." He created small groups that helped people form community; he created missions and orphanages and literacy programs and infirmaries. As Methodism spread across the United States in the frontier days; we founded hospitals and universities, addressing the needs of the poor and those on the margins of society.

John Wesley's ability to knit together groups of people through faith and call them into action remains a constant in our DNA as Methodists today.

Today's virtual church, forced upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic, has pushed us back in time to claim the future. We are moving out of our pews and into the world, bringing our faith and our invitation to

discipleship to the masses in a 21st century "virtual" way. When I "connect the dots," I think of the ways in which 352 United Methodist Churches across Northern Illinois are linking with one another to strengthen their communities. Supporting parents as some communities engage in virtual school, strengthening food pantries in light of growing poverty, caring for the homebound who are at the most risk.

As United Methodists, we also connect the dots beyond our community and our conference. We do not always see the results of these connections up close, but as part of a connectional church, we are responding to disasters in our southern and western United States, bringing pandemic support to Africa, and offering education and financial opportunities around the globe.

Can you see the dots being connected and the sense of abundance that is multiplied across Northern Illinois to Haiti, to Africa, to the Philippines, to Eastern Europe?

When we feel isolated in these days of social distancing, give God thanks that the reality is far different – we are connected. The church left the building in the 1750s and built a movement. We are doing it again.

Outdoor and Retreat Ministries News

We are certified compliant for COVID-19 safety best practices.

Family escapes to Geneva Lake!

PTL! (Praise The Lord!) Wesley Woods Retreat Center is now open to FAMILY Retreats 7-days-a-week!

Missed your summer vacation? Take it now and enjoy:

- Fall Colors surrounding Geneva Lake,
- Weekly Farmers' Markets at Lake Geneva and Williams Bay,
- Corn Maze at Pearce Farms,
- In-camp Archery, Prayer Trail, Basketball, Gaga Ball and Volleyball, Croquet, and
- 22-mile shore path surrounding the Geneva Lake.

Direct inquiries to info@lakeretreats.org.

Camp Reynoldswood

While Illinois is not yet allowing overnight, residential camps, Camp Reynoldswood has again partnered with the Dixon YMCA and offered Summer Day Camp. CRICKET has morphed into a Fall Day Camp to assist children and complement the local school district's alternating COVID in-school schedule.

Direct Reynoldswood inquiries to info@reynoldswood.org.

Thank you all for your prayers and support during this challenging year!

APPOINTMENTS September Announcements

Bishop Sally Dyck announces the following clergy appointments for the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church

Tina Shelton (District Superintendent Supply) to South Elgin: Community (1/4 time) (Elgin District). Tina follows Jan Comerford who has retired. Effective September 15.

Timothy Biel, Jr. (Elder) to Elston Avenue (1/4 time) (Chicago Northwestern District) while also serving at Skokie: Central (Chicago Northwestern District).

Erin James Brown (District Superintendent Supply) to Irving Park: Grace (Chicago Northwestern District). Effective August 1.

Steve Pearce (District Superintendent Supply) to Burrill (1/4 time) (Rockford District). Steve follows Brenda Byrne. Effective September 1.

Christine Hoffmeyer (Elder) to retirement. During her ministry in the NIC Christine served Wilmette: Trinity (Associate), Chicago: Irving Park, Westmont: First, Lombard: Faith and Advocate Lutheran General Hospital, North Shore University Health System. Effective December 1, 2020.

Gregory Gross (Deacon) to Care for Real as Executive Director from Chicago Night Ministry. Effective September 8.

Christian Van (Elder) to 346.1 Appointment to another Annual Conference in North Georgia to Pleasant Grove, Dahlonega Georgia.

October Calendar Items

"I Am Her" Women's Leadership Summit

Oct. 8 - 10
Hosted by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. This virtual event is a movement of women coming together to Be Inspired, Be Empowered, and Be Equipped. The keynote speaker will be New York Times best-selling author Nadia Bolz-Weber. For more information and registration, visit gcsr.org.

An Invitation to Teens and Young Adults: Indigenous Peoples Day Celebration

Oct. 12, 1 - 2:30 p.m.
A Virtual Learning, Fellowship and Worship Experience
Zoom video conference co-sponsored by the NIC Anti-Racism Task Force and the Committee on Native American Ministries with music, prayer, devotions, speakers and discussion. Register by visiting umcnic.org/calendar/indigenous-peoples-day-celebration. Space is limited. If you have questions, please contact Rev. Jeremiah Thompson at castiger1@gmail.com or 815-592-3764, or Rev. Dr. Michelle Oberwise Lacock, Co-chair of CONAM, at mickiol@aol.com.

Intentional Discipleship Systems Follow Up

Online presentations are identical on both days.
Oct. 14, 7 - 8:30 p.m. followed by a 30-minute Q/A
Oct. 15, 10 - 11:30 a.m. followed by a 30-minute Q/A

To register, visit umcnic.org/calendar/intentional-discipleship-systems-training. Sponsored by the NIC Office of Congregational Development and Redevelopment.

UMW Annual Zoom Meeting

"Listen: With Fresh Ears and Eyes!"
Oct. 24
Guest speaker: Rev. Danira Parra. Rev. Parra will lead us to action on behalf of women, children and youth.
Register online by Oct. 17 at nic-umw-annual-celebration-2020.chedderup.com. For more information visit, umwnic.org.

Introduction to Coaching

Oct. 29, 9 - 12 p.m and 1:30 - 4 p.m.
Online Webinar Learning
Event with coach Jim Griffith for new, turnaround, or vital churches.
Cost: \$30 for the webinar and The Coaching Manual
Register at umcnic.org/calendar/introduction-to-coaching. Sponsored by the NIC Office of Congregational Development and Redevelopment.

Job Openings

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

Stay Connected

Sign up for the weekly NIC eNews, Appointment Announcements and Sympathy notices. Visit www.umcnic.org and scroll down and click on "Sign up for our Newsletter" to enter your name and email.

How to Contact Us

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

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