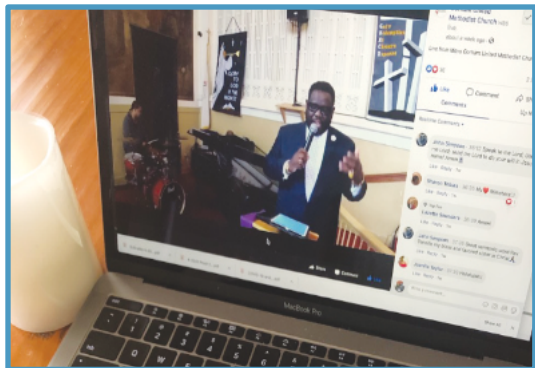




Many churches, like Gorham UMC in Chicago, are livestreaming and posting worship services online to reach people in their homes during the coronavirus outbreak.

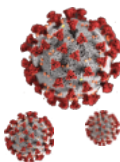


Children at Our Redeemer's UMC in Schaumburg participate in Sunday school via Zoom with their parents joining in to help with arts and crafts. Photo courtesy Rev. Nancy Grim Hunter, Christian Education, Youth, and Discipleship Minister at Our Redeemer's UMC.

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COVID-19 Pandemic: Churches connect despite coronavirus challenges

By Anne Marie Gerhardt, Dir. of Communications

Church buildings closed. Sanctuaries silent. Pews and Sunday school classrooms empty. It's a surreal scene in churches around the country since the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic turned our world upside down and disrupted our everyday routines, such as going to church on Sunday.

On March 16, Bishop Sally Dyck called all churches to suspend in-person worship services, including Holy Week and Easter, following federal and state government guidelines limiting social gatherings of more than 10 people to help stop the spread of COVID-19. Then on March 20, Bishop Dyck urged all church leaders and staff to abide by Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzler's "stay-at-home" order and practice the six feet apart social distancing guidelines.

"Sheltering in place is for our own health and safety as well as for the health and safety of others," said Bishop Dyck. "But remember we have another shelter: the shelter that comes from God."

Despite these restrictions, clergy and laity stepped up to the challenge and found creative ways to take church outside the building walls and to the Internet, reaching hundreds of virtual visitors.

Providing alternative worship experiences

Many pastors and church leaders quickly learned how to livestream and use Facebook Live. Others placed pre-recorded videos on their websites or posted on video-

sharing platforms, such as YouTube or Vimeo. Others sent out printed copies of the sermon and order of worship, while others placed phone calls to their members.

"I have no doubt that many in our congregations (as well as others who 'tuned in') were blessed by these forms of 'virtual worship,'" said Bishop Dyck. "I'm proud of our NIC clergy and laity for finding new ways of reaching out and sharing spiritual strength and emotional support, as well as ways to serve those during this difficult time."

The Rev. Char Hoffman, senior pastor at Antioch UMC, said they experimented with Zoom, a web-based video conferencing tool, and then uploaded the recording on YouTube. "Our keyboard player sent music to our choir director, who sang the hymns, then our church school superintendent read a Bible story to the children and we put a link on the website for a craft activity," Hoffman said. "We were all new to this 'techy' stuff, but it worked. We had so many comments on how touched people were."

The Rev. Satya Sudhakar, who pastors Franklin Grove UMC and Ashton UMC, said she was surprised by how many congregants wanted to join the online service and also invited their friends and families to join in, too – unlike in-person services. "I learned that we the church are more connected in spirit no matter what separates us physically," said Sudhakar.

Local Pastor Lori Bee at Mount Hope UMC in Johnsburg said her first Facebook Live service reached

more than 250 viewers and had more than 300 engagements. "During the service, we felt truly connected. People gave feedback that they felt like the congregation was together in worship," she said. "The surprise was that we worshiped without music but found other ways to make it interactive."

Our Redeemer's UMC children's Sunday school and youth group are gathering online via Zoom. "I created a Google Drive shared folder with the lesson materials for families to print handouts at home," said Rev. Nancy Grim, Our Redeemer's Christian Education, Youth, and Discipleship Minister. "We are improvising crafts if a family does not have something. As the host account, I shared my screen for certain scriptures or other handouts while the teachers taught the lesson in stages."

Exploring non-digital ways to connect

For those who are unable to connect online, the Rev. Jacqueline Pamela Ford, pastor at Ingleside-Whitfield in Chicago, reaches her members by phone through a conference call, something she started during the blizzard of 2015 when it was difficult to get out and drive to the church. "Many of my members are elderly and livestreaming isn't an option," Ford said. "I send out a bulletin through email and we worship via conference call, while musicians provide music from home." Ford also sends out a text message and/or robocalls with a brief word of encouragement daily.

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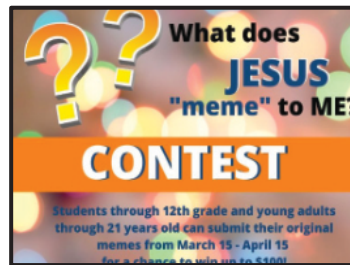
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From the Bishop: Easter can never be cancelled

My favorite Easter services are at dawn in a cemetery. The first Easter as a pastor at one of my churches, they had an eight o'clock in the morning service at the church that seemed a little anticlimactic. But the reason it was at

this earlier time was because a pancake breakfast was held right after the service.

The next year, I suggested that we go to Lakeview Cemetery, a huge, beautiful cemetery in Cleveland that is the home to President James A. Garfield's memorial tomb and a chapel with a spectacular Tiffany window. The cemetery was originally intended for the wealthy on the near east side of Cleveland, but over the years that changed. I conducted many burials there during the 25 years I was in the Cleveland area and I loved to drive through it afterward to see the nicely manicured plots and landscaping.

After it was announced that the sunrise service would be held at Lakeview, some were excited about doing something a little different. However, there was a particular group in the church whose refrain was "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" I explained that the cemetery is where it's hardest to affirm our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ—let's go there!

Fortunately (for me and my idea), Easter morning dawned with 60-70 degree weather. People came in T-shirts at the end of March! The cars began to roll in, one

after another after another. Everyone came out to see just what this service would be! The next year they were begging to do it again! Over the years, we added full bell choirs, vocal ensembles, and eventually invited other churches to join us. Last I knew (probably not this year), it was still going after all this time!

I don't want to go to a cemetery this year. If not resulting in death itself, the effects of the pandemic are all around us. Normally congested areas in the city are like ghost towns, if not cemeteries. We need to affirm our faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But even though we don't know what the "shelter in place" order will be beyond April 7, we dare not gather together in worship on Easter Sunday. There are a variety of wide-ranging statements about when people can come back together again, but all diagrams for "flattening the curve" would suggest that Easter Sunday is way too soon to gather in our churches. So I am suspending all worship services in the Northern Illinois Conference until further notice. I do not want people to get sick from going to church, Easter or not.

In extraordinary times like these, Easter—that ultimate experience and expression of our faith—can NEVER truly be cancelled, just as it has never been cancelled during other difficult times throughout the centuries. Our very creative and innovative clergy and laity, at the time of this writing, are already working on offering meaningful worship services via whatever technological

means fit the context of each congregation.

Our Easter celebration may be a little more subdued this year, but when we are able to gather together again in our congregations, what a great celebration we will have to give thanks and recognize that "we are yet alive"! And we can reach out to all those who "view" our online worship services and invite them to our celebration. I look forward to it along with you as we affirm our faith after a difficult time, singing:

*Christ the Lord is risen today,
Earth and heaven in chorus say,
Raise your joys and triumphs high,
Sing ye heavens, and earth reply,
Alleluia! Alleluia!*

(Charles Wesley, UM hymnal #302)



From the cover: COVID-19 Pandemic con't from page 1

Brooke Road UMC in Rockford, Ill., is bringing back the old-fashioned idea of pen pals, asking members to pick a name or two from the church directory and correspond by mail. The Rev. Violet Johnicker, Brooke Road's pastor, is sending out worship resource packets via email and postal mail, including Scripture passages, sermons, prayers, and coloring pages and activities for children. "With schools closing indefinitely, there is a great need to minister to homebound children and help parents keep them occupied," said Johnicker.

Church leaders are creating phone trees so members can check regularly on one another. Others are sending cards and letters weekly, especially to members who live alone or live in senior facilities. Church staff are also organizing lists of volunteers who can help deliver a meal, go grocery shopping, or pick up medications for those who are sheltered at home.

Faith UMC in Orland Park's "grocery gophers" will to run errands for people stuck at home. The church also started up a "micro-pantry" by placing a large bin outside the building to encourage people to donate nonperishable food items for those who need it and for people to drop by to take food if they need it. The one collection bin has multiplied to five!

The Rev. Doc Newcomb of Marengo UMC wrote in an email to his congregation to "be the church where you are" and encouraged members to call on their neighbors—especially those who are elderly or alone. "We cannot come to the building right now, but we CAN be the church," he said. "Reach out to friends or family and be in touch. Connect with your church family and pray for one another."

Feeling the impact as coronavirus cases multiply

As of March 30, the Illinois Department of Public Health reported a total of 5,057 cases of coronavirus, including 73 deaths, in more than 50 counties in Illinois. The sick range in age from younger than one to 99 years old.

Quarantine restrictions and bans on hospital visits are

agonizing for pastors as they try to continue to offer pastoral care for members who are homebound or hospitalized. It's been especially difficult for the Rev. Chris Winkler of Barrington UMC, where five members tested positive for COVID-19.

"Four members are from one family who returned from a trip to Egypt just as the coronavirus was really getting traction," said Winkler. "While three of those people had mild cases or are recovering, one is really fighting for his life."

Winkler said now more than ever it's important to intentionally stay connected to one another. "When it came time to pass the peace during our first livestream worship, I asked people to close their eyes and think about who is often in their row, who they will miss seeing at church, and to picture a newcomer or visitor, then offer a prayer for them during that time," Winkler said.

"That time of virtual community (which may be an oxymoron), inspired one woman to send an email to a whole list of people she was missing to tell them she cared for them and looked forward to being together with them again. Those notes were really important to the people and it's something all of us can do."

Signs of joy

With so much uncertainty and anxiety in our communities, many church leaders are sharing positive uplifting messages in unique ways. The Rev. Cheri Stewart of First UMC in Ottawa received a surprise text from a couple who drove by the parsonage on the Sunday night after the Governor's stay-at-home order. Stewart received a text from them saying "look out your front window!" Stewart went to the window and saw the couple waving a sign that said: "I love you!"

"It had been a hard week of frantically trying to make all the changes necessary to worship from home," Stewart said. "Their one simple gesture gave me so much joy!"

Stewart and her husband Jon decided to pay it forward to all the members of the church. They started making signs

and called themselves the "God Squad." So far, they've made it to more than 20 houses and have reached 38 people.

"From the car to the door or window, we've shouted at each other things like: 'I miss you!', 'You're not alone!', 'Are you ok?', 'Do you need anything?', said Stewart. "To see their smiles is just a great joy. It really is the joy of the Lord that is our strength in this very difficult time. It's the strength of our faith and our relationships as siblings in Christ that transcend social distance and keeps us connected."

Other church leaders and laity are writing words of hope in chalk on sidewalks for walkers who pass by and some are decorating windows with hearts inspired by a Facebook group to spread a little love and compassion. So in this Easter season amid this challenging time, rejoice in all the ways NIC churches are connecting with members and search for signs of hope, joy, and life!

Remember, God is with us and we are in this together.

For more resources, COVID-19 updates, and a list of online church services, visit umcnic.org/coronavirusresources.



Rev. Cheri Stewart and her husband Jon call themselves the "God Squad" driving by their church members' homes and sharing signs of hope and encouragement.

Disaster Response: How to Help



Needed supplies stored at the United Methodist Committee on Relief's Sager Brown Depot are being distributed to first responders in Louisiana as part of the agency's effort to help fight the spread of the novel coronavirus and the disease it causes, COVID-19. Photo credit: Amy Fuselier.

The Midwest Mission Distribution Center (MMDC) in Chatham, Ill., is working with their many partners to meet the needs of disasters – and COVID-19 is no exception. They're currently working to get face masks to first responders and healthcare professionals, and then to other sectors who continue to be on the frontlines.

"We are preparing parts of our warehouse to serve as a FEMA

distribution center in Central Illinois and we have offered our assistance to help transport supplies as needed," said MMDC Executive Director Chantel Corrie. "Just because COVID-19 is here doesn't mean that other natural disasters stop either. We have had a tornado in Illinois last week. Flooding is occurring around the U.S., and our busy flood season in the Midwest is April and May."

MMDC also continues to serve the developing world with lifesaving hygiene and medical equipment. "We are taking extreme measures to keep our inventory safe so that we can continue to ship to these countries with confidence," said Corrie.

The MMDC will not be taking missionaries or volunteers at this time and is relying on their very committed staff members. "Our staff and their families are taking extra precautions at home and work to keep themselves and others healthy so that we can continue this vital work."

Corrie says they need your help now more than ever. She asks for prayers for the MMDC staff and others who are working on the frontlines during this crisis. She says financial gifts are also appreciated. "We have

had to cancel all mission teams through April 12, yet we still have our normal overhead," she said. "For every \$1 donated to Midwest Mission in 2019, we sent out \$6.33 of in-kind supplies.

MMDC also is accepting donations of homemade mission items including sewn face masks, sewn feminine hygiene pads and plarn (plastic bag material) to make sleep mats. A list of kits, projects and patterns to make at home are available on the MMDC's website at midwestmission.org/kits-projects-patterns/midwest-mission.

Several NIC churches are also searching through their mission closets for extra supplies of face masks, goggles and gloves, and donating to hospitals and fire departments. Check your local hospital's website for needed items or email the Illinois Department of Health at ppe.donations@illinois.gov to find out areas in the most need of donations across the state.

UMCOR donates needed supplies to first responders

More than 80,000 masks in sealed and unopened cartons purchased for future use are being distributed to first responders serving communities near the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Sager Brown Depot in Baldwin, Louisiana.

"In normal times, United Methodists and friends of UMCOR make thousands of UMCOR relief supply kits," said Thomas Kemper, general secretary of Global Ministries, which includes UMCOR. "Now, some of these kit supplies are being used to support and protect first responders on the frontlines of the fight against COVID-19."

The director of the Sager Brown Depot Amy Fuselier said, "One never knows the impact an UMCOR kit, or its parts, will have on someone's life. This donation is a great example of UMCOR's efforts to address an immediate need and the impact of kit supplies being felt in unanticipated places."

Make a Donation Today . . .

Give to UMCOR - umcmmission.org/umcor/give
Give to MMDC - midwestmission.org/donate



Annual Conference 2020

Bishop Dyck and the Annual Conference (AC) Committee are continuing to plan as if the 2020 Northern Illinois Annual Conference is still scheduled for June 7-9. They continue to be in close communication with the Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center and Hotel to determine how COVID-19 state restrictions on large gatherings could impact our meeting. At the time of this printing, the AC committee has not made any decisions on postponement. The health and safety of all our clergy, lay members, and guests will remain a top priority. For the latest updates, visit umcnic.org/AC2020 and look for announcements in the NIC eNews.

Do your part: speak out against racism

We're all in this global pandemic together. As followers of Jesus, we condemn sinful and hurtful statements of racism against Asians and Asian Americans. Every single person around the world is created in God's image, no exceptions. We call upon all people to actively work against racism and xenophobia in all forms.

If you see racism expressed online, don't scroll past, intervene. You can make a difference.

A statement from the Anti-Racism Task Force
Committee of the Northern Illinois Conference



Bishop's Appeal update

The Global Mission Secondary School with The United Methodist Church in Tanzania is the recipient of the 2020 Annual Conference

Bishop's Appeal. Donations will help complete the second phase of construction on the co-ed boarding school for children ages 13-18.

NIC Elder and Global Missionary Rev. Young Seon (Christina) Kim is the project director. The school has been her vision and dream to give boys and girls in Tanzania the opportunity of an education.

Rev. Kim seeks prayers for the country of Tanzania. The government confirmed its first

case of coronavirus on March 19. Schools are closed for 30 days. Rev. Kim says Tanzania has no healthcare system or health workers to deal with this pandemic. She says if the virus spreads, it will be chaotic, and many will die without any medical treatment.

Meanwhile, construction on the missionary school continues. Crews are working on roofing and racing to finish before the rainy season comes.

"Don't worry about me. I am not panicked and have no fear. I have peace and hope in Christ. Let us pray together for God's grace and mercy," said Rev. Kim. Words of encouragement may be sent to Christina at yskim1023@gmail.com.

To learn more and how to donate, visit umcnic.org/bishopsappeal.



Rev. Young Seon (Christina) Kim welcomes young leaders and preachers who visited the school construction site to bring a donation and pray together.



Construction crews work on installing the roof on the Global Mission Secondary School in March.



General Conference postponed until 2021

By Heather Hahn*

General Conference organizers are exploring potential new dates in 2021 for The United Methodist Church's top legislative assembly after the coronavirus pandemic forced postponement. General Conference was originally scheduled May 5-15, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minn. The Commission on the General Conference determined that multiple factors make it unfeasible to reschedule the international 10-day gathering for this year.

"These issues include the undetermined length of the pandemic, uncertainty around travel bans in different areas of the world, delays in processing visas due to government and business closures and other questions," said Kim Simpson, commission chair.

At this point, the commission does not have specific dates to announce. However, commission members also resolved they wanted to keep the next General Conference in Minneapolis. They authorized Sara Hotchkiss, the event's business manager, to pursue negotiations regarding other dates available at the Minneapolis Convention Center, the original venue for the 2020 General Conference.

"Continuing to work with the Minneapolis Convention Center and area hotels will help us avoid competing with other groups for space in those facilities if they did not already have a contract," Hotchkiss added. Organizes also credited the host team from the Dakotas and Minnesota conferences with being willing to work toward a new date.

"As soon as negotiations are complete, specific dates will be announced," said Rev. Gary George, the commission's secretary. The commission is taking steps regarding booked flights and hotel cancellations.

At a March 21 meeting to discuss the changes, commission members acknowledged they were dealing with an unprecedented challenge.

"Almighty and loving God, we have made plans and they have been upended," prayed the Rev. Beth Ann Cook, a

commission member. "We are at a loss and feel disoriented, but we know that you are God."

Cook prayed for the church around the world to respond to people in crisis and especially for health care workers on the front lines of combatting the disease.

Simpson reminded fellow commission members that they are dealing with only one part of the public health crisis. However, she also acknowledged that planning the 10-day international assembly comes with multiple moving parts that must align. These include securing visas, hotel space, transportation, interpreters and a large-enough venue for a gathering set to draw 862 delegates from four continents and potentially thousands of others.

General Conference typically has met every four years since 1792. But in the past three years, the volunteers who serve on the commission have needed to plan two such large gatherings, including a special General Conference in 2019.

"I do commend you as a commission," Simpson said. "You have done more in our three years than most commissions do in eight."

Delaying General Conference a year raises a numbers of potential challenges. Under The United Methodist Church's constitution, General Conference is to meet every four years "at such time and in such place" as determined by General Conference itself or "by its duly authorized committees."

The gathering — the only body that officially speaks for the entire United Methodist Church — is responsible for many crucial decisions. These include electing members of the Judicial Council, the denomination's equivalent of the Supreme Court, and voting on the four-year budget that funds denomination-wide ministries.

Bishop Thomas Bickerton, the Council of Bishops representative on the General Conference commission, said the bishops are discussing with their chancellor the

ramifications of the constitution's four-year requirement. "We are cognizant of those issues and are exploring those at this point," he said. He and other bishops urged for the postponement because of the coronavirus and related travel restrictions.

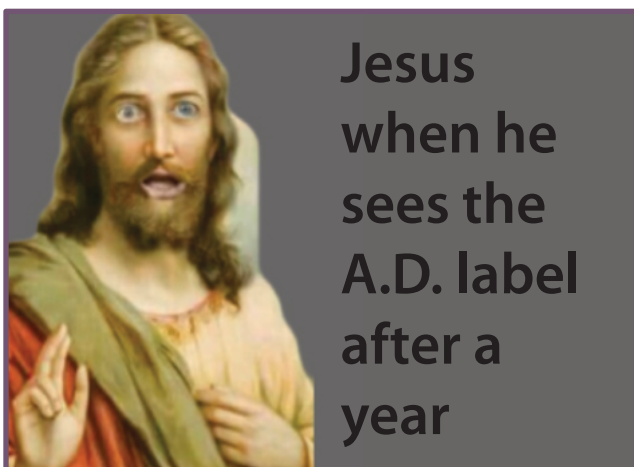
In this time of pandemic, it remains unclear how many other United Methodist gatherings can go on as planned. United Methodists in the Philippines, Côte d'Ivoire and Germany already have postponed 19 annual conferences indefinitely. The Judicial Council, which like General Conference was set to meet in Minneapolis, also postponed its spring meeting because of the ongoing threat.

Whatever happens, Simpson spoke with confidence that General Conference organizers are up to the challenge. "We are strong people, and we are fit for what comes ahead," she said at the meeting's end. "And I hope we'll all come together, as we've done in the past, to try to find the best way to bring the vehicle for General Conference."

North Central Jurisdictional Conference

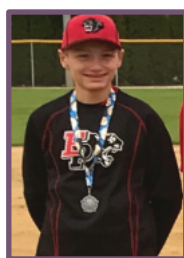
The Council of Bishops will decide whether to postpone Jurisdictional Conferences. The North Central Jurisdictional Conference, which includes the Northern Illinois Conference, is scheduled for July 15-18 in Fort Wayne, Ind. With the retirement of Bishop Sally Dyck effective August 31, many may be asking: what will happen with episcopal elections if Jurisdictional Conference is postponed? The North Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops and Episcopacy Committee would be responsible for arranging episcopal oversight if an interim bishop is needed. Look for updates in the NIC eNews and website.

**Hahn is a multimedia news reporter for United Methodist News*



Bryce Jepson from Erie UMC entered this original meme in the "What Does Jesus Meme to Me?" contest.

Contest: What does Jesus MEME to me?



Bryce Jepson

"I've gone to church my whole life and I love memes," said Bryce Jepson, a high school freshman who attends Erie United Methodist Church. "So, when I heard about this contest, I had to make one." His mother, Mindy, said Bryce is athletic, "techy," and thought the NIC Discipleship Task Force's meme contest was a fun opportunity. Bryce's pastor, the Rev. Katie Voigt, was the first female pastor of Erie UMC in about 180 years when she first came two years ago.

She shared the deep rich history of Erie UMC and that the Jepson family goes back generations of active and passionate members of this church.

Voigt saw the article about the contest in the NIC eNews and announced it to her church the following Sunday. That very day, Bryce heard the announcement and finished his meme. Voigt was delighted to learn that Bryce was the first one in the conference to submit his meme.

If you're 21 years old or younger and would still like to submit your meme and share "what Jesus memes to you," go to umcnic.org/memecontest for details. Participants have until April 15 to submit their memes and could win up to \$100. All memes will be posted on the Northern Illinois Conference social media sites, i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in late April. Make sure you check them out so you can vote with your "likes" and also be part of the final voting. It's on—let's get those memes submitted!

Churches reframe outreach to the homeless

By Diane Strzelecki, NIC Communications Specialist



A typical setup for PADS guests in a gymnasium or community room.



Epworth UMC in Chicago in partnership with Cornerstone Community Outreach (CCO) is keeping its shelter open. They serve 65 single men every night.

When the DuPage Public Action to Deliver Shelter (PADS) organization announced the closure of all interim (overnight) shelter locations beginning Saturday, March 21, George Groves was saddened. Groves, a member of Naperville: Community UMC was scheduled for the 9 pm – 1 am Sunday shift. For Groves—and for many area UMC churches—the coronavirus pandemic has upended a long-standing ministry to the community.

Citing concern for the health and safety of clients, volunteers and congregations, DuPage PADS noted on their website that the decision to close was not taken lightly. “We have taken these deliberate measures in accordance with directives of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the DuPage County Health Department,” the statement noted. Medical experts note that the virus spreads quicker among groups of people, leaving many older volunteers and homeless people especially vulnerable.

However, many NIC churches are responding rapidly to meet the needs of the homeless population and the organizations that advocate for them. At the time of this writing, Downers Grove: First was compiling a response to the closing of their PADS site, according to Associate Pastor Rev. Anna Voinovich. She notes the church will begin collecting donations of supplies, toiletries, and non-perishable food for the DuPage Pads Emergency Response Relief Fund.

The Rev. Claude King, Senior Pastor at Downers Grove: First, said the church’s response was a coordinated effort between the Finance Committee, their Mission Justice and Community Committee and their local PADS volunteer leadership

“The needs of our PADS clients—whom we refer to as guests when they stay with us—have intensified at this time, as well as those newly homeless people that have joined those unfortunate ranks due to the ‘flattening-the-curve’ measures put into place over the past two or more weeks,” King said.

On Monday, March 23, Journeys/The Road Home notified Kingswood UMC (KUMC) in Buffalo Grove that it would be shutting down the church as a PADS site and transitioning their clients to hotels. JOURNEYS/The Road Home is a non-profit agency that provides shelter, social services and housing to the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless in Cook County’s north and northwest suburbs. The agency

consists of the PADS Shelter Program, the HOPE Center Supportive Services Program, and the Pathways Housing Readiness Program.

KUMC has been a PADS site since 1990, housing an average of 35 persons each night. “We normally have individuals and families—sometimes we have up to 6 to 8 children here with their families,” said the Rev. James Preston, KUMC Lead Pastor. “The gift is that we can house children with their families in our classrooms.”

The church quickly formulated a response to the closure. On March 24, KUMC trustees voted unanimously to provide a \$5,000 grant for Northwest Suburban PADS to begin to house persons in hotels in an effort to contain the spread among the homeless population.

Preston noted that a few other churches including First UMC in Arlington Heights, as well as the brothers of Saint Viator in Arlington Heights, made similar donations in support of re-housing PADS clients.

In accordance with Governor Pritzker’s stay-at-home order and the directive of NIC Bishop Sally Dyck, Epworth UMC in Chicago has shuttered its building to community use and worship services. However, the men’s overnight shelter in the church’s gymnasium still serves their homeless clients.

The shelter is a partnership with Cornerstone Community Outreach (CCO) and serves 65 single men every night. CCO staffs and manages the shelter.

“These are ‘residents’ who’ve ‘lived’ there two to three years,” said Senior Pastor Donald Guest. “All the men leave in the morning for CCO’s Crossroads Center, where they eat breakfast, then go to work. They return to the Center for dinner then to our shelter at night.”

Epworth UMC hosts four meals a year for shelter residents where the congregation and residents eat together and experience fellowship, but Guest said that upcoming meals will be suspended until the stay-at-home order is lifted.

The closure of the Downers Grove: First PADS site saddens King. “Yes, we’re doing it for good reasons and measures but there is a void there without physical contact with our homeless population,” he says. “They should be the focus as to how we move forward. In helping others—and in serving God by helping others, we become healed.”

Ways to promote generosity

With in-person worship services suspended and the strain on the nation’s economy during this coronavirus crisis, there’s a growing concern about the financial health of our churches. The Rev. Harry Nicol, a consultant with Generosity Group and member of Christ UMC in Deerfield, offers the following 12 tips for promoting generosity during this crisis and after.

- 1. Promote gratitude.** Link gratitude with generosity. Generosity is a natural result of gratitude. Much has been lost with this coronavirus crisis. But much remains. The love of family and friends, the support and companionship of a life partner, your faith community, for most of us the necessities of life are being met, and so on. Express your gratitude for the precious gifts that remain through generous giving, in part to God through the church.
- 2. When the going gets tough the people of Jesus give.** They give in every way: with talents, skills, active care and concern and with financial resources. The people of Jesus respond to hold good things (like the church) together.
- 3. In this crisis, there will be some who will be unable or unwilling to give.** They will lose income and lose value in asset accounts. They may have extraordinary medical bills. They may need to support a family member who has lost a job or had extraordinary medical bills. There will some people who simply will not give during a time when the church is not meeting. Pastors can make a general appeal for those who can pay ahead to do so.
- 4. Give yourself.** Leaders lead! During this time, as you appeal for people to use an online giving option, the pastor could make it clear that her/his family has set up a recurring weekly or monthly gift to the church so that their pledge is paid during this time. Encourage others to do likewise.

- 5. Being created in the image of a very generous God we were created to be generous.** It’s in our DNA. Generosity is a spiritual gift! Being generous will bless the giver. Google “benefits of generosity.” There are many. Those in your congregations will likely be more faithful disciples if they are generous.

- 6. Do not neglect to let the congregation know that ministry continues during this crisis.** Speak about what ministry is happening. How are lives being changed? How is your church showing compassion to others both within the church and the larger community during this crisis?

Examples:

- Our Tuesday night Bible study continues to meet via ZOOM.
- Our prayer warriors have been busier than ever sharing prayer requests via group emails and texts.
- Our pastor has made 12 visits this past week to those in our church who are alone during this crisis. They have found her visits to be a real blessing.
- We’ve provided assistance to three families who have been unable to pay their rent because of layoff during this time.
- Our children have found ways to connect via Facetime during this crisis.

- 7. Don’t be bashful** about preparing a list of fixed costs that need to be paid whether our doors are open or closed. Salaries, pension, medical insurance for the pastor and other staff, utilities, apportionments, housing costs for the pastor, property and liability insurance, and so on. Please help us maintain our financial responsibilities during this time.

- 8. Do you want to consider an emergency fund** connected with the coronavirus? If you expect folks in your community to be affected in terms of layoffs, medical bills, etc. this might be a reasonable thing to do. This could be a fund for church members and others.

- 9. Make it easy for people to give.** If you haven’t done so, establish an online portal so that people can contribute weekly, monthly, one-time gifts, recurring gifts, debited out of your bank account or charged to a credit card. Make it easy. A large “donate” button needs to be on your webpage and embedded in each email newsletter. You can set up your giving so that you can receive texts or donations via Venmo (owned by PayPal).

- 10. Provide offering envelopes.** You can also make your congregation aware that you still receive checks and that you do have a U.S. Postal address!

- 11. Minimize your losses.** The chances are that during this time you will lose income. Doing everything on this list will minimize your loss! If you keep doing all that’s talked about here after the crisis is over, your income will increase in future months.

- 12. Be bold!** Your church needs money to do its ministry. Your people need to be generous as a part of their faithful discipleship.

To find options for electronic giving and to access a webinar with NIC treasurer Lonnie Chafin, Apportionments Administrator David Quinn and Rev. Harry Nicol visit the NIC website at umcnic.org/news/church-giving-in-times-of-crisis.

Mental health resources in challenging times

By Rev. Cheryl Magrini, NIC Committee on Accessibility Ministries

This coronavirus pandemic and social distancing restrictions may be causing increased feelings of anxiety, loneliness, isolation, and other fears for some. The NIC Committee on Accessibility Ministries asks pastors and caregivers: How are you taking care of yourself in the midst of caring for others at this time? First, pace yourself. Second, be your own best friend.

Many 12-step groups and in-person support groups have suspended meetings. Some are offering online options via a live support group, meeting or a community forum.

Here are some mental health support resources:

- If you are having thoughts of self-harm or suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Help Line: 800-950-NAMI (6264) or email info@nami.org
- Crisis text line: type NAMI 741741

- For an in-depth COVID-19 guide with tips and resources visit nami.org.
- Find a support group with the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance at dbsalliance.org and click on “support”
- Mental Health America online community forums: inspire.com/groups/mental-health-america
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention information and resources for a positive message afsp.org/campaigns/covid-19
- Alcoholics Anonymous online meetings via Skype aaonlinemeeting.net

Self-care strategies for you:

- Remember to eat. Plan enough time for grocery shopping so you will not be rushed. Buy healthy greens, fruit, and protein that will last several days.
- Have a healthy sleep routine. Keep paper nearby to

write down thoughts that are keeping you awake and let them go. Even if you think you need less than 8 hours of sleep, your cells, cognitive functioning and body systems will thank you for getting enough sleep. Turn off Netflix and the phone.

- Reach out. Worry, anxiety, stress, depression and thoughts of self-harm intensify when held inside. Identify with whom you can talk, how to communicate via online, phone, texting. Keep resource numbers with you.
- Breathe deeply. Spend five to ten minutes in focused slow deep breathing and muscle relaxation in the morning, before sleeping, and in the moment when stressed or anxious.
- Ration media. Stay informed but do not obsess.
- Just move. Get outside. Take stretch breaks throughout the day. Walk in place. Praying for God's strength with and within you each moment.



NIC Prayer Network

In this time of uncertainty and concern, the Northern Illinois Annual Conference Shepherding Team's Discipleship Task Force invites you to join in daily prayer of support, joy and encouragement. Prayers will be posted to the NIC's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter sites through April 30.

NIC pastors, elders, youth pastors, and laity are invited to sign up to provide a written prayer by visiting umcnic.org/news/daily-prayer-and-support.

And coming soon...the Discipleship Task Force is launching a new webpage on the conference website to

provide an opportunity to join together in common prayer. The webpage will host a weekly prayer calendar with a Bible verse and devotion by an NIC pastor. We will be encouraged to pray for an NIC church, pastor, events of the week, and more. We will post humor and resources sited on this page as well.

We encourage groups to gather for a short time of prayer starting with our NIC Prayer Network page, but individuals can join in privately from their computer as well. Watch for it. It's coming May 1, 2020!



Earth Day shifts to digital mobilization

Amid coronavirus (COVID-19) global pandemic concerns, Earth Day Network, the global organizer of Earth Day, will mark the 50th anniversary of Earth Day much differently this year.

Organizers are encouraging participation in the first Digital Earth Day, a global digital mobilization on April 22 to address the most urgent threats to people and the planet.

“At Earth Day Network, the health and safety of volunteers and participants in Earth Day events are our top concern. Amid the recent outbreak, we encourage people to rise up but to do so safely and responsibly — in many cases, that means using our voices to drive action online rather than in person,” said Kathleen Rogers, President of Earth Day Network.

The pandemic will affect regions and countries differently, and some individuals and communities

may decide to still hold in-person events. Earth Day Network urges everyone to assess their situation individually, take precautions and follow the recommendations and advice from the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Whether it be coronavirus or our global climate crisis, we cannot shut down,” said Rogers. “Instead, we must shift our energies and efforts to new ways to mobilize the world to action.”

The global conversation will be unified and tracked by the shared hashtags #EarthDay2020 and #EARTHRISE. Earth Day Network will provide live coverage of the global digital mobilizations from its social media accounts (@earthdaynetwork). Other digital events will include virtual protests, social media campaigns, online teach-ins and more. A full scope of digital actions will be available at earthday.org.

The NIC Sustainability Task Force shares these ideas to celebrate Earth Day:

- When you walk around the neighborhood pick up trash.
- Start planning your flower and vegetable gardens. Be mindful of nature and wildlife in your yard/garden choices. Focus on clean earth solutions and better sustainable plants.
- Pick a movie listed at OneEarthFilmFest.org and have a group watch from their entertainment provider and discuss as a group on Zoom.
- Praise God for all the benefits the earth is receiving for slowing down of pollution.
- Meditate outdoors and be mindful of the air, the wild creatures, the coming to life of the perennials.
- Focus on clean earth solutions and sustainable play.
- Find worship resources at creationjustice.org.

Helping children during the COVID-19 crisis

By Jim Patterson*

It's important to address the anxiety of children over the coronavirus, church leaders agree. Small children miss personal contact with their friends, while some teenagers wonder about more existential issues.

"Multiple of the youth have brought up about, 'Is this the end of days?'" said Matt Vollmar, contemporary worship coordinator and youth minister at Saint Matthew United Methodist Church in Belleville, Illinois. "I didn't assume this was where they would go. ... So we clearly need to talk about it."

Vollmar said he tells the teens to read about the signs of the end times in Luke 21 in the Bible.

He additionally advises them to "work on your relationship with God so if God comes back tomorrow, you're ready to go. But work for him as if he's coming back in a thousand years. So there's still work to be done."

Younger children also have a lot of anxiety around COVID-19, said the Rev. Kathy Pittenger, children's initiative coordinator for the Michigan Conference.

"For elementary-age school kids (it's important to) explain what's happening and why social distancing is important, because that's a hard thing for kids to understand," Pittenger said.

She said it's also essential for kids to have some kind of a schedule.

"It can be a flexible schedule, but something that kids know is coming every day. Exercise is also important, whether that be outside if they are able to, or inside their house."

Parents should also limit the news that children hear or watch on television and avoid making promises about when the crisis will end, Pittenger said.

"As adults, we can get stuck on having the news on 24-7," she said. "Not only can that be anxiety producing for us as adults, but it can be very stressful for children." Pittenger is curating a webpage for the Michigan Conference to help parents through the crisis.

"There are so many resources that people are feeling overwhelmed and paralyzed," she said. "So I'm putting together some vetted resources that people can trust and can use."

One way churches are keeping in touch with children is by posting videos of pastors or youth leaders reading books on Facebook and YouTube. St. Paul and St. Andrew United Methodist Church in New York City posted a video of the Rev. Lea Matthews, associate pastor, reading "Wemberly Worried" by Kevin Henkes. Saint Matthew United Methodist Church in Belleville, Ill., posted Lindsay Vollmar, director of children's ministries and the wife of Matt Vollmar, reading "Hooray! It's a Duck Day!" by Jennifer Maze Brown. Lindsay Vollmar is joined by "Little Mattie," a "Sesame Street"-like puppet voiced by Matt Vollmar.

"Wemberly Worried" is about keeping worrying in check, while "Hooray! It's a Duck Day!" speaks to the boredom of not being able to leave the house. "I had a little girl from our children's ministry that called, and she just wanted to check to make sure I was OK because they didn't get to come to church," Lindsay Vollmar said. "And so we just started thinking about how we can connect with the kids and the youth in the ministry." Normally, Lindsay Vollmar reads a story to preschoolers before their Sunday school class starts.

"So I thought (reading a story) would be normal to them," she said. "They could see my face."

They plan to post two stories a week while the crisis continues.

Parents can help college students deal with the impact of COVID-19, too, especially those who were forced to clear out of their campuses on short notice.

"My daughter (Eloise) had a very sudden change in plans for her academic year," said the Rev. Christine Hides, a United Methodist deacon and director of Christian education at Kenilworth Union Church in Kenilworth, Ill.



One way churches are keeping in touch with children is by posting videos of pastors or youth leaders reading books on Facebook and YouTube. St. Paul and St. Andrew United Methodist Church in New York City posted a video of the Rev. Lea Matthews, associate pastor, reading "Wemberly Worried" by Kevin Henkes.

"Letting her be sad and disappointed and upset about the unexpected change in plans, I think, has been most important." Eloise had less than 12 hours to pack and find storage for her belongings before flying home to Illinois from California, where she is a student at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo. Since she's been home, Christine Hides has tried to "focus on the positive, that we are safe and we're together. There are unexpected gifts in this new reality that we're living in."

At the church, Hides is thinking ahead to things she had never considered before, such as a drive-in Easter service or facilitating children seeing their friends through video conferencing.

"Even if we could drive (children) to a parking lot and be with each other with the windows up, maybe that's the kind of thing that we'll need," she said.

"I think that this is a marathon, not a sprint. As the weeks drag on, I think the financial implications for families will be greater, and I think that the social isolation will be even harder to take," Hides said.

**Patterson is a UM News reporter in Nashville, Tennessee.*

Appointments - March Announcements

Bishop Sally Dyck announces the following clergy appointments for the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church effective July 1, 2020 (unless otherwise noted):

Ji Eun (Mori) O (Local Pastor) to Chicago: Ravenswood (Chicago Northwestern District) from Red Oak/Waynet (DeKalb District). Mori will follow Erin James Brown who has been serving as interim following Linda Misewicz-Perconte who retired in December.

Matthew Krings (Elder) to Chicago: Berry (Chicago Northwestern District) from New Lenox (Associate) (Aurora District). Matthew follows Krista Paradiso and Gregory Gross who have been serving as interim following the move of April Gutierrez to Michigan.

Shirley Pulgar-Hughes (Local Pastor) to Schaumburg: Our Redeemer (Elgin District) from Chicago: El Redentor del Calvario (Chicago Northwestern District). Shirley follows Romir Esguerra who is appointed to Joliet: Grace (Aurora District).

G. Morris (Local Pastor) to Chicago: Chicago Lawn (Chicago Southern District). Effective 2/1

Lisa Telomen (Elder) to Geneva (Associate) (Aurora District) from LaGrange: First (Chicago Southern District). Lisa follows Esther Lee who is appointed to Deerfield: Christ (Chicago Northwestern District).

Noah Panlilio (Elder) to Oak Park: St. John (Chicago Northwestern District) from Morrison (DeKalb District). Noah follows Felicia Howell LaBoy who is appointed to Elgin: First (Elgin District).

Tiffany Garcea (Elder) to Erie (DeKalb District) from Elizabeth: First (Rockford District). Tiffany follows Katie Voigt who is appointed to Antioch (Elgin District).

Beverly Dukes (Recommended for Provisional Elder) to Homewood: St. Andrew (Chicago Southern District) from Chicago: East Side (Chicago Southern District).

T.K. Lee (Provisional Elder) to Rockford: Christ (Associate) (Rockford District) from Chicago: Granville and Westridge (Chicago Northwestern District). T.K. follows Daniel Lee who is transitioning from appointive ministry.

Mike Jones (Elder) to Extension Ministry with Church Properties Reimagined as Executive Director. Mike currently serves Shannon: Bethel (Rockford District).

Sung Ja Lee Moon (Elder) to retirement from Rockford: Aldersgate (Rockford District). Sung Ja became a probationary member of the conference in 1988 and a full member in 1990. During her ministry Sung Ja served Chicago: First Korean, Chicago Calvary, Arlington Heights: First (Associate), Elgin: Wesley, DesPlaines: First, McHenry: First and Mt. Hope, Barrington: Salem and Rockford: Aldersgate.

Joey Garcea (Provisional Elder) to Prophetstown (DeKalb District) from Savana (Rockford District). Joey follows Mark Meyers whose appointment will be announced at a later date.

Mark Meyers (Elder) to New Lenox (Assoc.) (Aurora District) from Prophetstown (DeKalb District). Mark follows Matthew Krings who is appointed to Chicago: Berry.

Barbara Morgan (Elder) to Waukegan: First (Elgin District) from Evanston: Sherman (Chicago Northwestern District). Barbara follows Cecelia Harris who is retiring.

Brett Todd (Elder) to Rockford: Aldersgate (Rockford District) from LaSalle: Grace (DeKalb District). Brett follows Sung Ja Lee Moon who is retiring.

Jon McCoy (Elder) to Jackson: Christ (Assoc) (346.1) (Mississippi Annual Conference) from Northbrook: North Northfield (Chicago Northwestern District).

Brenda Morris (Local Pastor) to Shannon: Bethel (Rockford District) from Dakota: Rock Grove (Rockford District). Brenda follows Mike Jones who is moving to an appointment in extension ministry.

Min Hyuk Woo (Elder) to Northbrook: North Northfield (Northwestern District) from Mundelein: Vision Church (Elgin District). Min Hyuk follows Jon McCoy who will be appointed to a church in Mississippi.

Elsa Noemi Meza (Pending Provisional Status) to Chicago: El Redentor del Calvario/The Redeemer of Calvary (Chicago Northwestern District) from Elgin: Wesley (Elgin District). Elsa follows Shirley Pulgar-Hughes who is appointed to Schaumburg: Our Redeemer (Elgin District).

Calvin Haines (Elder) to Morrison (DeKalb District) from Freeport: First (Rockford District). Cal follows Noah Panlilio who is appointed to Oak Park: St. John.

Dennis Oglesby Jr. (Elder) to Evanston: Sherman (Chicago Northwestern District) from Harvey: Transformation Community (Chicago Southern District). Dennis follows Barbara Morgan who is appointed to Waukegan: First (Elgin District).

Save the Date

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DYK???

What Matters?

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

As I write this column, one of our pastoral families welcomed a first baby into their home. Others are burying a parent. Families are frantic for the well-being of loved ones separated from them.

Others are juggling homeschooling and entertaining rambunctious children. High school seniors are grieving the cancellation of prom and graduation, and Olympic hopefuls are adjusting to the postponement of this summer's games. Medical personnel are putting their lives on the line in ways we have rarely considered. All because of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

We've all had moments in our lives when priorities shifted quickly, but none of us have lived in a time when the priorities of a nation and the world have changed in the blink of an eye.

Stories of how our world has come to a halt and how our world goes on in the midst of a global pandemic are clashing all around us. Most of us have experienced the loss of our daily routines, the postponement of long-awaited milestones, financial upheaval, loss of purpose, freedoms we

took for granted—even our sense of security. We are being pushed to a new understanding of “what matters”.

Over the course of a few short weeks, we find ourselves in a strange, unfamiliar world. At first, the virus seemed far away: China, Italy, even Washington State. We watched the reports of illness on the news, but life went on as usual. Planning was in the final stages for General Conference and Holy Week services. Now our assumptions have been challenged, turned upside down, our expectations shaken, and our routines are anything but routine. Uncertainty has become the norm.

My family was poised to celebrate my mother's 90th birthday when we learned that large gatherings would be suspended. The food was ordered and party supplies assembled. We settled for a small family dinner on Saturday, March 14, and plan to have our party when it is deemed safe. Postponing the party was a disappointment, but we soon determined that “what matters” is life. Bringing my mother and her friends together in those circumstances would put their lives in danger.

It was jarring for us all when Bishop Dyck asked that worship be suspended. On rare occasions, Sunday services are cancelled for a snowstorm, but even then we've said “where two or three are gathered we will worship” and clergy often found their way to the sanctuary, just in case.

“What matters”? Faith, life, community: all three have been challenged in a COVID-19 era. Faith is life-giving and sustaining. Faith offers us groundings, belief, prayer, community, routine, and hope. Our clergy are bravely and boldly experimenting with new forms of discipleship as they have reinvented the rubric of worship, pastoral care, Bible study, support, and community overnight. From drive-by pastoral calls to Facebook devotionals and online worship, we are feeding our souls and creating a new form of community.

“What matters” for you today? Take a few slow, deep breaths and offer your thoughts to God. Listen for God's sustaining Spirit, give thanks for those things we cherish, and seek God's strength as we navigate this season.

“Be still and know that I am God” ~Psalm 46:10

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.

Suits for Success expands to Wisconsin prisons

Suits for Success is entering a new phase of operation. Bill Denwood, a member of Community UMC in Naperville, started the non-profit organization Suits for Success in 2017 to collect gently-used suits and clothes from dry cleaners and churches for parolees in Illinois prisons to help them be well-dressed and prepared for job interviews.

“In the last three years, we have delivered over 47,000 clothes to men's and women's State Prisons in Illinois,” said Denwood. “From our main distribution point at the Life Skills Re-Entry Center in Kewanee, Ill., we have distributed to over 24 men's facilities and to both of the women's facilities in Lincoln and Decatur.”

Suits for Success will soon expand by supplying clothes to the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC). “We have been receiving from our donors an ever increasing number of clothes,” said Denwood. “The amount of women's clothes has now exceeded the need for both Logan and Decatur Women's Correctional facilities and the Wisconsin DOC has eagerly accepted our offer to supply them with clothes.”

In 2019 Suits for Success delivered close to 27,000 clothes to the State of Illinois DOC, which saved the state approximately \$500,000 - \$600,000, said Denwood. “Equally our financial donations have grown and our number of volunteers has more than

doubled,” said Denwood. “We now have 18 people who pick up donated clothes from companies, non-profits and churches. They deliver them to dry cleaners and then are picked up and delivered to the correctional facilities in rented vans.”

Denwood said they will begin sending clothes to the Wisconsin DOC after the coronavirus crisis has passed and is reaching out to the Indiana DOC to see if they're interested as well.

“Our target for 2020 is to collect and deliver 40,000 clothes,” said Denwood. “Our hope is to help reduce recidivism and from the correctional facilities we have heard many positive stories from the staff and wardens.”

Angel Wilson, Assistant Warden at the Decatur Correctional Center said Suits for Success has helped many parolees get a fresh start. “Your organization enables the women to step outside of the correctional center with a sense of pride and enables them to enter their communities without the stigma of preconceived notions or labels because they are dressed in regular clothing,” said Wilson.

Denwood is grateful to every Suits for Success supporter who has given to this ministry and continues to help it grow. “As I have said, all this is a ‘God thing’. It could not be done without Him,” said Denwood.

For more information, visit suitsforsuccess.net.



Tim Ford, member Grace UMC in Naperville, drops clothes for inmates at Stateville Correctional Center in Crest Hill, IL. Photo by William Ackerman.



Tricia Goldberry, manager of the closet at Logan's Women's prison in Lincoln, Ill., is surrounded by racks of clothing ready for soon-to-be parolees.

Job Openings

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

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