

## AC2021 Dates Set - Returns to Virtual Session

By Anne Marie Gerhardt, Dir. of Communications

Continuing to keep the health and safety of clergy and lay members a top priority, the 182nd session of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference will convene again as an all-virtual session from July 16-17, 2021, with Interim Bishop John L. Hopkins presiding. The Annual Conference Committee, which met Feb. 22 led by its new Chair Deborah Dangerfield, is working on a theme and schedule.

Despite the trend of declining COVID-19 cases across Illinois, the future is still uncertain for large events. “We all miss the face-to-face interaction and look forward to the day when we can gather in one place again,” said Rev. Arlene Christopherson, Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Connectional Ministries. “But at this point, the state guidelines still don’t allow large groups to gather and meet, so hosting the Annual Conference virtually is the best option to safely and efficiently do our work.”

Good News TV, which provided production, a secure voting platform and live-streaming services for the 2020 virtual annual conference, will once again help coordinate and host the virtual gathering through a Zoom webinar. Barrington United Methodist Church has again graciously offered its sanctuary for the production space. In-person attendance will be limited to the Bishop, staff and the behind-the-scenes crew.

Since a rise in COVID-19 cases forced the cancellation of the limited in-person 2020 Ordination Service planned for Nov. 13, a new date is set for April 24 at 3 p.m. at Barrington United Methodist Church.

“It is our hope that the improvements we are seeing in COVID-19 infection rates will hold and that we can conduct this service



The 182nd Annual Conference scheduled for July 16-17, 2021, will look similar to last year’s first-ever virtual annual conference held November 2020 and will be held through a Zoom webinar.

safely, with limited participation, and virtual attendees,” said Bishop John Hopkins in a letter to the 2020 class of ordinands. “We will follow the same plan set forth last fall – masks and social distancing, limited guests, and a shortened service. Bishop Sally Dyck will return to co-officiate the service. The service will be live-streamed on the Conference’s YouTube channel and Facebook page.

An ordination service for the 2021 class is scheduled for Oct. 1, likely with limited in-person participation and live-streamed. A fall session to consider the budget and other agenda items will be held Oct. 2 and will be held virtually as well.

The AC committee is still ironing out the dates for legislation submission, Bible study, Clergy Session and worship services.

Stay up to date on news and announcements by visiting [umcnic.org/AC2021](http://umcnic.org/AC2021).

## General Conference postponed another year

By Heather Hahn, UMNS

General Conference organizers announced that the denomination’s top lawmaking assembly — long postponed by the pandemic — must wait to meet another year. The global gathering is now scheduled Aug. 29-Sept. 6, 2022, in Minneapolis.

With the slow rollout of vaccines, continued travel restrictions and limitations of virtual technology, the commission concluded Feb. 20 that a full, 10-day session was not possible this year either in-person or online.

The Commission’s decision was informed by the report of the Technology Study Team appointed to explore the implications of options for accommodating full participation at General Conference, including but not

limited to the possibility of utilizing technology and online voting, in considering whether the meeting should be held virtually. Even planning the one-day virtual meeting comes with limitations, as Simpson told church leaders in earlier meetings.

The coming General Conference has 862 voting delegates — 55.9% come from the U.S., 32% from Africa, 6% from the Philippines, 4.6% from Europe and the remainder from concordat churches that have close ties to The United Methodist Church. At a typical General Conference, bishops from around the globe as well as interpreters and other staff are needed for the proceedings.

At the same time, the Council of Bishops (COB) announced a special

Continued on page 3, see From the Cover: General Conference

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## FROM THE BISHOP: Remembering our United Methodist values

As I start a conversation about our Church, I think it is helpful to begin with basic foundational values. When I was a new bishop in the Minnesota Area, I was working on a list of core values that could

direct our shared ministry and bind us to Christ and each other. During a clergy session, I asked, “What are the values United Methodists live by?” The Rev. Steven Manskar, a John Wesley scholar, responded by examining and taking experts from John Wesley’s, “The Character of a Methodist.”

During Lent, as we move closer to God and one another in preparation for Easter, I encourage you to meditate on these United Methodist values reprinted with permission from Rev. Manskar.

In general, a Methodist is one who . . .

- Has the love of God “shed abroad” or a transformative experience of God’s love in his or her heart by the Holy Spirit. (Romans 5:5)
- “Loves the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” (Luke 10:27)

We believe in rejoicing over the goodness of God.

- God is the joy of the heart and the desire of the soul that is constantly crying out, “Whom have I in heaven but you? There is none upon earth that I desire besides you! My God and my all! You are the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!” (Psalm 73: 25-26)
- We are therefore happy in God, indeed, always happy, as having in us a well of water springing up to everlasting life and overflowing our souls with peace and joy. Perfect love having cast out fear, we rejoice evermore. (1 John 4:18) Whether in ease or pain, whether in sickness or health, whether in life or death, we give thanks from the ground of our hearts to God who orders it for good. Knowing that as every good gift comes from above, so none but good can come from the Father of Lights, into whose hand we have wholly committed our bodies and souls, as into the hands of a faithful Creator.

We believe in the power of prayer.

- For indeed, we pray without ceasing. It is given us always to pray, and not to faint. Our hearts are lifted up to God at all times and in all places. In this we are never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing.
- Consequently, we always exercise our love for God by praying without ceasing, rejoicing always, and in everything giving thanks. This commandment is written in our hearts, “That those who love God, love their brother and sister also.” (1 John 4:20). We also, accordingly, love our neighbors as ourselves. We love every person as our own soul. For we love our enemies. Indeed, we love the evil, the unthankful, and the enemies of God. And if it is not in our power to do good to those that hate us, we pray for them, even though they continue to spurn our love and abuse and persecute us.

We believe in purity of heart . . . in holiness.

- For Methodists, the love of God has purified our hearts from all vengeful passions, envy, malice, and wrath, from every unkind attitude or evil affection. It has cleansed us from pride and arrogance of spirit that lead to contention. For all our desires are for God and in remembrance of God’s name.
- Our one desire is the one design of our life; namely, not to do our own will, but the will of God who sent us. Our one intention at all times and in all things is not to please ourselves but God whom our souls love.

We believe in keeping the commandments of God.

- For as we love God, so we keep his commandments. Not only some, or most of them, but all, from the least to the greatest. To do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven is our daily crown of rejoicing.
- Accordingly, we strive with all our might to keep all the commandments of God. For our obedience is in proportion to our love, the source from which it flows. Therefore, loving God with all our heart, we serve God with all our strength.

We believe in glorifying God.

- By consequence, whatever we do, it is all to the glory

of God. In all our endeavors, we not only aim at this, but actually attain it.

- The customs of the world do not hinder our “running the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 112:1) We know that vice does not lose its nature, no matter how fashionable it becomes. We remember that everyone is to give an account to God. . . . But “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise.” (Phil. 4:8) We think, and speak, and act, glorifying the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in all things.

We believe in doing good . . . for the body and the soul.

- Lastly, as we have time, we do good for all people: to neighbors and strangers, friends, and enemies. We seek to do good to them in every possible way, not only to their bodies, “by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick or the prisoner” (Matthew 25:34), but much more we labor to do good to their souls, according to the ability that God gives us.

We believe in the unity of the church.

- By these values, by these fruits of a living faith, we labor to distinguish ourselves from the unbelieving world, but we earnestly desire to not be distinguished at all from Christians, of whatever denomination, or from any who sincerely follow after what they know they have yet attained. No, “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.” (Matthew 12:50)
- And I implore you brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, that we be in no way divided among ourselves. Is your heart right, as my heart is with yours? I ask no further question. If it is so, give me your hand. For opinions or words, let us not destroy the work of God. Do you love and serve God? It is enough. I give you the right hand of fellowship.

These are the principles and practices of our Church. These are the values of a true Methodist.

### From the Cover: General Conference

one-day General Conference on May 8. The special global gathering has only 12 pieces of legislation before it — all basically intended to help the church function until the full General Conference meets

“When we became aware of the need for a further postponement, we knew that some action needed to be taken in order to free the church to operate and continue to fulfill its current mission until we could gather in person,” said Bishop Cynthia Harvey, who leads the Louisiana Conference as well as the Council of Bishops.

After the online meeting’s adjournment, delegates will have an extended period in which to vote by paper ballot on the 12 legislative items. Those ballots will be mailed in, with results to be announced by July 13.

The agenda for the coming May 8 special General Conference includes legislation to:

- bring the Discipline in line with a recent Judicial Council decision;
- maintain the current denomination’s budget until the full global lawmaking assembly can meet;
- to give the Commission on General Conference and other bodies more flexibility in dealing with delays caused by war, political upheaval, natural disaster, disease outbreak, travel restrictions or other developments.

Crucially, the new legislation would allow bishops planning to retire to do so this year — potentially relieving some strain on the denomination’s finances. The bishops also have set a new timeline that includes special sessions of the jurisdictional conferences to be held virtually in July 2021.

The Episcopal Fund that supports bishops’ work is already financially strapped. The Council of Bishops has recommended delegates not elect any new U.S. bishops until 2024, although some delegates, including the NIC’s, are discussing at least electing some successors for retiring bishops.

The denomination has 24 bishops who plan to step down as soon as possible, including 16 in the U.S. Ultimately, the number of bishops is in the hands of delegates.

Not on the agenda is any proposal to split the denomination, including the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation.

Read the COB’s full letter, the legislation and more information at [unitedmethodistbishops.org](http://unitedmethodistbishops.org).

# NIC Strategic Goals: Our progress

Marking the 18-month point since the Annual Conference passed three strategic goals in June 2019 aimed at ending racism, growing disciples and building vital churches, the Annual Conference Shepherding Team's (ACST) task forces and District Shepherding Teams have been busy working aligning ministries and programs with the goals. During a report at the ACST's January meeting, each task force gave a brief summary of what's been happening.



**Goal: To Live Out the Conviction that Racism is Incompatible with Christian Teaching**

The Anti-Racism Task Force has an aggressive agenda for 2021, with major initiatives including working on an extension of the Clergy Peer Reflection & Engagement Series before moving to the official rollout. Justice Generation held a successful Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Virtual Celebration and is also planning individual and group projects, along with planning a virtual mission trip to Montgomery, Ala. and Tulsa, Okla. They are currently piloting The Ephesus Project, a church exchange program focused on race awareness and engagement, between Harvey: Transformation Community UMC (a black church) and Naperville: Community UMC (a predominantly white church). Champion Team members have formed an Anti-Racism Training Committee led by Dr. Richard Guzman and overseen by Rev. Matthew Krings to research, review, evaluate and create anti-racism training for the conference.

Visit [umcnic.org/antiracism](http://umcnic.org/antiracism) to learn more about the work of the Anti-Racism Task Force.



**Goal: To Grow and Reach New Disciples of Jesus Christ**

The Discipleship Task Force is committed to "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." They have tweaked our SMART goals to reflect their goals for 2021. They are continuing their Jumpstart videos with youth-focused engagement ideas and resources for Senior Pastors and Youth Leaders to continue at least through the 2nd quarter. They are also planning a Youth Leader Symposium. A trained Resource Team for each district stands by to support churches that want to develop and maintain an Intentional Discipleship System. The NIC Prayer Network continues their commitment to undergird the NIC in prayer through monthly prayer meetings and sharing devotional resources written by lay and clergy at [umcnic.org/prayernetwork](http://umcnic.org/prayernetwork). They have recently created a logo (see above) and will be rolling out a webpage in mid-March.



**Goal: To increase the Number of Highly Vital Congregations**

The Vital Congregations Task Force has launched a pilot program with 17 churches across the conference with representation in every district. Congregations will work with leadership from Epicenter led by Paul Nixon over the next two years in assessment, planning and implementation toward vital ministries. The strategic team has also perfected their tool for measuring the vitality of churches based on spiritual, financial, worship and missional factors. The analysis of church vitality will be rolled out to congregations along with tools and support to move the church to a more vital ministry throughout 2021. Meanwhile, coaching options and trainings opportunities are underway in partnership with the Office of Congregational Development and Redevelopment.



## Youth Symposium focuses on discipleship

ATTENTION! Are you someone who works with youth? Are you passionate about discipleship? Do you wish to connect with others like you? Then please join us (virtually) on **Saturday, May 1, from 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.** for our first NIC youth leader symposium, "Building coNEXTion": Building up young disciples by connecting a community of disciple-makers.

Sponsored by the NIC Discipleship Task Force this virtual gathering of youth ministers and leaders is a great opportunity to connect and build relationships with other youth workers across our annual conference!

Details on registration and other information coming soon! Stay tuned to upcoming eNews articles!

## Transition beginning for new districts

NIC District Superintendents have already started the transition process from six to five districts that will go into effect July 1, 2021. Each of the new five districts will have a transition team with laity and clergy and will look different in each district. District Superintendents have already started reaching out to the District Committees on Ordained Ministry, United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men leaders, as well as churches and pastors who they will be overseeing. There will more ways to get to know each other in the next few months.

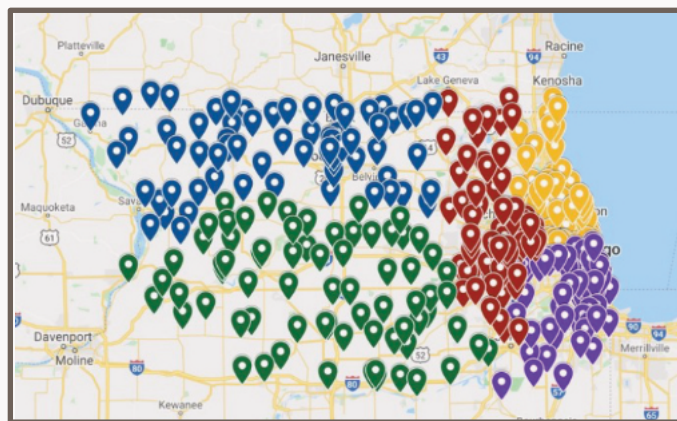
### Get to Know your District Name

The five new District names are Prairie North, Prairie Central, Prairie South, Lake North and Lake South. The NIC Cabinet researched and discerned different factors when choosing the names. They looked at other conferences and found many identify their districts with some geographical maker.

"We debated various ideas such as names of United Methodist historic figures, cities, rivers and other landmarks and tested them all for feedback," said Rev. Arlene Christopherson, Assistant to the Bishop and Dir. of Connectional Ministries. "Being that Illinois is the 'prairie state' and the eastern part of the conference is on the shores of one of the Great Lakes, we pinned down the names 'prairie' and 'lake'. Through our research, we determined geographical identity was the greatest value so

people in mind's eye could picture locations."

While the Cabinet says the names honor our land and water that bring us life, we can't forget our Native American/Indigenous forbearers who lived on Illinois' prairies for centuries upon centuries.



**New redistricting map with colors coded by district. Blue - Prairie North, Green - Prairie South, - Red - Prairie Central, Yellow - Lake North, Purple - Lake South**

NIC Committee on Native American Ministries Co-Chair Michelle Oberwsie Lacock reminds us of the words of Black Hawk (Mahkate:wi-mesi-ke:hke:hkwa)-Sauk Nation, when he said, "We thank the Great Spirit for all

the benefits He has conferred upon us. For myself, I never take a drink of water from a spring without being mindful of His goodness" (Indian Spirit-edited by Michael Fitzgerald, pg. 43, 2003 World Wisdom, Bloomington, Indiana).

Oberwsie Lacock says this is a good educational opportunity to remember the Conference's commitment to the Acts of Repentance toward Healing Relationships with Indigenous Peoples, which calls for conversation and learning the history of Native American tribes who lived on the land we call the Northern Illinois Conference.

"Taking moments to educate about the history of our prairie lands and lakes and what was done in the name of 'progress' could have a positive impact and honor Native Americans," said Oberwsie Lacock. "Let us remember the Great Spirit's goodness of the beautiful prairie and water that gives us sustenance and all the native nations that lived and still live in northern Illinois."

As we move into this new identity for our district remapping, as a conference let us be proud to bring awareness of the past into the work of our future.

Visit [umcnic.org/news/redistricting-announcement](http://umcnic.org/news/redistricting-announcement) to learn more about the redistricting plans and to find your church's district.

# LOCAL CHURCH NEWS

## Youth volunteers enjoy winter fun break By Diane Strzelecki, NIC Communications Specialist



Youth from Warren and Elizabeth UMC enjoyed some winter fun sledding as a “thank you” for their volunteerism the past year.



The church youth group helped with several ministries including working at the Rockford and Galena food distribution centers.

On February 20, Pastor Roger Bronkema and families from Warren and Elizabeth UMC traveled to the Lake Carroll snow tubing hill in Lanark, Ill., for a day of fun. The trip was a “thank you” to the youth who helped Bronkema in ministry throughout 2020. Amid bright sunshine and crisp blue skies, about 25 youth and adults grabbed inner tubes and let gravity speed them along down the hill.

“This trip was kind of a reward to them for being so good about helping out last year,” Bronkema said. “These kids helped me with our Caring Hands Ministry, teacher back-to-school luncheons and working at the Rockford and Galena food distribution sites. I thought, ‘well I asked them to do all this serving, we can go to something fun!’”

During 2020, Bronkema sought out and seized on opportunities to gather youth from both churches to help their community. “Wherever I saw something coming up and help was needed, I thought it would be great to get the kids together, to mask up and go,” he said.

Keith Hess took his two daughters Hadley (14) and Harper (11) on the tubing trip, and according to his wife Tonia, they had a great time. “It’s nice for the kids and families to be able to get away for a couple of hours and have a little fun,” she said.

The Hess family developed the Caring Hands Ministry with Bronkema in 2020 as a way to care for seniors in their community, and about 5 to 6 youth were consistently involved.

“As United Methodists, we always talk about social justice, we want to do what Jesus wants us to do, ‘care for widows and orphans’, and this grew out of a need we

saw in the community,” Bronkema said. “Some of our elderly neighbors still living at home would have trouble getting things done, like cleaning up the yard, cleaning windows. We would hear of someone needing help and get a group together to do projects for them.” With more complicated projects – they actually built a deck at one house – Bronkema says a skilled member of the congregation assisted.

According to Hess, Caring Hands allowed her daughters to learn new skills while helping others. “So many people go through changes in their lives and struggle to keep their surroundings safe,” she said. “We have built ramps, cleaned up yards, helped make a home handicap accessible and more. It’s a great way to teach our children to look out for their neighbors and to always help others.”

Bronkema also took the youth serve at drive-through food distribution sites in Rockford and Galena. “We’d make a day of it: a lot of times they were loading boxes of food in trunks of cars from 11 to one o’clock,” he said. “The first one we did was in July in Rockford and there must have been 1,000 families that went through that day.”

Youth also helped with back-to-school luncheon for teachers at Warren Elementary and the River Ridge Middle School, which is the church’s annual way of thanking teachers for their efforts. Prepackaged lunches were served by masked and gloved youth to start the new school year.

Despite the pandemic, Bronkema and Warren and Elizabeth UMC youth and families found a way to serve together and lift others up. And on a sunny Saturday in February, they were all smiles in the snow.

## Church opens doors to vaccination clinic By Anne Marie Gerhardt, NIC Dir. of Communications



Rev. Marilyn Nolan, senior pastor at Lanark UMC, receives her first dose of the COVID-19 Moderna vaccine. The church hosted a vaccination clinic for the Carroll County Health Department on Feb. 17.

Like many people eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, Rev. Marilyn Nolan, senior pastor at Lanark UMC, went on a search to find an appointment to get her shot. Surprisingly, the search turned into a community outreach.

“Since I was in the 65-and-older category, I called the local Carroll County Health department to make an appointment and was told I was number 500 on a long waitlist,” said Nolan, who remembers being a bit discouraged. “But while on the phone, I asked the administrator if the county needed sites to distribute the vaccine and offered our church, taking a suggestion from one of our members,” Nolan shared that the church building had two fairly large, ground-level rooms, nearby restrooms, and a handicap accessible entrance. The administrator appeared to like the space options and said she would get back to her.

Within a few days, Nolan was giving county health department officials a tour of the church building, and a clinic date was set for Feb. 17.

“The church reached out to us and the space was ideal for our needs,” said Dawn Holland, Assistant Administrator for the Carroll County Health Department, who added this was a community effort. “We were partnering with the Freeport Health Network to administer the vaccine and Lanark was close and a good location for them as well.”

Holland says like many other counties, the Carroll County Health Department has received a very limited supply of COVID-19 vaccine from the state and the clinic

at Lanark was the largest they’ve been able to hold. “We typically receive 100-200 doses weekly and get very little advance notice. Once we receive enough, we schedule a clinic and start calling from the top of our waiting list,” said Holland. “At the clinic at Lanark UMC we were able to vaccinate 400 people, the most so far at one time.” Those vaccinated will return in March for the second dose. All appointments were scheduled and walk-ins were not accepted, eliminating long lines.

“Everything ran so smoothly and we only had to set up some tables and chairs,” said Nolan, who was able to get her shot that day along with her husband. “The shot wasn’t bad at all and I’m thankful we were able to offer our space and be in ministry to care and help keep people safe. That’s what the church should be doing – reaching out to the community and be welcoming, open and available.”

Lanark UMC member Marilyn Lamoreux was also fortunate to get an appointment and grateful her church hosted the clinic.

“I signed up through Carroll County and wanted to get the vaccine so I would be able to visit my mother who is 100 and living in an assisted living facility,” said Lamoreux, who along with a few other women in the church have been at the forefront of helping people stay safe during the pandemic by making hundreds of face masks for distribution. “I always knew once the vaccine was developed that I would get it. I think it’s really important to help eliminate transmission, and the more people who get it the better off we all will be.”

## Chicago churches come together in common mission By Anne Marie Gerhardt, Dir. of Communications



Rev. Kelli Knight (left) from Holy Covenant UMC on Chicago's North Side brings donations to Rev. Adonna Reid (right) from South Shore UMC on Chicago's South Side as an outreach and shared giving through the UM connection.



Holy Covenant reported items from several packages meant for its feeding program were stolen off the front steps of the church on Feb. 9.

A thief may have stolen packages from the front steps of Holy Covenant UMC in Chicago, but that didn't stop the church's ministry of helping feed the homeless.

On Feb. 9, the church discovered that several Amazon boxes filled with packaged food and gloves, winter hats and face masks meant for its Dignity Diners program, which serves a weekly warm three-course meal to 50 people on average, were opened, rummaged through and pilfered.

Holy Covenant Senior Pastor Rev. Kelli Knight doesn't look as the church as a victim of a crime, but they are using the experience as a way to raise social justice awareness. "We typically leave food on the steps of the church on Tuesdays for those who need it so it's normal for people to pick things up," Knight said. "They left the empty boxes, and you could tell by what was taken and left behind that people were taking what they needed."

The so-called porch package theft made NBC 5 Chicago evening news and shortly after the story aired, donations began pouring in, including cases of Gatorade from the Chicago Cubs, boxes of snacks and prepackaged food, fleece blankets, and a \$3,000 check from an Aurora man who saw the story.

"News coverage of this kind of theft is more frequent when it happens in (white, affluent) neighborhoods like our Lincoln Park neighborhood, even though packages are stolen all across the city," said Knight. "The church's anti-racism committee (working on the NIC's anti-racism goal) and the Dignity Diner committee decided when the donations came in that we would like to share them with a congregation with a similar ministry and to raise awareness of racial disparities."

Chicago Northwestern District Superintendent Rev. Brittany Isaac and the Cabinet recommended several churches, including South Shore UMC on Chicago's South Side, which had been operating a food pantry. Holy

Covenant gave South Shore a portion of the food and \$500. "We don't consider this donation as charity but justice, and being united in mission," said Knight.

While South Shore's food pantry is currently closed for logistical reasons during the pandemic, Senior Pastor Rev. Adonna Reid said she can use the donations for hospitality and outreach at different community events.

"We are so appreciative of the generous donation from God through Rev. Kelli Knight and Holy Covenant UMC," said Reid. "It is a manifestation of the strength of our connection as brothers and sisters in Christ, in general, and United Methodists, in particular. The need is great across the city and we can do more when we work together to address the needs of the most vulnerable among us."

For nearly 30 years, Holy Covenant's Dignity Diner has been feeding the hungry and homeless, and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the church has seen the need increase.

"Because of the pandemic, shelters are closed, restaurants are closed and the need for hot meal programs is really important right now," said Knight. "We've seen new faces coming to Dignity Diner. Many are experiencing homelessness for first time and they're young people – those in their 30's who lost their job and can't pay rent."

After a flood damaged the basement in 2014, the church has been operating Dignity Diner without a kitchen and volunteers have been preparing and serving to-go meals curbside. The goal is to rebuild the kitchen, possibly put in showers and laundry facilities in the basement and work towards becoming an emergency daytime shelter.

"That's our dream," Knight said. "We hope to be open to serve clients by the fall and continue to be the church where people in the community know they can come and be fed."

Visit [holycovenantumc.org/dignity-diner](http://holycovenantumc.org/dignity-diner) for more information on Dignity Diners and how you can help.

## Aurora District provides video discipleship curriculum



In The United Methodist Church, we celebrate two sacraments: baptism and communion. In these sacraments we experience outward, tangible signs, of inward grace; of God permeating unconditional love in and through our lives.

When is the last time you discussed your baptism or contemplated its impact on your life? If you're not baptized, have you ever wanted to know more about what baptism means? 5 Cups of Water is a five-week discipleship curriculum developed by several clergy and laity leaders in the Aurora District that invites you to engage with others in

meaningful conversations about baptism and its impact on our lives as individuals and as a community: the body of Christ here on earth.

Videos, one for each week of a five-week small group experience, accompanied by questions, are available on the NIC website at [umcnic.org/news/five-cups-resources](http://umcnic.org/news/five-cups-resources). All are welcome to use these materials. The creators of this curriculum hope these materials remind you of the grace poured out upon each in baptism and nurture you on your faith journey!

## Vaccine (continued from page 4)



While not every church can serve as a vaccination clinic, leaders can take an active role in helping church members and the community find the vaccine and make their decisions.

The state of Illinois is administering on average 69,000 vaccine doses daily, which falls behind other state rollout efforts. This can make finding an appointment difficult and frustrating. Rev. Arlene Christopherson, Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Connectional Ministries, received her two doses of the Pfizer vaccine through a community program launched by Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. By stepping up to be in the first group vaccinated by Rush, faith and community leaders were asked to testify to the experience and encourage others to follow their example.

"I took my shot and I can report that while I experienced a sore arm and a few joint aches after the first dose, overall,

the process was smooth," said Christopherson. "Many counties are now offering the vaccine to clergy as part of the Phase 1b rollout, and many other designated groups are now eligible to be vaccinated."

Christopherson says if you're looking for information, go to your county health department website for local information and sign up for alerts. Rev. Nolan said if your church would like to host a clinic, contact the local health department, and it doesn't hurt to offer.

"The people who came to our clinic were hopeful and happy to get the process started," said Nolan. "We are grateful we were able to give that opportunity to those 400 people who got their shot at our church."

To find more information on the vaccine, including locations and FAQs, visit [coronavirus.illinois.gov](http://coronavirus.illinois.gov).

LAITY CONVOCATION 2021

## The Other Side

Making our churches vital in a post-pandemic world



Recording available at [umcnic.org/laity](https://umcnic.org/laity)

Northern Illinois Conference  
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Laity Convocation recording available online

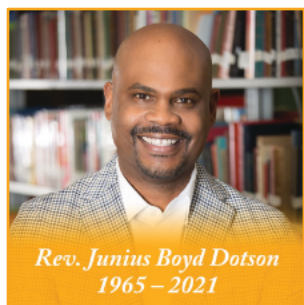
More than 300 people attended the first virtual Laity Convocation, “The Other Side: Making Churches Vital in a Post-Pandemic World,” held as a Zoom webinar on Feb. 13, 2021. The session focused on the NIC’s strategic goals of ending racism, growing and reaching new disciples, and building vital congregations. The three speakers included Rev. Sue Nilson Kibbey on communal prayer, Rev. Adam Hamilton on helping people grow in faith, and Rev. Dr. F. Douglas Powe on reaching out to our neighbors.

The NIC Board of Laity hopes the event energized churches to work on anti-racism, discipleship and outreach. “The ‘Other Side’ of living in the post-

pandemic world will be different, but the things we learned during Laity Convocation will be very relevant for each of us as we move forward together,” said NIC Co-Lay Leader Mark Manzi.

The Board of Laity is also grateful for all those who donated to the special offering to help fight hunger. More than a \$1,000 was collected to support three northern Illinois area food banks.

If you missed the event, a recording is available in two parts at [umcnic.org/laity](https://umcnic.org/laity). The Board of Laity hopes church leaders will download and share the segments to use as a great resource for group studies, discussions or trainings in each church.



## Remembering Discipleship Ministries’ General Secretary

By Heather Hahn, UMNS

The Rev. Junius B. Dotson, the top executive of Discipleship Ministries, died late Feb. 24 surrounded by family, less than a month after announcing his battle with pancreatic cancer. He was 55. His unexpected death

brought together United Methodists of varied theological views in an outpouring of grief and love for a leader whose ministry touched lives across the denomination.

“He had an indelible way of pulling leaders to their full potential,” said longtime friend Toska Medlock Lee, who has known him since they were undergraduates at the University of Texas at Arlington. Lee organized prayers for Dotson during his illness. United Methodists around the world signed up to pray. “His other legacy is his ability to see a hopeful future for our denomination.”

Dotson held multiple denominational leadership roles in addition to helping Discipleship Ministries since July 2016.

He also was one of 16 church leaders who negotiated the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation, the widely endorsed proposal that seeks to resolve the longtime United Methodist debate over homosexuality through a denominational split. As part of the negotiations, Dotson represented multiple centrist advocacy groups that seek greater freedom in church policies related to same-sex weddings and gay ordination.

The protocol needs the approval of General Conference to go forward, but the legislative assembly is now postponed until 2022.

In the Northern Illinois Conference, Dotson most recently led three online Bible studies for the 2020 Annual Conference, was the keynote speaker at the 2018 Laity Convocation, and was a regular speaker for the Institute for Congregational Development and traveled with the group to South Korea in 2019. Leaders say he will be truly missed.

“He had an amazing spirit and engaging presence and passion when it came to encouraging people to ‘remember the why’ and to ‘see all the people,’” said Bishop Sally Dyck, who retired from the NIC December 2020. “He will be greatly missed in the church, especially during these uncertain times because he always kept focus on our mission. He assured NIC that our three strategic goals are exactly right for these times and to hold fast to them.”

The NIC Board of Laity also expressed their deep sadness of the passing of Rev. Dotson. “We have lost a good friend,” said NIC Co-Lay leader Mark Manzi. “His strong voice for making Disciples has been heard not only across our conference, but throughout our denomination. Let his passionate guidance continue to encourage us now and into the future.”

Before coming to Discipleship Ministries, Dotson was both a church planter and a megachurch pastor. He planted Genesis United Methodist Church in California’s Silicon Valley in 1996, four years after his ordination, and

saw it grow to nearly 500 members. At the time, the area saw plenty of technology startups, and Dotson saw church as “a spiritual startup.” He later was senior pastor of 3,500-member Saint Mark United Methodist Church in Wichita, Kansas, for 14 years. While at Saint Mark, he expanded the church into a multi-campus ministry.

In his time at Discipleship Ministries, he led the agency’s restructuring. He also initiated its “See All the People” initiative to help churches — as the nursery rhyme says — see the people in their communities and make world-transforming disciples of Jesus Christ. In promoting the initiative, he has been a frequent speaker at annual conference sessions around the denomination.

Dotson told Discipleship Ministries staff Jan. 28 that he was battling pancreatic cancer. He said he first learned something was wrong with his health earlier in January when searing pain in his back and stomach sent him to the emergency room. Doctors informed him — and tests confirmed — that he had stage 4 pancreatic cancer with metastasis to the liver. He said he hoped to use his experience to raise awareness of how pancreatic cancer especially afflicts African Americans.

Council of Bishops President Cynthia Fierro Harvey said Dotson will have a long legacy. “His passion for justice and full inclusion impacted the life of the UMC as he made his voice clearly heard and known in every place he served,” she said. View the March 6 Memorial Service at [UMCDiscipleship.org/Junius](https://UMCDiscipleship.org/Junius).

Mission Links: Living the Beatitudes  
A Call to Action and Connection

Mission Giving Opportunities  
2021-2024 Advance Projects and  
Connectional Giving

Northern Illinois Conference  
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Rainbow Covenant book revamp moves connectional giving into the future

By Diane Strzelecki, NIC Communications Specialist

The Conference Board of Global Ministries (CBGM) announces the release of a new conference mission-giving book called “Mission Links: Living the Beatitudes” which replaces the Rainbow Covenant book. Mission Links is the product of more than 12 months of prayerful, reflective work for the committee, which sought to update and refresh the book’s design and content while linking connectional giving to scripture. Mission Links is scheduled for release in digital format mid-March.

Jesus’ blessings during his Sermon on the Mount as recounted in Matthew 5, known as the beatitudes, guided the new book’s organization and structure. In verses 1-12, Jesus offers a description of the various forms human goodness can take within the eight categories of the beatitudes.

The projects and ministries described in Mission Links are matched with one or more beatitudes that allow the church to “advance” the cause of Christ and work for the public good. CBGM developed icons representing the beatitude

“categories” and tagged each project or ministry with one or more icons to highlight its connection to Jesus’ blessings. Committee members were assigned projects or ministries to contact for updates and media to help tell their story.

While the committee revamped the booklet’s look and feel, they note that NIC’s commitment to global and local projects and people remains the same. “The name and set-up are different, but we have kept those missions that are still in operation,” said Kathy Carey, CBGM member. “Hopefully, this new format will draw attention to the appropriate mission the church or individuals want to support.”

Rev. Shirley Pulgar-Hughes, Conference Secretary on Global Ministries, is enthusiastic about the new book. “The NIC Board of Global Ministries, passionate about its mission, has been wonderfully creative and busy, envisioning and reimagining our Connectional Giving Book, Rainbow Covenant,” she said. “Through months of hard work we have brought into fruition a new format that

Continued on page 7, see Rainbow

# Thank You 100% Churches

In 2020, 152 churches paid 100% of their apportionments and 54 went above and beyond giving to Rainbow Covenant. While numbers are down slightly from 2019, the conference is grateful for the generous giving especially during the unprecedented times during the pandemic.

Algonquin: Christ	Chicago: Indo Pak	Evergreen Park:	Morris: First	River Forest	Sugar Grove
Alsip: Christ	Chicago: Ingleside	First	Morrison	Riverside	Sycamore
Apple River	Whitfield	Fair Haven	Mount Carroll	Rochelle	Tampico
Argo Fay	Chicago: Irving	Fenton	Mount Hope	Rockford:	Thomson
Arlington Heights:	Park	Forreston	Mount Morris:	Aldersgate	Triumph
First	Chicago: Lincoln	Fox River Grove:	Disciples	Rockford: Beth	Urban Village
Arlington Heights:	Chicago: Parish of	Community	Mount Prospect:	Eden	Warren
Incarnation	the Holy Covenant	Freeport: Faith	Sam Mool Korean	Rockford:	Waterman
Bensenville: First	Chicago:	Freeport: Harmony	Naperville:	Centennial	Wauconda:
Blaine	Resurrection	Galena	Community	Multicultural	Federated Church
Bolingbrook:	Chicago: South	German Valley	New Lenox	Rockford: Evans	Waukegan: First
Crossroads of Faith	Shore	Green Garden	New Life Church	Rockford: Grace	West Chicago: First
Brookfield	Chicago:	Hampshire: Zion	Northbrook	Rockton	Western Springs
Compassion	Southlawn	Hanover	Norway	Roscoe	Wheaton: Gary
Brookville	Chicago: Wesley	Harding	Oak Park: St.	Roselle	Wilton Center
Buffalo Grove:	Cicero: Wesley	Harmon	John's	Savanna: First	Federated Church
Kingswood	Coleta	Harvey:	Orland Park: Faith	Scales Mound	Winfield:
Burlington	Compton	Transformation	Oswego: Good	Schaumburg: Our	Community
Carol Stream: St.	Dakota Rock Grove	Community	Shepherd	Saviour's	Winfield: South
Andrew	Davis Junction	Hinckley: First	Ottawa: First	Seneca: First	Asian
Cary	DeKalb: First	Hinsdale	Park Ridge: First	Sheridan	Wood Dale:
Chana	Des Plaines: First	Hunter	Paw Paw	Shirland	Community
Chicago: Adalberto	Des Plaines: Neuvo	Ingleside	Plano	St. Charles: Baker	Church
Memorial	Amanecer	Joliet: Grace	Plattville	Sterling: First	Zion: Memorial
Chicago: Berry	Downers Grove:	Joliet: Hope	Princeton: First	Sterling: Wesley	
Memorial	First	Kaneville	Red Oak	Steward	
Chicago: Chicago	Earlville	Kingston	Reynolds	Stockton: Wesley	
Lawn	Elgin: First	Lanark			
Chicago: Church of	Elgin: Journey of	Leaf River			
3 Crosses	Hope	Leland			
Chicago: Clair	Elk Grove: Prince of	Lemont			
Christian	Peace	Leon			
Chicago: El	Elmhurst: Christ	Libertyville			
Redentor/	Esmond	Lisle: Faith			
Redeemer of	Evanston:	Lockport: First			
Calvary	Emmanuel	Lombard: First			
Chicago: Emanuel	Evanston: First	Malden			
Chicago:	Evanston:	Maple Park: Grace			
Englewood/Rust	Hemenway	Mendota: First			
Chicago: First	Evanston:	Millbrook			
(Temple)	Sherman	Milledgeville			

## Top 10 of Rainbow Covenant Givers:

Libertyville	\$22,000.00
Arlington Heights: First	\$15,432.26
Hinsdale	\$13,125.00
Schaumburg: Our Saviour's	\$8,452.00
Freeport: Faith	\$8,430.00
Naperville: Community	\$8,316.93
Downers Grove: First	\$8,212.09
Sterling: Wesley	\$5,903.49
Oswego: Good Shepherd	\$5,419.45
St. Charles: Baker	\$5,100.00



## Kids Above All operating camp to help kids impacted by homicide

In the Chicagoland area, children and young people—especially from black and brown communities—are dying at unprecedented rates from violence, and Illinois is ranked in the top 10 nationally for death rates related to homicide, per the Center for Disease Control (CDC). The impact on a child from a family member's death due to homicide is devastating and life-altering.

That's why Kids Above All (formerly ChildServ) and the Sheilah A. Doyle Foundation have officially come together to operate Camp Sheilah, a grief camp specifically tailored to help youth ages 7-17 cope with the loss of family member to homicide.

"The pain and loss of the young people who attend Camp Sheilah changed their lives forever," said Kids Above All President and CEO Dan Kotowski. "The partnership between Kids Above All and the Sheilah A. Doyle Foundation ensures these youth begin the very difficult process of healing from the trauma they've endured. For Kids Above All, this is also an opportunity to step up and stand up for the safety and well-being of all children in every community in and around Chicago."

Sheilah A. Doyle Foundation's Founder, Kevin Doyle, lost his mother to homicide when he was 17-years-old. In 2009, he created the Sheilah A. Doyle Foundation in honor of her and the first Camp Sheilah took place in September of 2011.

"It's hard for people that haven't gone through this to understand what it's about," said Kevin Doyle. "When you go through it, you feel very alone. We bring kids and families together so they know they're not alone in this grief journey and that what has happened to them does not define their path forward. Partnering with such a dedicated and empowering organization like Kids Above All will allow Camp Sheilah to grow and thrive and we know they will take care of these kids, and always put them first."

Due to restrictions from COVID-19, last year's camp took place virtually in September. Activities included s'mores, writing exercises, art projects, grief circles and a memorial celebration. Attendees will leave camp equipped with tools to continue to work through their loss, as they move toward a brighter future. Plans for camp for 2021 are still in the planning stages with hopes of an in-person gathering.

"We inspire courage in our campers by challenging them to do what they would normally be afraid to do. These skills help in situations that trigger their loss, such as a monumental moment or life event that their loved one isn't going to be present for. We help them learn how to navigate these situations and carry on in their journey," said Kids Above All Chief Clinical Operating Officer and Camp Sheilah Director Jeri Laureano. "Everyone's journey will be different and there's no rule or treatment that will get you over your grief quickly. Kids who have lost a family member never get over their grief, but we can help them get past it and live with it. If anything, this is a life lesson."

For more information, visit [kidsaboveall.org](http://kidsaboveall.org) or [sadfund.org](http://sadfund.org).

## Rainbow (continued from page 6)

will enable the achievement of the vision and mission of Global Ministries with greater impact as we allow local churches to navigate successfully through a simpler book format."

David Quinn, NIC Apportionments Administrator, notes that the book's organization of projects under "Global Advances," "US-Based" and "NIC Districts" allows churches or individuals to easily and quickly select projects that resonate with them and support the church over and beyond their apportionments.

"The Rainbow Covenant format has done an amazing job at ensuring that projects received adequate support during a time when the world needed it most," Quinn said. "As much as we loved Rainbow Covenant and its color bands, it was time to refresh the look while looking ahead."

Carey agrees that the new format is designed to support thoughtful connectional giving. "I think it makes it easier both for churches and individual UMC members who like to support a mission, maybe for an honorarium or in memory of someone," she said.

Even with the revamp, Quinn says that the process for

donations remains the same. The appropriate fund number(s) should be noted in the check memo line and checks should be sent to PO Box 5656, Carol Stream IL 60197-5646. "Mission Giving will make it more transparent to local churches to see where their money is going," Quinn added.

Mission Links is designed to educate local church congregations, mission committees or small groups about apportioned funds through connectional giving, help them give to Advances in a specific category, and deepen their knowledge of the missionaries our Annual Conference supports.

CBGM members hope that Mission Links will deepen relationships between churches and the causes they support. There is also an opportunity to structure giving around the conference goals, as many projects or ministries have an underlying commitment to growing and reaching new disciples of Jesus Christ, living out the conviction that racism is incompatible with Christian teaching, and increasing the number of highly vital congregations.

Churches may use the new resource in many ways:

reflecting on the beatitudes and relating them to connectional giving, "visiting" the country or city where a project or ministry "lives," developing giving themes around the three conference goals, highlighting the impact of UMC members around the world and around the block, and much more.

"This is an amazing chance for churches to step up and support projects that will unite the Methodist faith in supporting those who need us," Quinn said.

Pulgar-Hughes looks forward to the publication of the digital resource. "As local churches make a commitment to support local, regional and international mission projects, the new book will refresh the church's mission mindset and ongoing ministry in the forthcoming post-pandemic context," she said.

Mission Links will be hosted both in digital magazine format and as an accessible PDF at [umcnic.org/missionlinks](http://umcnic.org/missionlinks). Churches can link their website, social media and email campaigns to the book. Look for the rollout announcement in the weekly NIC eNews, District eNews and at [umcnic.org/news](http://umcnic.org/news) in mid to late March.

*\*CBGM member Kathy Carey contributed this article.*

DYK???

# Safe Sanctuaries

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



*“Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child. . . welcomes me.” (Matthew 18:5 NRSV)*

Safe Sanctuaries author and church consultant Rev. Joy Thornburg Melton said, “Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.”

During the first quarter of 2021, the Northern Illinois Conference Insurance Board, under the leadership of Dwayne Jackson, Director of Risk Management and Ministry Protection, has undertaken the mission of ensuring that every church in the Northern Illinois Conference has a process of screening and training for church volunteers who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults. Thank you to all those churches who have filled out the survey and take this responsibility seriously.

Our annual conference has long been a champion of providing safe space for those who participate in our ministries. In the early 1990s, we began training clergy around concerns of sexual harassment and misconduct, and we began talking about the protection of children and youth. By the 2000s, we passed legislation mandating that churches establish policies, background checks and training for volunteers working with our voiceless and vulnerable. We responded to a growing reality that even

in places considered sacred and safe, bad things can happen.

As a denomination, we have called this work “Safe Sanctuaries.” It is the work of making our programs, outreach, ministries and witness safe for those who are powerless or voiceless.

Our call as the church is to care for all of God’s creation: our environment, our souls and those who have no voice for themselves. We do this as a sacred trust, remembering the mantra “Do no harm.”

We have learned a great deal in the ensuing decades. We know that often the abuser is someone we would inherently trust. We know that abuse takes on many forms, some very subtle but equally damaging. We know that our instinct is to be trusting when we are in the safe environment of the church.

The first time my wallet was stolen out of my church office or when I saw someone hot-wire a car after worship in the church parking lot, or when I was held up at knifepoint in a church fellowship hall, I was reminded that churches—our buildings, our sanctuaries—are not exempt from harm.

Even during this virtual era when we long to be together in person, we must be vigilant and protective of those who enter our ministries with trust and assume a

sense of security while we gather online. Our lack of physical contact has not diminished the cautions we must exercise with social media to protect those who cannot protect themselves. Our excitement at coming back together must also be balanced with our need to be “safe sanctuaries.”

Over the years we have grown wiser about the ways in which we must be alert to harm, but ways of abusing have also grown more complicated. Assuring safety is work we cannot do casually or on our own. A few years ago, the NIC Safe Sanctuaries Task Force entered a relationship with “Safe Gatherings” an agency that provides training and screening for church leaders and volunteers (safegatherings.com). In the last five years, we have had more than 700 volunteers screened and trained through Safe Gatherings. We know that volunteers come and go and training needs to be revised often, renewed. We cannot be complacent.

If your church needs a partner in creating safe spaces or you need to refresh your work in caring for the vulnerable, I encourage you to take your first steps today and be part of the network of congregations demonstrating their love for others in this concrete work ensuring that the church environment is a safe place for all.

## February 2021 Appointments

Bishop John Hopkins announces the following clergy appointments for the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church, effective July 1, 2021 (unless otherwise noted):

**Becky Nicol** (Elder) to retirement from Geneva (Assoc. Part-time) (Aurora District). Becky was ordained a provisional member in 2012 and full Elder in 2014. During her ministry she served at Manhattan (interim), Burlington and Geneva. Effective March 1.

**Adrienne Stricker** (Deacon) to Transitional Leave from the Connectional Table. Effective January 1.

**Rob Hamilton** (Elder) to Geneva (Lead Pastor) (Aurora District) from Rochelle (DeKalb District). Rob follows Rich Darr who is retiring. Effective July 1.

**Carolyn Lukasick** (Elder) to Rockton (Rockford District) from Ottawa: Epworth (DeKalb District). Carolyn follows Howie Snyder (from another denomination) as he accepts a church call in Colorado. Roland Hayag is serving as the interim until July 1.

**Katherine Paisley** (Elder) to Rochelle (DeKalb District) from Oak Park: First (Chicago Northwestern District). Katherine follows Rob Hamilton who is appointed to Geneva (Aurora District).

**Caitlyn Nesbit** (Elder) to Palos Heights: First and Evergreen Park (Aurora and Chicago Southern Districts) from Orland Park: Faith (Aurora District). Caitlyn follows Barbara Good who is retiring.

**Mark Gilmore** (Local Pastor) to Tinley Park (Chicago Southern District) from Pecatonica (Rockford District). Mark follows Chung Nam Kwak who is retiring.

**Adonna Reid** (Elder) to Oak Park: First (Chicago Northwestern District) from Chicago: South Shore (Chicago Southern District). Adonna follows Katherine Paisley who is appointed to Rochelle.

**Satya Sudhakar** (346.1) to Ottawa: Epworth (DeKalb District) from Ashton/Franklin Grove (DeKalb District). Satya follows Carolyn Lukasick who is appointed to Rockton.

**Jennifer Wilson** (Elder) to Willerup UMC, Cambridge WI, Wisconsin Conference, from Naperville: Wheatland Salem (Aurora District) as a 346.1, clergy from another annual conference.



# HOLY WEEK

Palm Sunday - March 28

Maundy Thursday - April 1

Good Friday - April 2

Easter - April 4

# LENT

*fast + pray + give*

### Job Openings

For the latest job openings in the Northern Illinois Conference, visit [www.umcnic.org/jobs](http://www.umcnic.org/jobs).

### Stay Connected

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

Visit [www.umcnic.org](http://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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