

Welcome Bishop Hopkins to the Northern Illinois Conference

By Anne Marie Gerhardt, Dir. of Communications

“I remember sitting under a tree and saying to myself, ‘this is like candy and I’m going to be a pastor.’”

With the new year, we welcome retired Bishop John L. Hopkins, who began on Jan. 1 serving as the interim bishop for the Northern Illinois Conference through 2021.

Because COVID-19 restrictions prevented a more formal welcome, NIC Director of Communications Anne Marie Gerhardt interviewed Bishop Hopkins via Zoom to help us get to know him a little better.

AG: What is your call story?

JH: It’s a long story but my call story goes back to the sixth grade. I was away from my family at the time and I was very lonely and lost. During a worship service, I felt like Jesus sat down beside me and told me everything was going to be OK. Fast forward to my freshman year of high school, I went to church camp and the night of the altar call I felt a lump in my throat and I committed myself to follow Jesus, not to be a pastor but always to make Christ central in my life. I studied psychology and philosophy at Indiana University, but by my senior year, I was burned out on psychology. I went to seminary on a trial basis and within two months, I remember sitting under a tree and saying to myself, ‘this is like candy and I’m going to be a pastor.’ It wasn’t a direct call but like a light bulb came on. I realized I wanted to enable people to experience the living God or presence of Christ the same as I had. I wanted to light the candle, pull up the chair, sing the song, tell the stories and let people lean in so they can have an experience that’s unexplainable. My call to ministry came after seminary and five years of marriage to Elaine and I’ve never turned back. It’s been a joy ever since.

AG: Tell us about your ministry journey.

JH: I graduated from Yale Divinity School and was selected for the two-year Wheelock Residency at the Church of Christ at Dartmouth College where I practiced hospital, campus and parish ministry. During this residency, I served as the Protestant Chaplain at Mary Hitchcock Memorial Hospital in Hanover, N.H. I was ordained deacon and elder in the North Indiana Conference. After serving a two-point charge in LaPorte, Ind., I was appointed in 1976 as Wesley Foundation Director at Ball State University. In 1983, I became Director of the Council on Ministries in North Indiana, and in 1989 was appointed in South Indiana as Senior



Bishop John Hopkins
Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church

Bishop Hopkins hit the ground running online as NIC’s new interim bishop. He greeted churches through a video sermon for the Cabinet Epiphany service, met with staff and cabinet through Zoom calls and will be sharing a message at the February Laity Convocation. See his first column on pg. 2

Pastor at The Methodist Temple in Evansville. I was elected bishop in July 1996 at the North Central Jurisdictional Conference and assigned to the Minnesota Area for eight years. I then served the East Ohio Conference for 12 years until I retired in 2016. I’ve served as the first Chair of the Connectional Table, on the Executive Committee of the Council of Bishops, the United Methodist Publishing House Board, the General Board of Church and Society, and the General Council on Ministries.

“When I feel Jesus and the church has a need, I have to respond.”

AG: What brought you out of retirement?

JG: A phone call from Bishop Greg Palmer asking me if I wanted to be on a team to oversee a plan to fill episcopal vacancies. I said yes to that and they came back and said what they really needed was someone to go to Northern Illinois. He didn’t say they asked a whole bunch of other people, but I felt they really needed me. When I feel Jesus and the church has a need, I have to respond. It’s like helping someone in my family because they’ve done so much for me over the years. I didn’t need the Interim Bishop position: I found meaning and purpose in retirement. It was nice being out of the Methodist bubble

for a while and getting the chance to meet a lot more people and get a different perspective from people who are not Christian or United Methodists. It helped my soul a little. I’m coming back into this role because I love the church and I love Jesus.

AG: Tell us about your family.

JH: My wife Elaine and I met in the seventh grade in Ft. Wayne, Ind. On our first date, we played doubles tennis together. We went to the same high school and both had college scholarships. We gave up those scholarships and got married at age 18. We thought if we took the scholarships, we would go our separate ways and never see each other again. We both went to Indiana University and have been together for 56 years. We have three grown sons and seven grandchildren ranging in age from 26 to eight-year-old twin girls. We reside in Indianapolis, where two of our sons also live.

AG: What do you like to do in your free time?

JH: During retirement, I liked going to the gym for cardio and lifting weights (I enjoy exercising). We also enjoy attending and being a spectator at our grandchildren’s activities like basketball and volleyball games and cheerleading. I’m also trying to learn the guitar better and a pastor in the East Ohio Conference gave me lessons to get me started. When I retired in Indianapolis, I got into a Monday night guitar jam group, and I like cranking up the amplifier and jamming along with them. I travel a lot and my family likes to go to the Boundary

Continued on page 2, see From the Cover: Welcome Bishop Hopkins

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FROM THE BISHOP: Coming Back Home

*“From John, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God’s will.
To the holy and faithful people in Christ Jesus (in Northern Illinois).
Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”
Ephesians 1:1-2 (CEB)*

As the Apostle Paul greeted the Ephesians, I greet new Christian friends in Northern Illinois. Of course, Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter and I am merely in COVID-19 confinement in Indianapolis. His letter may have been written by someone else and carried for weeks to reach the church in Ephesus, while I can instantaneously connect via Zoom by clicking a link.

Since I was assigned by the Council of Bishops last June to serve with you:

- “I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, this is the reason that I don’t stop giving thanks to God for you when I remember you in my prayers. (v.15-16)
- I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation that makes God known to you. (vs. 17)
- I pray the eyes of your heart will have enough light to see what is the hope of God’s call, what is the richness of God’s glorious inheritance among believers, and what is the overwhelming greatness of God’s power that is working among us believers.” (vs. 18)

It is a joy to come back to serve as your interim bishop for 2021. I say “come back” because Elaine and I

have a special connection with Northern Illinois that began September 4, 1964. At 18 and in love, we turned down college scholarships to different schools so we could stay together. We were married in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and started our life together with a honeymoon in Chicago!

A couple of years earlier, Elaine’s youth group had toured Chicago and even visited the “Top of the Rock” at the Prudential Building and the “Chapel in the Sky” at the Chicago Temple. When we decided to get married on Labor Day weekend to get three days off work, Elaine put these destinations on our agenda.

If my research is correct, the Chicago Temple was the tallest building in Chicago from 1924-1930. The Prudential Building was the tallest Chicago building with an observation deck in 1964. From these tall buildings, we dreamed of our life together while looking over the most beautiful city in the world.

Our visit to the “Chapel in the Sky” was a time of asking God to bless our marriage and keep our faith strong whatever would come our way. We purchased a print of Sallman’s “Head of Christ,” which hung on our walls over the years to remind us to keep Jesus in our lives. Now, 56 years later, much to our surprise and by what must be God’s plan, we come back to serve a people and a place we already love.

After college, seminary, and a resident program in hospital, campus and parish ministry, I served in the North Indiana Conference for 15 years and the South Indiana Conference for seven years. I was elected bishop and assigned to the Minnesota Area in 1996. Since that time, Elaine and I have made countless trips through Northern Illinois going back and forth from Minnesota and Indiana.

We are familiar with Highway 39 from Bloomington to Rockford. Believe me, we know to stop at Rochelle for a restroom break going north and how to find restaurants on the east side of Rockford. We have even been to Malta to visit my former administrative assistant’s parents on the farm where she grew up.

In 2004, I was assigned for 12 years to the East Ohio Conference, and continued to return to Minnesota for regular visits. We know Highways 90, 290, and the exhilaration of getting into the express lane just as the rush hour traffic starts.

I plan to work at home with occasional visits to the office until I receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Then I hope to learn more about the people, churches, geography and history of this magnificent area. Already I like what I see. After 56 years, it is good to come back home where our dreams were born and where God sent us forth in gratitude and ministry.

From the Cover: Welcome Bishop Hopkins

“What I’m looking forward to the most . . . is hearing people’s stories of conflicts and victories”

Waters with the grandchildren. I do a little fishing and enjoy flying my small collection of kites.

AG: What are you looking forward to in your year with the NIC?

JG: It’s great to have a front-row seat into what God is doing in the lives of people. What I’m looking forward to the most is discovering how God is working among the churches in the NIC and hearing people’s stories of conflicts and victories. In one year as an interim, I can’t start a lot so I’m not coming in to “save” the conference. I’m coming in to be a pastoral, loving consultant to try and help people keep doing the good work they’re doing and when there’s conflict, I ask them to tell me more. I’m here to listen and provide any wisdom I have, but when I leave, I want people to move on, be healthy with God’s help, and provide direction in uncertain times.

AG: What are your concerns for the future of our church?

JH: First, I want to thank the pastors, staff, musicians and all those that have worked so hard to provide worship and online services during the pandemic. This has been a difficult time—from the pandemic to

divisions in our society and church. Social media overload and short news cycles wear people out. It’s counterintuitive with all the emphasis on doing and action, but during this time, we almost need to slow down and recognize the time for grief and healing and connection and hope. Rather than always trying to make something happen, I believe we need more spiritual reflection along the way. The world needs the church and the Word of Christ more than ever before and yet we are as weak as we’ve ever been. The church needs to find a new witness, and I think we can, but until we start relying on the love of God and the practice of caring for every person at the table, we have to find a way to focus on ‘who’s in’ rather than ‘who’s out.’ We have an open communion table but I often say that doesn’t mean there are not requirements. One requirement is that you’re willing to follow Christ in your life and the second requirement is that you are willing to eat with anyone else who comes to this table. If we go by that, then we might find some of our divisions are not as important as we think.

AG: What are your plans for working in the Conference?

JH: Living in Indianapolis, my plans are to work remotely and Zoom from here. I plan to spend a week to ten days in Chicago at the minimum and if COVID ends, it would be more of a 50/50 split. Normally I would be visiting districts and holding in-person clergy meetings, but they will have to be online for a while. I’m hoping to get my vaccination and come to the conference more often. As interim bishop things are a little different. I won’t be able to attend special events that I normally would attend and I have to resist the temptation of jumping in like I’m going to be here four to eight years. I will spend more time with targeted work and goals. We have an annual conference that we have to schedule and the ordination of the class of 2020. I’m really praying for things to open up so we can have in-person meetings that bind us together. I was in Cleveland when finally the basketball team with LeBron James won the championship and I would love to be in the NIC when the COVID-19 pandemic ends...and we can celebrate and visit churches and have an annual conference in person!

To watch the video interview and learn more about Bishop Hopkins, visit umcnic.org/bishop.



The Discipleship Task Force began its 2021 prayer network initiative with a devotion from Bishop John L. Hopkins. Join together in prayer monthly with a weekly prayer focus for each church, clergy person, district and regional leaders, as well as NIC Advance Specials at umcnic.org/prayernetwork.

"This is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my instructions within them and engrave them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." Jeremiah 31:33

I enjoy listening to stories of faith. When one of my church members told me a stewardship sermon changed her life, I must have looked surprised. She went on to tell me the sermon was about more than money. It was about what was important in her life. Her pastor said, "Do not give one dollar to this church until you have given your life to Jesus Christ!"

As she told me this, I could see she was committed to keeping first things first. God's claim on her life deserved her faithful response. Every time she gave a dollar to the church, she must have asked herself, "Am I still giving my life to Jesus Christ?"

In 1755 John Wesley introduced a Covenant Renewal or Watch Night service to help us reaffirm our covenant with God. It is a service to reflect on the past year, make confession, pray, and resolve to live for God. A Watch Night service takes on special significance in the African American community after many slaves gathered in churches on New Year's Eve in 1862 to await the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863.

As we acknowledge those who came before us in faith, we must be freed from any bondage that would keep us from knowing, loving, and serving God. This is a time to set aside all that divides us from one another and from God. We acknowledge our plans need to change to follow God. If God is with us, we can be with God!

As I begin my service to the Northern Illinois Conference, I look forward to learning about God's claim on your life. As this new year begins, I have renewed my covenant with God and given my life to Jesus and His Church. Will you join me?

Prayer: O God, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

The Covenant Prayer (Modern Version)

*I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
exalted for you, or brought low for you;
let me be full,
let me be empty,
let me have all things,
let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.*

Monthly calendar with devotions, prayer tools and more!



Ministry Makers

The logo features the text "CO₂ NEUTRAL" in a bold, green, sans-serif font. The "CO₂" is positioned above "NEUTRAL". The text is set against a circular background with a green-to-white gradient and a stylized green leaf design.

Oak Park goes carbon free

By Dick Alton, Euclid Avenue UMC and Interfaith Green Network

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.

The planet is heading into trouble as the West is burning and storms are increasing in the South. You can definitely say carbon products are wrecking the planet's climate system. We need to stop spewing planet-warming gases. One of the keys is the de-carbonization of the U.S. electricity grid. Solar power is being called the new king in global energy markets and the cheapest source of electricity in history.

Oak Park's Euclid Avenue United Methodist Church initiated its own decarbonization in 2014 when it first installed a geothermal heating and cooling system, reducing its carbon footprint by 80%. Euclid then installed a 99-panel solar photovoltaic system on its roof that reduced electricity usage from the grid by 27%.

Now, working with the Interfaith Green Network, Euclid has joined with other congregations to commit to Nexamp's Community Solar program that, in principle, makes Euclid a net zero carbon building.

In addition to helping save the planet, the church is also saving its budget. In 2009, Euclid Avenue was paying \$13,000 for gas and \$7,000 for electricity. By 2014, gas and electricity charges had decreased from \$20,000 to \$11,500 annually. By adding new solar panels in 2014, electricity came in at \$5,300 and gas \$1,500 annually. Now the church is adding community solar, which will further reduce their energy bill.

And this is just the building. The church is now asking the congregation members to take the leap and become a Community Solar project, which advertises that there are no panels to install, no cost to switch, and subscribers save up to 20% of their energy cost. Community Solar brings construction and other green energy-related jobs to low-employment regions of the state, and it supports Illinois farmers by paying them for their use of underutilized land.

Some may wonder if the church can claim "net zero" since they are still paying \$1,500/year for gas. The church has answered this concern by balancing this carbon emission and absorbing an equivalent amount from the atmosphere by planting two trees and having a butterfly garden, a rain garden and two electric car-charging stations in their parking lot.

The Euclid Avenue UMC motto is "Love God, Live Green and Liberate All." They are definitely living green and helping to liberate all, while noting that caring for Creation is loving God. For more information, visit euclidavenueumc.org.



Euclid Avenue United Methodist Church in Oak Park, installed a rooftop solar power system in 2014 to generate and supply electricity to its building.

Lighting the night with hope



Christ UMC in Deerfield participated in the national memorial by lighting candles and ringing chimes.

On the eve of the presidential inauguration, NIC churches rang bells and lit candles taking part in a national memorial remembering the 400,000 American lives lost to COVID-19 since the pandemic hit.

Members at First UMC in West Chicago rang their two large bells pulling long ropes to ring them in front of the church for several minutes. The church's leaders said they've lost current and past members to COVID-19. "A family came to hear the bells - two women and a boy. He held a photo of his grandfather who had died from COVID-19. These deaths have a face and a family left behind to mourn. May the ringing of the bells ease their grief and ours," the church posted on Facebook. They also said it was a memorial for unity and time to get together to "forge a much brighter future together."

Members of Christ UMC in Deerfield gathered on the church's street corner to join with our nation to remember the victims of COVID-19 by ringing chimes, singing "Amazing Grace," holding candles, and praying.

Lanark UMC showed their love and support by placing luminaries outside the church's front entrance. They posted this prayer on Facebook, "Lord, in your mercy help us to love and care for each other as you love and care for us. Let us carry your light to everyone in our communities, our nation, and the world. Amen."

The city of Chicago fell dark during a moment on the evening of Jan. 19 to reflect on the pandemic and its impact on the city and country.

Churches joined businesses in the Chicago area for the city-wide remembrance by turning off their lights and electronics and stepping outside to light a candle and observe a moment of silence. Following ten minutes of reflection, the city asked residents, business and churches to turn their lights back on, symbolizing moving from darkness to light. The city also asked faith institutions to ring bells or other instruments to commemorate the memorial service.

Several members at Broadway UMC in Chicago gathered outside on the sidewalk to light candles and share a moment of prayer.

Many United Methodist also called for a time for healing in our nation following the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. capitol two weeks before a new administration took office. Following the day's unnerving events, First UMC in Arlington Heights (FUMCAH) held a drive-up, parking lot worship service to denounce the violence and pray for the nation, those who died in the riot, the capitol police, and congressional leaders who were in harms way.

"We see what happened in D.C. a symptom of what ails our nation, our world and even ourselves," said the Rev. Melissa Earley. "May we recommit ourselves to the work of peace and may we recommit of work of abiding in the peace of Christ."



(left to right) Mike Horsley, Brian Hendricks and Gigi Hendricks members of First UMC of West Chicago ring the church's bells to commemorate the nationwide memorial service to remember the more than 400,000 victims of COVID-19.



First UMC in Arlington Heights held a parking lot service and candlelight vigil on the evening of Jan. 6 in response to the violence at the U.S. Capitol. Photo by Anne Marie Gerhardt.



Luminaries light the night outside Lanark UMC.

Resources for Lent and Easter at home



The season of Lent (Feb. 17 - April 3, 2021), one of the most important times in the church year, helps us remember the 40 days Jesus spent fasting and praying in the desert before he began teaching, preaching and healing in public. The end of Holy Week marks the end of Lent and the beginning of the 50-day Easter season, where we celebrate the resurrection and recommit ourselves to living as faithful disciples of Christ.

Despite the distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, United Methodists around the world will likely experience the seasons of Lent and Easter in 2021 under many of same restrictions on in-person gatherings experienced in 2020. Thanks to resources available from ResourceUMC.org, Discipleship Ministries and more, we may find ways to experience the reflection and rejoicing that resonates in both seasons.

Activities

Families practicing physical distancing may be interested in “Holy Week House Party: Adaptable Easter Egg Hunt,” which can be used in a variety of ways: throughout Holy Week or in its entirety on Easter Sunday, indoors or outdoors. Churches can use it in lieu of Children’s Messages in the worship series, “Rend Your Hearts: Claiming the Promise,” for Palm Sunday and Holy Week worship services. This resource uses items found around the house and is adaptable to many settings. You can find it at umcdiscipleship.org/articles/holy-week-house-party-adaptable-easter-egg-hunt.

The Methodist Church in Britain offers several free resources that provide activities families can do together each day of Holy Week and Palm Sunday. Children’s ministry and Sunday school curriculum provider Dwell offers a free download of “God’s Big Easter Story - A Holy Week Journey for Families,” as well as a Holy Week Journey for Young People, a journaling resource that can be downloaded and either printed and written on directly or viewed on-screen using a separate paper journal. You’ll also find a downloadable Methodist Holy Week and Easter poster to print and display. Two lively versions of the poster can be shared with family around the home or posted in your window to share with your neighbors. Learn more about “God’s Big Easter Story,” the journaling resource and the poster at methodist.org.uk/our-work/children-youth-family-ministry.

Worship

The seasons of Lent and Easter are a time for reflection and joyous celebration, respectively. Even though we might not be able to worship with our church family, we can still find ways to worship! Try a Maundy Thursday family meal with worship or use a fresh look at Holy Week worship that combines traditional Tenebrae service with a home-based approach. Congregations may also want to use a scripted “Liturgy of the Palms” especially designed for virtual platforms. Finally, “The Heart of the Matter” Easter series, a complimentary resource from Dr. Marcia McFee and the Worship Design studio, can be led by an online leader or done at home. To learn about these resources and more, visit dakotasumc.org/news/resources-to-celebrate-easter-and-holy-week.

Spiritual disciplines

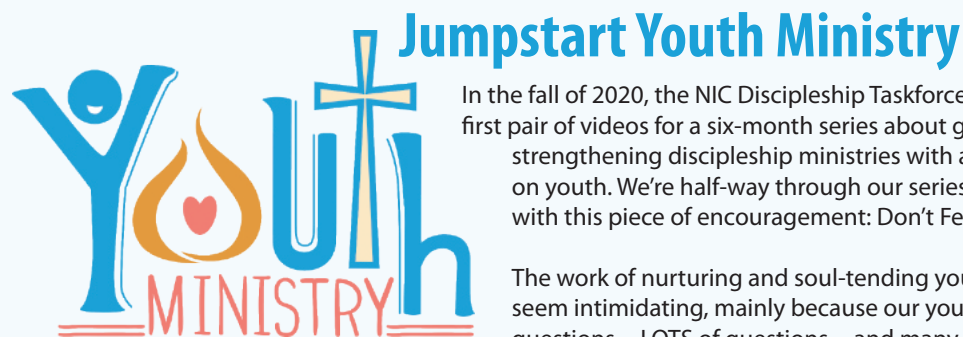
The reflective spirit of Lent is often an individual exercise, but congregations may miss the tradition of guided prayer and reflection experienced in community. The website Godspace has directions for a Holy Spirit Centerpiece that retells the story of the last week in the life of Jesus. The centerpiece can be a cornerstone for experiencing Holy Week by yourself, with family, with a youth group, or at a Zoom meeting. Visit godspacelight.com to learn more.

Lenten studies

The United Media Resource Center has a variety of Lenten studies from DVDs to book studies. To search the catalog, visit igrc.org/umrc. Examples include Rev. Adam Hamilton’s seven-session DVD study, “24 Hours that Changed the World,” and seven-session adult book study, “Give up something bad for Lent” by James W. Moore.

That glorious day

As it may be necessary again to plan for a physically distant season of Lent and Easter celebration, please consider the resources above. Many churches are postponing and planning a big in-person Easter celebration on the Sunday when all restrictions have been lifted and it is safe once again to gather. Whenever that happens, whatever Sunday it is, it will be a glorious one indeed, because Jesus will have walked us through the pandemic to a time when church families will be reunited once again.



Jumpstart Youth Ministry

In the fall of 2020, the NIC Discipleship Taskforce introduced the first pair of videos for a six-month series about growing and strengthening discipleship ministries with a particular focus on youth. We’re half-way through our series, and begin 2021 with this piece of encouragement: Don’t Fear the Questions.

The work of nurturing and soul-tending young people can seem intimidating, mainly because our young disciples have questions—LOTS of questions—and many adults fear, “what if I don’t know the answer?”

Every disciple on the Christian journey has questions, regardless of age or church-life experience. Questions strengthen us, both teacher and student, as well as strengthen bonds. We are not alone on this journey of faith, and shouldn’t be afraid to ask, engage, or struggle with the questions life and faith present before us.

To find the last four months of resources, visit umcnic.org/jumpstart.



UM Scholarships: Apply Now

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry’s (GBHEM) office of Loans and Scholarships provides millions of dollars in scholarships to students every year. Finances should never be a barrier for anyone to answer their calling in life. The application

period ends March 24 for fall term awards only. Each applicant may apply once per year for a scholarship from GBHEM. Renewals must re-apply each year. For eligibility requirements and to apply, visit gbhem.org/loans-scholarships.

LOCAL CHURCH NEWS: New Faith Community springs up in pandemic

By Anne Marie Gerhardt

A new faith community in Oswego, Ill., is springing up in the new year. Wellspring UMC launched on January 1, 2021, with the Rev. Corey Ashley serving in the former Oswego Campus of Wheatland Salem UMC. On the heels of a difficult year for churches with the pandemic and restrictions on in-person services, some may ask, 'is this the right time to plant a church?'

"It goes without saying that 2020 was a strange year. In a lot of ways, it feels like the world has been knocked back on its heels. Division, health crisis, political turmoil, injustice, economic calamity and more have become trademarks for 2020," said Ashley, who served as the Oswego Campus Associate Pastor. "Yet, when we look to church history, we find that it is in times of hardship and strife that the church can shine its brightest."

Ashley says the mission of Wellspring is focused on the United Methodist's mission of "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

In Kendall County, where the church sits, surveys show that more than 57% of the population is disconnected from a religious institution, which is about 73,500 people in the area. Ashley says one of the church's vision is closing the divide in the community.

"We believe we are called to be a community that faithfully lives out our mission and therefore closes the divide by reaching non-religious people who are disconnected from the church; by addressing the injustices in our community and building bridges of healing; by

connecting new generations to the church and raising leaders; and by breaking the cycles of poverty in our community," said Ashley.

The church community is already taking the first steps in fulfilling its vision. Wellspring partnered with the local school district to adopt two families for Christmas.



Wellspring UMC in Oswego holds its first church conference via Zoom with Aurora District Superintendent Jeffry Bross after launching on Jan. 1, 2021.

"Even before we launched, our church community went above and beyond with gifts, food and finances for holiday bills with local a 'adopt-a-family program,'" said Ashley.

Wellspring UMC's website also includes resources to support the NIC's strategic goal that "racism is

incompatible with Christian teaching," Ashley says. Wellspring is committed to challenging the unjust power structures that support racism and working for equality in all areas of life.

The church held its first church conference on Jan. 11 via Zoom with Aurora District Superintendent Jeffry Bross celebrating its first nominations and ministry leadership teams and is working toward becoming a chartered church.

Wellspring honors its past, which began more than 170 years ago when German families began arriving in the Oswego Township and settled on the rich farmland of the Oswego Prairie. The faith-filled community of farmers first gathered for church in their homes. As their congregation grew in numbers, they raised the money to construct their first church building in 1848.

The church building is located at 1217 Wolf Road and is a historical landmark in Kendall County, most recognized by the lighted red cross on top of the bell tower, which illuminates the night sky as a beacon of God's light.

The church's worship is currently online on Sundays at 9:30 a.m. on its Watch page, YouTube Channel, and Facebook Page. Ashley says they're focused on being a grace-filled presence in the community and excited to welcome people inside the church sanctuary when it's safe and appropriate.

To learn more about Wellspring and to find services and activities, visit wellspringumc.church.



Roscoe Church helps local food pantry stay full after the holiday season

Article shared by WREX-TV on January 5, 2021

The Roscoe United Methodist Church made sure the shelves at the Old Stone Food Pantry stayed full with its "12 Days of Giving" donation drive. For 12 days, the church donated a specific type of food to the pantry from a list of the top 12 most-needed items.

The staff at the pantry says this event couldn't have come at a better time since donations are typically down at the beginning of the year.

"This drive was dreamed up as a way to do something meaningful during the 12 days of Christmas and continue to make a difference during a downtime after the holidays," said Rev. Paul Meyers of Roscoe UMC. "There is a lot of giving between Thanksgiving and Christmas and then the

giving drops off. We just thought this would be a really good time to help the pantry stock up."

Meyers said the church made a friendly competition out of the drive between age groups in the congregation and the response was great with more than 6,000 items donated.

"It was a beautiful feeling to take at least one pick-up truckload of food to the pantry each day," said Meyers. "We may have provided them a couple of months of food!"

The 12 days of giving ended Jan. 6 but the church will continue to support the pantry throughout the year. The pantry serves an average of 60+ families each week from several communities, including Rockton, Roscoe, Shirland, Harrison, and South Beloit.

◀ Roscoe UMC collected more than 6,000 items for a local food pantry for a "12 Days of Giving" donation drive.

February/March Calendar Events

Older Adults in the Pandemic: Things We Can Do

2021 Webinar Series

Feb. 23, March 25, Noon - 1 p.m.

Though quarantining is changing the way churches engage in ministry, that does not mean the church's response has slowed down.

This new Discipleship Ministries webinar series for 2021 will focus on ways churches can be in ministry to/with/for Older Adults and Boomers during these challenging times. The NIC Older Adult Ministries Council helped plan the series and consultant Rebecca Fraley from the DeKalb District will be one of the panelists for the March 25 presentation.

For more information, visit umcdiscipleship.org/articles/things-we-can-do-webinar-series.



Fresh Expressions with Bishop Ken Carter

March 3, 9 a.m. - 12 noon

Cost: \$10

Explore the wave of new Christian churches emerging to reach unchurched and dechurched people living in a culture that is increasingly non-religious and multi-religious. These established churches and new faith communities gather with people who typically have never been to church, listening to them and meeting them

where they are on their journey toward Jesus. They have learned fresh ways to communicate their identity through discipleship.

Our presenter is Bishop Kenneth Carter, resident bishop of the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church and author of "Fresh Expressions: A New Kind of Methodist Church" (with Audrey Warren; Abingdon Press, 2017).

Bishop Carter will cover such topics as including redefining connection and evangelism, fresh expressions of our Methodist faith, and missional relationships in our current cultural landscape.

To register, visit umcnic.org/calendar/fresh-expressions.

Fresh Expressions is an international movement of missionary disciples cultivating new Methodist churches in partnership with existing congregations to reach unchurched and dechurched people.

Mediation Skills Training Institute

Does your congregation experience conflict? Does it harm your Christian fellowship and distract from your church's mission?

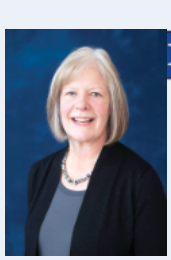
Learn to transform conflict from a negative force into an opportunity for reconciliation and growth. Register now for one of these six 2021 sessions of our popular and practical **Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders** presented by the **Lombard Mennonite Peace Center**:

March 1-5	August 2-6
May 3-7	October 11-15
June 21-25	November 15-19

Tuition: \$750

Currently the plan is conduct these trainings online via Zoom.

To register or to learn more, visit Impeacenter.org/ticketspice or contact the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center at **630-627 0507** or Admin@LMPeaceCenter.org.



You need a plan

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

Few of us really understood in March 2020 what it meant to live through a pandemic. Now we are entering our second year, still struggling with a steep learning curve. We have a better sense of the strength and spread of COVID-19 than we had 12 months ago. The medical community has more tools to combat the disease. We have hope as vaccines are rolling out. Yet the need to stay vigilant and patient is as important now as it was last spring.

Many of us long for life to return to normal. Questions are asked every day about congregations returning to in-person worship, activities and gatherings. In March 2020, we had no idea that we would move like a roller coaster through phases of restrictions for an entire year. For United Methodists, all through the pandemic we have been called to practice a Wesleyan tenant of "Do No Harm". In doing so, we have helped our communities minimize the worst of the illness.

On November 20, 2020, we moved into mitigation phases

as our state experienced a resurgence of the virus. Both the Great Rivers and the Northern Illinois Conference bishops asked our churches to suspend worship until we moved out of Phase 3 mitigation. Finally, in mid-January there was some easing up of the mitigation as certain regions leveled off in the spread of COVID-19. A few of the state's regions have moved into Tier 2 or even Tier 1 mitigation over the past few weeks and more will follow.

If you did not set up a health team in your church last spring, or if it has been dormant during the mitigation, now is a good time to turn to the Northern Illinois Conference ReTurn Plan (umcnic.org/returnteam) and begin to build your step-by-step process as you consider reinstating some events and programs for your congregation. Experts and science are telling us that it will be some time before life is back to a normal rhythm, but with careful planning and flexibility, we can begin slowly to re-engage in some in-person activities.

As I write this column in the third week of January 2021, our state is still in Phase 3 (with tiers of mitigation 3-2-1).

As you follow the ReTurn Plan, begin there. Learn what tier of mitigation your community is in, review the measured restrictions for mitigation from the state of Illinois and respond accordingly. Some state recommendations are tailored specifically for communities of worship.

As your region moves closer to Phase 4 in the State of Illinois plan, you will want to refresh your work. In the ReTurn Team plan, you will find a list of absolute guidelines as well as best practices and new considerations in moving forward. While planning, continue to monitor the state's guidelines in the event that we also need to step back into mitigation for a time.

There is no one-size-fits-all method in the work of surviving a pandemic. Many NIC churches have been creative while also being appropriately cautious. The end of our pandemic restrictions is still some ways off, but we celebrate the hard work all NIC churches have been doing to save lives, engage in measured activities, and plan for a hopeful future.

January 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):

Donna Hoffman (Local Pastor) to Retirement from McConnell/Pearl City (Rockford District). During Donna's ministry, she served Apple River, Mt. Carroll and Pearl City: First/McConnell. Effective January 1.

Doug Carroll (Elder) to McConnell, Pearl City, Stockton: Wesley (Rockford District). Doug follows Donna Hoffman and Charles Wolbers who has concluded his service. Effective January 1.

Cheryl Carroll (District Superintendent Supply) to Willow (1/4 time) (Rockford District). Effective February 1.

Tercio Junker (¶ 346.1) to Poplar Grove (Rockford District). Effective January 1.

Kimberly Neace (Deacon) to St. Charles: Baker (Aurora District) from Naperville: Wheatland Salem (Aurora District). Effective January 15.

Joshua Bailey Green (Elder) to appointment to attend school 1/2 time while remaining as Associate at Batavia (Aurora District). Effective January 1.

Clayton Edwards (Local Pastor) to Buffalo Grove: Kingswood Assoc. (3/4 time) (Elgin District). Effective January 1.

Roland Hayag (Local Pastor) to Rockton (Interim) (3/4 time) while continuing at Shirland (1/4 time) (Rockford District). Roland follows Howie Snyder (¶ 346.1) as he leaves our conference. Effective January 1.

Brenda Bryne (Elder) to Durand (1/2 time) while continuing at Davis: Calvary (Rockford District). Brenda follows Nicole Snyder (¶ 346.1) as she leaves our conference. Effective January 1.

Timothy Biel Sr. (Local Pastor) to retirement from Alsip: Christ (Chicago Southern District). During his ministry Timothy served Alsip: Christ. Effective July 1.

Richard Darr (Elder) to retirement from Geneva (Aurora District). Richard became a probationary member in 1998 and full Elder in 2005. During his ministry, Rich served Greenwood Ringwood, Minooka, Park Ridge: First and Geneva. Effective July 1.

Barbara Good (Elder) to retirement from Palos Heights (Aurora District) and Evergreen Park (Chicago Southern District). Barbara became a probationary member in 1987 and full elder in 1990. During her ministry she served Chicago: Bethany, Lansing: First (Assoc), Cicero: Wesley, Wheaton: Gary Memorial (Assoc), Sycamore, Joliet: Grace, Chicago: Trinity, Antioch, Oregon, Palos Heights and Evergreen Park. Effective July 1.

Chung Nam Kwak (Elder) to retirement from Tinley Park (Chicago Southern District). Chung Nam became a probationary member in 1989 and a full elder in 1991. During his ministry he served Chana, Leland, Suydam, Palatine: Cham-JoEun Korean, McHenry: Mt. Hope, Lombard: Faith, United church of Sandwich, Appleton: Zion (346.1 to Wisconsin), Paw Paw and Compton, Rockford: Brooke Road and Tinley Park. Effective July 1.

Terry McDorman (Local Pastor) to retirement from Wood Dale: Community (Elgin District). Effective July 1.

Darneather Murph-Heath (Elder) to retirement from Elgin District Superintendent. Darneather became a probationary member in 1996 and full elder in 1998. During her ministry, she served Norwood Park, Chicago: Gorham, Crystal Lake; First (Assoc), Schaumburg: Our Saviour's and as Elgin District Superintendent. Effective July 1.

Janice Shaulis (Local Pastor) to retirement from Leon/Fenton (DeKalb District). During her ministry, Janice served Joliet: Grace and Leon/Fenton. Effective July 1.

Dwight Stewart (Elder) to retirement from Harvey: Transformation Community (Chicago: Southern District). Dwight was a probationary member in 1979 and full elder in 1982. During Dwight's ministry, he served Chicago: South Deering, Harvey: Academy, Chicago: First (Temple) (Assoc), Chicago: Wesley, Euclid Ave., Ingleside, Whitfield, Chicago; Trinity, as Chaplain at West Suburban Hospital, Mt. Morris, Chicago; St. Mark (Assoc) and Harvey: Transformation. Effective July 1.

Christine Hoffmeyer (Elder) to retirement from extension ministry. Christine transferred from the New York Conference and became a full elder in Northern Illinois in 2005. During her ministry, she served Wilmette: Trinity (Assoc), Chicago; Irving Park, Westmont: First, Lombard; Faith, and in Extension Ministry at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital and North Shore University Health System as a chaplain. Effective July 1.

Dawn Gardner (LP License Pending) to Mandell (Chicago Northwestern District) part-time. Dawn follows Karen May who has concluded her service. Effective January 1.

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.

Job Openings

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

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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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