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DO NOT DELAY. DATED MATERIAL

'Grace is Sufficient' for 2025 Northern Illinois Annual Conference



by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communication

About 700 clergy and lay members of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference met in session from June 9 to 11 in Schaumburg, Ill., to explore the theme "Grace is Sufficient" as they worshiped, heard inspiring sermons and Bible study, and passed legislation to further the conference mission and ministry.

Land acknowledgement

The first session began with a land acknowledgement led by Rev. Michelle Oberwise Lacock, the chairperson of the NIC Committee on Native American Ministry. She led the conference in respectfully acknowledging and honoring the original inhabitants (and their descendants) of the land upon which the conference was meeting, previously known as Turtle Island. The original stewards of this land were the Council of the Three Fires, comprising the Ojibway, Odawa, and Potawatami nations, as well as the Miami, Menominee, Ho Chunk, Sauk, Fox, Kickapoo, and Illinois nations.

Bishop Schwerin encourages experimentation

In his address, Bishop Dan Schwerin, leader of the Northern Illinois-Wisconsin Episcopal Area, explained that part of acknowledging that grace is sufficient is the willingness to try new approaches for a new time—and to accept failure as part of the process. (See a summary of Bishop Schwerin's address on p. 2.)

continued on page 4; see AC wrap-up




Grace
is Sufficient



Find
videos,
photos
and more at
[umcnic.org/
ac2025](https://umcnic.org/ac2025).



From Your Bishop:

Subvert fear with grace

by Bishop Dan Schwerin

Do the words “Jerome Internment Camp” ring any bells for you? This “war relocation center” in Denson, AR, was one of many concentration camps on U.S. soil that confined Japanese Americans during World War II. The federal government was not confident about the loyalty U.S. citizens of Japanese descent, so President Franklin D. Roosevelt took the questionable step of reserving all Japanese-Americans in detention camps.

The book *May Sky: There Is Always Tomorrow*, by Violet Kazue Matsuda de Cristoforo, tells how she and other internees gathered in haiku clubs to remember and make art out of tragic experiences.

Kyotaro Komuro made his way to the United States in 1907 and eventually settled in Stockton, CA, where he became president and publisher of the Stockton Times. He was first interned at the Stockton assembly center. His last haiku reads:

lived well 70 years
roadside grass
begins to wither

Neji Ozawa wrote this haiku when he was behind barbed wire:

From the window of despair
May sky
there is always tomorrow

The long history of being made to fear people groups has not healed in the U.S. The United Methodist Church has its own racial reckoning at Sand Creek, CO, and elsewhere. How might the waters of baptism be remembered in such a way as to challenge us to become people of grace in relation to the polarization, fear, and political violence of these days?

The late Elizabeth “Liz” Okayama was memorialized along with others at our June Annual Conference. Of the approximately 110,000 Japanese who were incarcerated under Frank-

lin Roosevelt’s presidential order, two thirds were children and infants. Liz was three years old and a U.S. citizen, as was her mother, when they were captive. She and many others experienced what occurs when people are made to fear and hate people groups.

Political violence occurred in Minnesota last month, but high-profile incitement is taking place almost regularly. At the heart of this polarization is that we are being split and taught to fear. This is a moment to provide supportive and sanctuary-like care: how is your immigrant clergy family doing? How is your church called to fill food pantry shelves this summer? How might you love your neighbor, especially those most harassed and harmed?

Consider grace for the other. Consider the results of fear. Consider that your clergy families are carrying around their immigration documents to defend themselves. Attend to the means of grace: Bible study, communion, works of mercy and works of piety, fasting, and worship. In the words of Galatians 5:6, “the only thing that counts is faith working through love.”

Grace and peace to you.

Your giving to General Church apportionments supports the Episcopal Office.



Bishop calls churches to experiment with ministry

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communication

Urging conference members to experiment with new ways of being church, Bishop Dan Schwerin reminded them that “we are not living into what we planned but what we didn’t plan for.”

The days of waiting for people to visit our churches—and assuming they would like some of our dated, uninspiring practices and would be thrilled to join a committee—is about us and not about loving our neighbors.

Many of our churches are losing members, and there are increasingly fewer fulltime appointments available for elders.

“We are in a time of experimentation,” he said.

This is why the 2025 Bishop’s Appeal will provide conference churches grants to assist their efforts to try new ministries that serve their neighbors. Experimentation will sometimes result in failure, and that can be discouraging, the bishop observed.

He told of a childhood experience when their father arranged for his brother and him to rent a boat to cross a lake to meet their father at a cabin. It was a challenging trip. But

he knew their father would be on the other shore, waiting for them.

He found a parallel in Acts 27, which tells of a shipwreck that the Apostle Paul and his companions endured. Their lives were at stake because the soldiers aboard were planning to kill them when the boat got stuck in a reef. A centurion helped them escape by telling them to jump overboard and swim to safety.

Hope was the key factor in both stories. “If we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, we have a relationship with hope,” he said.

He offered three points for looking ahead with hope.

First, he said that both the Northern Illinois and Wisconsin conferences have plans to resource churches to experiment with ways to turn their missional focus toward their neighbors.



Rev. Christian Coon, NIC’s director of congregational development, is starting a cohort of large-church pastors that will experiment with new ministries to their communities. He will make coaching available if they want it. He is also preparing on a document on good practices for church mergers.

Wisconsin Conference is hosting a congregational development “boot camp” led by Discipleship Ministries’ Path One staff.

Second, churches can practice being the collaborative body of Christ. In our connectional denomination, churches can rely on each other and learn from each other.

Third, we can turn to the Old Testament profits and the Epistle of James to recall our Christian morality.

“True religion is caring for the widow and orphan, not making them,” he said.

“Faith is the courage to let grace do its work. You are the body of Christ to each other. We are the people we need for this moment.”

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports ministry experimentation.



The Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church Reporter

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Submissions

Deadlines for submissions are Feb. 5, April 5, June 5, Aug. 5, Oct. 5, and Dec. 5. 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 the communications staff.

Job Openings

For the latest job openings in the Northern Illinois Conference and across the connection, visit umcn.org/jobs.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports this publication.



Fourteen churches unite for Pentecost worship

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

On a bright and breezy Sunday, the spirit of unity and renewal filled the air as 14 Prairie North United Methodist churches came together for a powerful Pentecost worship service in the historic tabernacle at the Oakdale Nature Preserve.

These congregations from across the greater Freeport area celebrated at this service the birth of the Church and the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a vibrant display of faith, fellowship, and community, as members mingled together to worship as one body. The churches involved were Cedarville UMC; Coleta UMC; First UMC in Forreston; Faith UMC, First UMC, Harmony UMC, and Red Oak UMC, all in Freeport; German Valley UMC; Leaf River UMC; Lena UMC; Orangeville UMC; First UMC in Pearl City; Bethel UMC in Shannon; and Wesley UMC in Stockton.

From spirited singing and scripture readings to a shared message of hope and renewal, the service reflected the essence of Pentecost—a day when people of many languages and backgrounds were united by the Spirit.

Clergy and lay leaders from the participating churches took part in leading the worship, offering prayers, and providing music, emphasizing the importance of connection, collaboration, and the ongoing work of the Church in the world today.

Pastors Roger Bronkema and Cherie Quillman joined Rev. Jeremiah Lee in preaching a combined sermon on the The United Methodist Church's new vision statement: love boldly,

serve joyfully and lead courageously. Rev. Joel McClellan read the vision before the sermons, reminding worshipers that it helps unite us in shared ministry and reminds us who we are meant to be.



Rev. Matthew Smith offers communion.

"I've been trying to bring us together for over 10 years," said Pastor Eddie Eddy of Harmony UMC in Freeport. "Last year was the first time we got together [for Pentecost], and we had six churches. Increasing to 14 churches this year is a sign of the Holy Spirit's work. This is connectionalism. This is a great day for the kingdom."



Lawn and folding chairs replaced pews as the group worshiped in the mid-renovation Oakdale Tabernacle.

Tabernacle's United Methodist connection

Set among the trees and trails of Freeport's scenic preserve, the Oakdale Tabernacle was a fitting place to hold this service. The 105 year-old tabernacle holds memories for many people in the community.

It was constructed initially for United Evangelical camp meetings and was eventually sold to the Rock River Conference of the Methodist Church. In 1971, it was sold to the Freeport Park District and had been used for theatrical and musical performances, Scouting events, weddings, and large gatherings until 2015, when its condition had deteriorated to an unappealing state.

A group of people in the area petitioned the park district to save the building and are working to restore it. Their actions to save the building mimic those of the disciples on Pentecost, working together across boundaries towards a goal for transformation and the betterment of the community. A special offering was taken up to help support the group in their efforts.

The gathering was more than a special service—it was a witness to what can happen when churches come together in a spirit of unity, reminding all who attended that the Church is alive, active, and moving beyond walls.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports connectionalism.



New UMC Vision Statement: an invitation to joy and hope

by Bishop Dan Schwerin

On May 1, the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table unveiled a new vision for The United Methodist Church—a vision that reflects our deep commitment to embodying God's dream for the world. A world where every person encounters the transformative grace of Jesus Christ, where communities flourish, and where all creation is made whole.

The summary of the vision statement: "The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ, who are empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections."

This renewed vision is more than words—it is an invitation to embrace joy and

hope as we live God's mission. It also provides a clear, Christ-centered framework for missional unity and collaboration across the Northern Illinois– Wisconsin Episcopal Area and our worldwide connection.

Now, more than ever, the world needs to experience God's boundless love. We may soon see the most vulnerable struggle even more. How might this vision remind us how we can love practically? How might we demonstrate love greater than our differences?

What a wonderful statement to use as a mirror for decisions made at a church administrative council or as a budget is made. What a great tool for teaching: how is God calling your congregation to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously? Perhaps this is a moment when you could be personally challenged by this vision. How might you live in this vision prayerfully?

We still have a mission to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." This new vision offers direction and challenge. I am grateful to be reminded that vision takes us into our communities and world to live the vision of Jesus with those God has given us to love.

The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.

Your giving to General Church apportionments supports the work of The United Methodist Church.



Bishop Oliveto at Celebration of Ministry

“When you are willing to take Jesus’s hand, all heaven breaks loose,” Bishop Karen Oliveto said in her sermon during the Celebration of Ministry Service on June 9.

The retired bishop, the guest preacher for the event, urged worshipers to renew their connection to Christ and each other. “We are not meant to walk this road of faith alone,” she said. “And in United Methodism, no church stands alone.”

She invited all present to strengthen our Methodist connection that helps us join hands “and allows the Holy Spirit to lead us to a place we can’t even imagine.”

Bishop’s Appeal

The bishop’s emphasis on experimentation is reinforced by this year’s Bishop’s Appeal for Innovative Outreach. Donations will provide grants to churches that try new ways to step outside of their building and engage with their communities. So far, churches have donated \$18,746.95. Bishop Schwerin announced that he and his wife, Julie Schwerin, would donate half of the amount of his raise in pay to this bishop’s appeal and the other half to Wisconsin Conference’s Bolivian partnership. Donations will be accepted for the next three months at umcnic.org/2025BishopsAppeal.

The Annual Conference Shepherding Team, which provides consultation and guidance to conference ministry groups and efforts, reported that in the coming months it will invest in adaptive leadership development, listen to the emerging needs of the church, and support ministry by aligning resources. “It’s a vital connection between the local church and the annual conference,” said Mark Manzi, who co-leads the team with Rev. KyungHae Anna Shin. Rev. Shin retires as of July 1, and Rev. Caleb Hong will take her place on the ACST.



Bible study on the centrality of grace

Leading the conference in Bible study, Dr. Reginald Blount drew on 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 to teach on “Grace Is Not

Plan B: Power in the Midst of Weakness” and “Grace Abounds.”

Dr. Blount is an associate professor of Formation, Leadership, and Culture and director of the Center for the Church and the Black Experience at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary.



“We often think grace is something God gives when everything else fails—a spiritual safety net,” Dr. Blount said. “But Paul reveals a deeper truth: grace is not Plan B. It is the plan. Grace is God’s presence and power made visible, not in our strength, but in our weakness.”

Legislative decisions

Among the legislation passed by conference members:

- A commitment to connectionalism, specifically by celebrating the conference’s diverse membership, praying for the flourishing of each of our churches and all of our clergy, and contributing our full apportionments to support ministry across our conference, nation, and world
- A call to the conference Nominations Committee to create a conference Committee on Inclusion, particularly to advance the ministries of LGBTQ+ people and their participation in conference-level leadership
- Encouragement of conference churches to advocate for and minister among immigrants



- Endorsement of a human-rights advocacy and the right to engage in nonviolent actions, including boycotts and free speech on public policy concerns
- Support for a boycott of Chevron products, following the lead of the UMC Board of Church and Society, United Methodists for Kairos Response, and the Methodist Federation for Social Action
- Resistance to religious nationalist theology
- Divestment from countries involved in prolonged military occupations
- Creation of an Equitable Compensation Committee that is separate from the Conference Board of Pension & Health Benefits
- Closure of two churches: Malden and Franklin Grove UMCs
- Establishment of a Committee on Creation Care

As all UMC annual conferences will do this year, NIC members voted on whether to ratify the amendments to the UMC constitution that were passed at General Conference last year. The vote tallies have been submitted to the general church, which will add up every vote cast before announcing the results.



Budgeting for ministry

Conference members passed a balanced 2026 operations budget of \$5,108,000, supported by anticipated apportionment, dividend, and interest receipts of the same amount.

Responding to churches’ requests for a simplified, transparent, and equitable apportionment formula, the Conference Council on Finance and Administration proposed a three-tiered plan:

- churches with income under \$250,000 will be apportioned 8 percent of their income
- churches with income between \$250,000 and \$750,000 will be apportioned 10 percent of their income
- churches with income over \$750,001 will be apportioned 12 percent of their income

Conference members approved the formula, which becomes effective on Jan. 1.

Kim Emery, the chair of the CCFA, updated the conference on its Repair the Harm to Children campaign. This fund is helping to cover NIC’s portion of the settlement to compensate survivors of abuse that took place in Boy Scouts of America activities. NIC’s portion of the \$30 million settlement with the UMC is \$742,000. The conference now must collect \$150,722.88 (including pledged amounts) for the fund in order to cover the full amount, which has already been sent. Contributions will be accepted up to Dec 31.

The Celebration of Ministry observed the ordination, commissioning, licensing, and consecrations of clergy and lay people. Eight clergy retired.

Members donated \$3,046 to the Ministerial Education Fund. Twenty-five percent of those gifts remain in the annual conference,

continued on page 5; see AC wrap-up





Celebration of those in leadership ministries:

Ordained

- Kicheon Ahn
- Jaeon Cho
- Chan Ik Choi
- Clayton Scott Edwards
- G. Morris K. Jarkloh Jr.
- Matthew James Smith

Commissioned

Deacon

- Alexander Dade Dungan

Elder

- Dawn Marie Gardner
- Michael Mitchell Sr.
- D. Josiah Montgomery
- Hyesang Jay Shin
- Jacob R. Tipantasig-Wolverton

Consecrated as a Deaconess

- Rhonda Smith-Sumrall

Licensed as Local Pastors

- Rene Bello
- Kurt Beystehner
- Saturnino Espinoza
- David Profit
- Sanha Kang
- Robert Wandell

Recognized as Certified Lay Ministers

- Kris Aves
- Shaun Barton
- Fay Bennett
- Katherine Brock
- Irma Clark
- Dawn Crowley
- William Dunfrund
- Peggy Hansen
- Bill Howell
- Katherine Howell
- Antoinette Lucas
- Michael McIntosh
- James Miller
- Steve Pearce
- Marcia Peddicord
- Joann Roth-Crackenberger
- Jay Schaney
- Raleigh Shifflette
- Jeff Spang
- Kristine Warning
- Alex Wilson

Retirees Celebrated

- Kwan Chong (17)
- Arlene Christopherson (39 ¼)
- Calvin Haines (11)
- Myron McCoy (44 ½)
- Marilyn Nolan (17)
- Colleen Norman (25 ½)
- Amos Oladipo (19)
- KyungHae Anna Shin (27 ½)

Watch the video of the Celebration of Ministry Service: vimeo.com/1094468180. Watch the video of the Retirement Service: vimeo.com/1095026327.



Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Annual Conference Session and special events



Stronger Together



by Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer,
NIC Director of Connectional Ministries
The second week of June was a powerful and spirit-filled time in our conference as nearly 800 clergy, laity, guests, and volunteers came together for our Annual Conference session. This vibrant event was a living example of what can happen when the body of Christ unites with shared purpose, grace, and dedication. Its success was due not to one person or group, but rather the collective effort of many. Truly, it takes a village.

The Annual Conference Committee, along with Northern Illinois Conference staff, worked for months to plan and coordinate every detail, creating an environment that was welcoming, meaningful, and spiritually enriching. Worship leaders and musicians lifted our spirits through powerful services, while legislative leaders guided us through church business with wisdom and compassion, even as we engaged in difficult conversations. These discussions were held in a spirit of love, with a commitment to unity, even amid differences.

Throughout the week, we were blessed by speakers and presenters who challenged and encouraged us to dream boldly and live faithfully. Our “Lunch and Learn” sessions offered nourishment for both body and soul, sparking valuable conversations across many areas of ministry. The display table representatives added to the experience by sharing stories of transformative ministry and inviting deeper connection and collaboration.



David W. Quinn helps members with some NIC merchandise that was available for purchase.

Every participant brought something valuable—whether it was a voice, a listening ear, a word of encouragement, or a prayer. Together, we embodied Paul’s vision of the church as the body of Christ, where every part is essential and every gift is needed. This Annual Conference reminded us of who we are and what we can do when we come together in faith and love. To all who gave of their time, energy, and heart—thank you. You helped make this not just a successful event, but a truly inspiring one.

Volunteers played a vital role in every corner of the conference, welcoming guests, offering help, opening doors, and supporting wherever needed. Their presence and joyful spirit made everyone feel cared for. Behind the scenes, our on-site staff went above and beyond, ensuring that every detail was handled with care and excellence.



Volunteers with green vests were available to help with check-in, information, hospitality, and more.

As we move forward, may we continue to live into this spirit of collaboration and community. Because indeed, it takes a village—and we are so blessed to be part of this one.

as the body of Christ, where every part is essential and every gift is needed.

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Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Office of Connectional Ministries.



AC wrap-up (continued from page 4)

to help support programs and services in theological education, the enlistment and continuing education of ordained ministers, and courses of study.

Laity session

To help prepare the lay members Eugene Williams, NIC’s co-lay leader (with Connie Augsburg), organized a detailed overview of important aspects of the Annual Conference. During the Laity Session on June 9, leaders from various NIC ministry areas explained the budget, the proposed apportionment formula, the voting process for ratifying the constitutional amendments, and the new clergy pension program, which goes into effect on Jan. 1.

Lunch-and-Learn

Members had a new opportunity this year: Lunch-and-Learn, where participants picked up a box lunch and chose among six informational sessions. They could hear from the Board of Global Ministries and United Women in Faith, Chicago Black Methodists for Church Renewal, the Commission on Religion and Race, Creating New Faith Communities, and Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary.



2025 One Matters Awards

The Northern Illinois Conference recognized five churches with One Matters Awards. The United Methodist Church's Discipleship Ministries created this award in 2015 to encourage congregations that in the previous year increased baptisms and professions of faith from zero to at least one. Wanting to recognize more churches, NIC makes four additional awards.



Lake North: First United Methodist Church, Arlington Heights

This church's long-standing programs reflect a commitment to inclusive and intergenerational ministry. The 4x8 Group meals, the lively Wednesday night JAM (Jesus, Art, & Music) program that brings all ages together for music and dinner, or groups like the Green Team, LGBTQIA+ support, and other affinity groups highlight the congregation's diverse and welcoming spirit. This welcoming spirit is coupled with a follow-up process to fuel growth. Worship attendance, both online and in person, has increased 20 percent over the previous year.



Lake South: United Methodist Church of New Lenox

Offering a warm welcome to all, this congregation intentionally practices hospitality. Rather than being driven by political or ideological differences, the church aims to be diverse and first and foremost, grounded by our faith in Jesus the Christ, who invites all to the Table. While this is often difficult work, members believe it is vital to creating an authentic community of believers that attracts people from various backgrounds. On any given Sunday, atheists, agnostics, seekers, and deeply grounded disciples are present.



Prairie Central: Antioch United Methodist Church

The friendly and welcoming nature of this congregation, which was firmly in place before its current pastor, Rev. Katie Voigt, arrived, is practiced by all members. A member who notices a new person sitting at a fellowship table alone may take the initiative to sit with the visitor or invite them to an occupied table where they can meet more people. Frequent worshipers invite newcomers to join them for lunch afterward. In the last five years, the church has baptized 2 adults and 6 children, and has received 24 new members by confession of faith or transfer.



Prairie North: Grace United Methodist Church, Rockford

Rockford, a spiritually conservative area with churches on nearly every block, has very few openly affirming congregations. Grace UMC members discerned that they were being called to offer LGBTQ+ individuals and their families a safe, welcoming space to worship and belong. The church introduced a new slogan: "Grace is for Everyone," and displayed it on a banner outside church alongside a Pride flag. Visitors started walking through the doors, many drawn by the banner and flag. By the end of 2024, Grace had welcomed 14 new adult members and baptized a child. These newcomers didn't just visit—they found a home.



Prairie South: Hinckley United Methodist Church

The people of Hinckley UMC had been praying fervently and faithfully for the next generation of the church. Over the past three years, those faithful prayers have borne fruit. The worship attendance has grown by over 30 percent. The church has welcomed 22 new members, including a class of six confirmands in spring 2025. They've baptized 13 young people—about half of them infants and the other half elementary-school students. Another powerful answer to those prayers is their growing number of young families who are choosing to put down roots in the life of this church.

If you have questions about the One Matters Awards, please contact Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer, director of connectional ministries (fgrandon-mayer@umcnic.org) or visit umcnic.org/onematters.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Office of Connectional Giving. Your giving to General Church apportionments supports Discipleship Ministries



In Memoriam:

Active Clergy

- Charlene Hill, Jan. 27, 2025
- Dennis Oglesby Jr., June 16, 2024
- Sigfried Schwirblat, Dec. 29, 2024
- Robyn Tabb, Oct. 22, 2024

Retired Clergy

- Ronald Ball, Jan. 11, 2025
- Nancy Dvorachek, July 12, 2024
- George Edwin Franke, Sept. 29, 2024
- Sang Hyu Han, May 15, 2024
- C. Wesley Johnson, Aug. 23, 2024
- Gladys King-Lucas, Feb. 8, 2025
- Lynn Longenbaugh, June 6, 2024
- Ron Purser, Feb. 24, 2025
- Raymond Rhoads, Aug. 4, 2024
- Royal Speidel, July 21, 2024
- Francine Taylor-Thirus, Oct. 8, 2024
- Margaret Anne Williams, June 5, 2024
- Cynthia Zolk, July 25, 2024

Spouses of Retired Clergy

- Marsha Harman, July 20, 2024
- Susan Keck, Oct. 17, 2024
- Robert Lacock, Feb. 28, 2025
- Maurine Patten, Dec. 9, 2024
- John E. Robinson, July 13, 2024
- Rosalind Swanson, Aug. 15, 2024

Surviving Spouses of Deceased Clergy

- Patrice Brown-Jackson, Aug. 24, 2024
- Catherine "Beth" Bundy, Jan. 28, 2025
- Esther Crandall, July 28, 2024
- Bruce Eller, Aug. 18, 2024
- Janet Matteson, Nov. 22, 2024
- Jane Reid, Feb. 3, 2025
- Kathryn Rockwood, June 30, 2024
- Elva Strawser, July 1, 2024

Lay Members to Annual Conference

- James "Jim" Blue, June 9, 2024
- Elizabeth "Liz" Okayama, Sept. 2, 2024
- Grace Elaine Willstead, June 7, 2024

Watch the video of the Memorial Service: vimeo.com/1094488002.



Mission Links Awards

Thank you to the Northern Illinois Conference churches that became 2024 Mission Links churches. These churches have given 100% of their apportionments and supported a project in each of the 7 giving areas (Special Sundays, Global Advance Projects, Missionary Support, UMCOR/Emergency Relief Projects, U.S.-Based Advances, NIC Conference Projects, and NIC District Projects).

Thank you for living out the beatitudes and being a blessing for projects around the block and around the world.

See the full list of the 2024 Mission Link churches at umcnic.org/news/mission-links-change-the-world.

Learn more about Mission Links at umcnic.org/missionlinks.

Philip Otterbein Award for Highest Total Mission Link Giving

Kingswood United Methodist Church, Buffalo Grove and Deerfield: \$21,542

John Wesley Award: Highest Mission Link Giving Per Member

Good Shepherd United Methodist Church, Oswego: 79%



Look for a new Mission Links booklet in fall 2025.

2026 budget and apportionment formula passed

by Kim Emery, Chair of CCFA

The Conference Council on Finance and Administration thanks the Annual Conference members for passing the recommended 2026 conference budget and a new apportionment formula last month.

2026 budget

The 2026 conference is balanced; that is, the income equals expenses. The Conference Council on Finance and Administration did not recommend an increase over the 2025 budget because we know these are challenging times for local churches. We understand that every dollar given to apportionments comes from the offering plate.

And we appreciate those local churches that pay their appointment in full, for being part of the connection, for meeting “the first benevolent responsibility of the Church” (Book of Discipline, para. 247.14).

Apportionment giving pays for the ministries that churches share as the Northern Illinois Conference. Annual Conference members approved the budget, and in so doing they agreed to support it financially. Our confer-

ence pays 100 percent of its bills, even if we don’t collect 100 percent from the churches. Last year our churches remitted 79 percent of the total apportioned. As of May, we collected 69 percent, which is 10 points higher than received at this time last year. THANK YOU! Most of the apportionment is paid in December. We hope to reach at least 80 percent this year.



David W. Quinn and Kim Emery during the budget presentation at Annual Conference

New apportionment formula

We have a new, simple, equitable apportionment formula (see p. 4 for details). The new formula comes with these rules.

- Income shall be defined according to each church’s statistical report. It shall be computed by subtracting the amounts on lines 53 and 54b from line 55 on the

apportionment remittance form. Line 53 reports capital campaigns amounts and other designated projects, and line 54b reports the Advance Special, Apportioned, and Connectional Funds the church received.

- A church’s apportionment will be figured on the most recent income information that it has submitted.
- There will be no appeal process.
- Previous appeal and adjustment limitations will no longer be in effect.

Watch for webinars and trainings this fall on statistical reports, especially the income line items. If your church completes its 2025 statistical report by Jan. 30, 2026, NIC will use your 2025 information to calculate your 2026 apportionment. If your church submits its report after January 30, 2026, we will use your 2024 information.

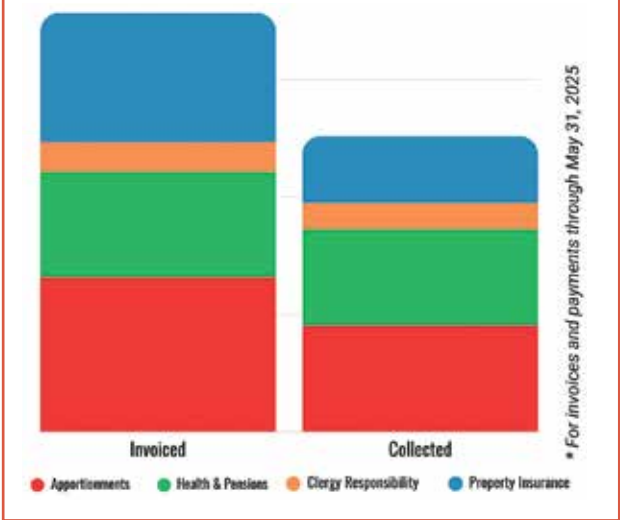


Connectional Giving Update

Currently, as of the end of May 2025, our collection rates are as follows:

- Apportionments: 69%
- Health and Pension: 91%
- Clergy Responsibility: 88%
- Property Insurance: 52%

Every contribution makes a difference in sustaining our conference’s mission and impact in the community. If you are not sure where your church stands on their contributions, please ask your pastor or church treasurer.



Quilt presentation celebrates diversity and creativity

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

At the 2025 Northern Illinois Annual Conference, a vibrant symbol of unity, justice, and cultural pride was unveiled: the Arts & Culture Quilt, presented by the NIC Anti-Racism Task Force.

This remarkable quilted wall hanging is the culmination of many individuals using fabric as an art form to explore the diversity that shapes our communities and reflects our shared commitment to racial justice.

Tim Alexander and Nadia Kanhai, co-chairs of the Conference Commission on Religion and Race, presented the quilt on June 11 to Bishop Dan Schwerin, asking that it be displayed at the conference office in Chicago.

The quilt was part of the Arts and Culture Series launched by the Task Force in 2024 to highlight the artistic expressions of various ethnicities through film, presentation, and art. To accompany the events, the ARTF asked churches and individuals to submit individual quilt squares that reflected their culture, congregation, or personal story. It was an invitation to reflect on their heritage, faith, and the call to equity.

Quilts have played a significant role in Amer-

ican history and culture for centuries. The submissions for this project were as unique as their creators; many incorporated meaningful phrases, song lyrics, or symbols connected to racial justice and unity. Each piece told a story, celebrating the richness of our diverse communities while also affirming our collective responsibility to challenge racism and inequality. Each square was a mini-quilt with a label on the back denoting their name and church. The final quilt was assembled by Ida Van Boven, the quilting coordinator from First United Methodist Church in Elmhurst. She added the

finishing touches—sashing, borders, binding, and a hanging pocket—transforming the individual contributions into a single, beautiful expression of hope and solidarity.

“Since 2024 was the end of the Anti-Racism Task Force in the conference, it is fitting that the final work of the group be a symbol of the diversity and talent we find throughout the conference,” said task-force member Tim Alexander. “While the Anti-Racism Task Force may have ended, the work of anti-racism will continue through the Conference Commission on Religion and Race. We look forward to new opportunities to share our work in the coming years. A special thanks to all the quilters and especially Ida Van Boven, who took the project under her wings and created the final gift we were happy to share with the conference.”

It stands not only as a work of art but as a lasting reminder of our connection through culture and shared purpose.

Accompanying the quilt is a book of photographs of each square along with the stories submitted by the quilters. You can view and download a pdf booklet at umcnic.org/2024ArtsandCultureQuilt.



Tim Alexander and Nadia Kanhai, co-chairs of CCORR, presenting the quilt to Bishop Dan Schwerin to hang in the conference office.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the work of CCORR.



Mission Collection a success



Over 4,000 pounds of goods, over \$1,000, and several large donations were collected at the Midwest Mission truck through the Mission Challenge!

If you missed out on the challenge, don't worry. There are also online shopping and donation options and you also can always send donations to the center directly or drop off at the NIC permanent sites:
Lake North: Maywood: Neighborhood UMC or Glenview UMC
Lake South: New Lenox UMC
Prairie Central: Fox River Grove: Community
Prairie North: Lanark UMC
Learn more: umcnic.org/2025MissionChallenge.



Laity address: Grace and connection strengthen us

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communication

Change is coming, Eugene Williams alerted members of the 2025 Northern Illinois Annual Conference during the laity address, delivered on June 10. But our dependence on God and maintenance of our connection will carry us through needed change.

He first named some positive changes taking place in the NIC.

"With great challenges come great opportunities— as is evidenced by 27 percent increase in new attendance. We have new attendees coming to this gathering this year. What that means is fresh eyes, fresh ideas, fresh thoughts." At the same time, some changes in our social and political world have been distressing, he acknowledged.

"Yes, we are either in a storm, entering a storm, or coming out of a storm, but the storms of life are always raging," he observed. "So we should be energetic and take back hope and encouragement to our respective ministry settings. We've come too far to turn back now."

Change is not always comfortable, he said. We will experience some distress. However, he

reminded conference members, some among us have already been experiencing deep pain as they waited for change.

Change can lead to renewal through Christ. "Through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus," Williams said. "We are steeped in our love for Christ and for humankind as United Methodists."

"In addition to God's grace, our connection to each other and to God can give us strength



to continue to share God's love and find joy. Let us celebrate our connection, because we all belong to God."

He urged members to turn their anxieties about change over to God.

"Let's lean into grace, sisters and brothers," he said, "to be the body of Christ."

"Love boldly, serve joyfully, lead courageously, and he will keep us and give us peace, even in the midst of the storm."

This Life-Changing Journey

God extends grace; let us do the same

by Rev. Danita R. Anderson, Assistant to the Bishop

Another Annual Conference is in the books! But not just any Annual Conference! It was the 186th session of the Northern Illinois Conference. Many joys and celebrations and still other moments of sadness, especially during the Memorial Service. And to see so many friends that get missed during the course of the year. Oh what joy in serving!



As I think back, especially to this year's Celebration of Ministry service, I was reminded of my own journey through that process. About 42 years ago, I was ordained as a deacon and elected as a probationary member. (This was the first step in the ordination process during that time.) Two years later, in 1985, I was ordained as an elder with full rights and privileges. The bishop put his hands on my head and told me to "take authority as an elder to preach the Word of God, to administer the Holy Sacraments and to order the life of the Church; in the name of our Triune God."

My journey has been filled with trying to do my best at upholding that pronouncement! Some days I felt like I had not preached a good sermon or I forgot the words to the communion or baptism liturgy or maybe could have made different choices at ordering the life of the church. But, by God's grace, I got the opportunity to try again.

God's grace reminds us of our humanity and should be the guiding force behind how we treat others. We have been extended God's love and forgiveness and should spend time extending it to others. Our current reality does not agree. We see atrocities every day that tell us that other people are not important, do not need to be respected, cared for or cared about. But the same God who extends grace to us reminds us to extend grace to others. In our daily walk, we must remember that grace has and will always be sufficient for us. We must find ways to share that message with others. How can you find more moments to extend grace in your everyday life?



Rev. Anderson (center) with Rev. P. Devon Brown and Rev. Marcus Tabb.

Upcoming Events

See the full calendar at umcnic.org/calendar

Upcoming Safe Sanctuaries Trainings



Cost \$15
includes class instruction and background check
Attendance for all three hours of class and background checks must be passed before completion certificate is issued.

Online Via Zoom

- Sat., Aug. 23, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- Sun., Aug. 24, 3 to 6 p.m.

In Spanish

- Sat., Sept. 13, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.,
Franklin Park: First UMC

Is your church interested in hosting an in-person Safe Sanctuaries training?
Contact Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer for more information: 872-810-0870 or fgrandon-mayer@umcnic.org.

Upcoming Finance and Administration Trainings

Online via Zoom

Church Property Tax Webinar

Tuesday, July 15, 7 p.m.
Learn more: umcnic.org/calendar/church-property-tax-webinar

Charge Conference Reporting Webinar

Tuesday, August 19, 7 p.m.
Learn more: umcnic.org/calendar/charge-conference-reporting-webinar

2026 Budget Information

Tuesday, September 23, 7 p.m.
Learn more: umcnic.org/calendar/2026-budget-information

Compass Retirement Plan Webinar

Tuesday, September 30, 6:30 p.m.
Learn more: umcnic.org/calendar/compass-retirement-plan-webinar

Find more resources and links to previous trainings at umcnic.org/financeadministration.



NIC Youth Fall 2025 Retreat

For middle school and high school students (6th to 12th grade)

Sept. 26-28

Lutherdale Camp and Conference Center, Elkhorn, WI

Cost: \$180

Learn more: umcnic.org/calendar/nic-youth-fall-2025-retreat



Leading the Laity

We are exhorters of grace



by Eugene Williams,
Conference Co-Lay Leader
On behalf of the Laity of the Northern Illinois Conference, I greet you in the name of our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ! The season of grace

that we are experiencing is indeed humbling.

We are truly grateful and extend a big thank you to the more than 400 people who attended Laity Session during Annual Conference. Our conference theme was “Grace is Sufficient.” And our quadrennial Laity Sunday theme is “Together By Grace,” which is based on Ephesians 3:14-21. Here are each year’s specific emphases:

- **Oct. 19, 2025:**
TOGETHER BY GRACE!
Be Strong in the Spirit (Eph. 3:16)
- **Oct. 18, 2026:**
TOGETHER BY GRACE!
Be Grounded in Love (Eph. 3:17)
- **Oct. 17, 2027:**
TOGETHER BY GRACE!
Behold the Breadth and Depth of Love (Eph. 3:18)
- **Oct. 15, 2028:**
TOGETHER BY GRACE!
Be Filled With the Fullness of God (Eph. 3:19)

Siblings, we are proving each day and at each Annual Conference that we are indeed children of God, working in the corporate community, that beloved community of Christ to love and value our neighbors as ourselves. John Wesley might say that all of us are called to be exhorters. Like Wesley, an exhorter is someone, especially laity (given that all clergy were once

laity), who strongly encourages or urges others to take a specific action, often with a focus on moral or spiritual improvement, especially in a religious context.

We have made some tremendous strides but more are needed. It seems that this world has never been more divided, as we continue to witness the intentional inflicting of unjustified harm, senseless violence, political assassinations, wars and rumors of wars. Through our connectionalism, let us lean into grace with all of our hearts, souls, and minds.

Although divisiveness is not going away any time soon; neither is grace. Grace is neither accidental or coincidental; rather, it is prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying. So let us as exhorters be the very tie that binds us all in Christian love. We are stronger as a result of the sum of our parts.

At Annual Conference, I witnessed firsthand the grace and love of Christ as we endeavored to push on from our current reality to one of equality, equity, and, ultimately, liberation. Thank you, exhorters of the Northern Illinois Conference, for reinforcing what we already knew: GRACE IS SUFFICIENT!

Because of the connection we share, I would rather be United Methodist than anything else. So, exhorters, let us exhort and encourage while receiving and extending grace as we journey through this season of experimentation.

This year, let’s focus on “Together by Grace: Be Strong in the Spirit!” Go with Christ as we celebrate our connectionism and be well. Amen!

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Board of Laity.



KIDS ABOVE ALL'S
BACK TO SCHOOL
BACKPACK DRIVE
JUNE 15 - AUGUST 20

MORE INFORMATION
WWW.KIDSABOVEALL.ORG/BTS-DRIVE

CONTACT INFO

Catherine Inserra
Kids Above All's Manager of Faith & Community Relations
(847) 224-2870
cinserra@kidsaboveall.org



Consider cooperative-parish partnerships

by Rev. Lindsey Long Joyce, Cooperative Parish Strategist

Starting July 1, the office of congregational development will explore an expanding cooperative parish ministry in the Northern Illinois Conference.

I am one of the founding members of the Northside Co-op, which formed in 2017 when Pastor Hope Chernich and I were appointed to serve United Church of Rogers Park and (then) Irving Park United Methodist Church. Embracing a collaborative approach, we worked together as a team, allowing the congregations to retain their autonomy while benefiting from the diverse gifts and shared resources of multiple pastors. It didn't take us long to realize that this kind of collaboration was good for pastors and for churches and we began seeking ways for churches on the Northside of Chicago to partner in deeper ways. Many churches and new colleagues later, the Northside co-op consists of three healthy churches who have done years of work and are about to launch a church plant called Free Recovery Chicago under Pastor Seth Botts.

For me, the co-op is less a model and more a scaffolding for churches to get stable enough to have real conversations about where they are and where they want to be. With my colleagues Seth Botts, Matt Temple and Mori Siegel, we are constantly asking each other, "Why not?" "Why can't we grow?" "Why can't we plant a church?" "Why can't we trust the Holy Spirit to show up like she's promised?" And one of the principles we stand on is, if it doesn't require the Holy Spirit to show up, it's not big enough!

My hope for this new initiative is not only that I can share some of the things we've learned over the past six years in collaborative ministry, but that my colleagues and their churches can be revived in the ways that cooperative ministry has revived us and made us brave. As we are in a season of taking things apart and putting them together in the church, we will need each other's support and encouragement. If you are interested in cooperative parish ministry in your area, please reach out to me at ljoyce@umcnic.org.



Your giving to NIC apportionments supports Congregational Development.



Meet three new NIC staff members

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communication

The Northern Illinois Conference has welcomed three new people to conference ministry.



Elizabeth (Beth) Stahl began work on June 2 as NIC's new risk manager. Ms. Stahl, a lifelong member of Antioch United Methodist Church, has been working at Allstate/HJS Financial Consulting Group as a personal financial representative. Her skills include financial analysis, sales and customer service communication and presentation, problem-solving and decision-making, budgeting and project planning.



Rev. Max Blalock is the new chaplain for North Central College, Naperville, effective July 1. This position is under the leadership of the NIC's Board of Higher Education and

Campus Ministry, in partnership with the college. Bringing 19 years of campus-ministry experience, he says that he is passionate about building communities where people are empowered to work for the common good, especially for those who are most marginalized and oppressed.



Rev. Lindsey Joyce has joined the congregational development staff part-time as cooperative parish strategist. She will introduce cooperative parish ministries and help expand them

in the conference. She is pastor of Grace Church of Logan Square, which is part of the Northside Cooperative Parish. That group of churches has done trailblazing work in this area, which can inform other churches that might explore participating in team ministry.

New retirement plan coming Jan. 1

by Rev. Cheryl Weaver, Conference Benefits Officer

Compass, which goes into effect Jan. 1, is an account-based defined contribution retirement plan for eligible UMC clergy. It's designed to help clergy optimize their retirement income with the ability to leave their account balance to their beneficiaries. Through shared responsibility, clergy accumulate an account balance during their active ministry and have flexibility on how to receive their income during retirement.

There are two sources of contributions to this plan: one from the church/conference (UMC) and the other from the clergy person.

UMC Contributions

There are three types of UMC contributions coming from your church:

- 2026 Flat dollar:** \$150/month*
*increases 2% annually in \$5 increments
- Pay-dependent:**
3% of plan compensation**
**plan compensation includes 35% for parsonage or housing allowance

- 3. Matching:** \$1/\$1 match with participant contributions, up to 4% of plan compensation

UMC contributions are held in the clergy's Compass directed account, which must be invested and managed by LifeStage Investment Management. At retirement, clergy can set up distributions of their directed account using LifeStage Retirement Income.

Upon retirement, clergy can turn their Compass-directed account into retirement income through LifeStage Retirement Income.

Clergy contributions

Clergy contributions are a critical component of Compass. Clergy should consider contributing 4% of their plan compensation early in their career to reap the

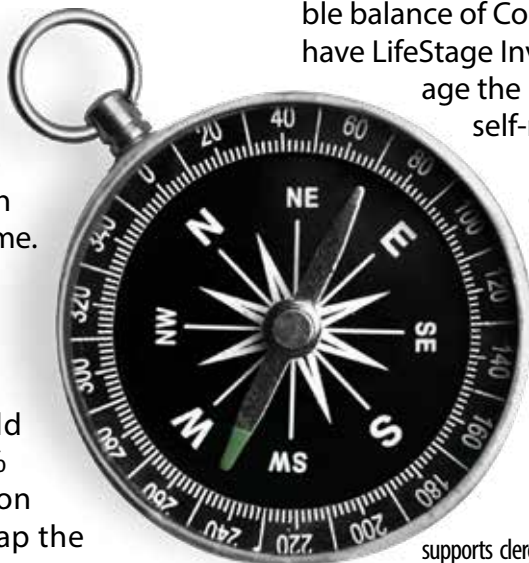
benefits of long-term investment growth, qualify for the full matching UMC contributions, and qualify for tax benefits (with before-tax personal contributions).

By making contributions of at least 4% of their compensation, clergy receive the full matching contribution—resulting in more dollars invested toward their retirement.

Personal contributions constitute the flexible balance of Compass. Clergy can choose to have LifeStage Investment Management manage the investment of this balance or self-manage the investments.

For those not eligible for Compass, the United Methodist Personal Investment Plan (UMPIP) will still be available. Please watch for more training in the third and fourth quarters of this year or contact your conference benefits office.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports clergy benefits and the Benefits Office.



Risk Management & Ministry Protection

by Elizabeth Stahl, NIC Risk Manager

I am excited to start my new challenge as your risk manager. My name is Elizabeth Stahl; I go by Beth. I have worked at Allstate for the last 20 years, have a financial and insurance background, have worked on property management, and I am a lifelong United Methodist. My mom, Martha Schmidt, is a retired Methodist pastor from this conference. I am an active member at the United Methodist Church of Antioch. I welcome the opportunity to bring my skills and dedication to this role to support your church and am committed to ensuring that congregations work on their missions and know that they have a robust risk conscious infrastructure backing them.

I am grateful for the gracious welcome from Elaine Moy, NIC's treasurer and director of administrative services, who noted that I have "the knowledge and skills of insurance, and the heart for this ministry."

While at Allstate/HJS Financial Consulting Group, I worked as a personal financial representative. This sharpened my skills in financial analysis, sales and customer service communication and presentation, problem-solv-

ing and decision-making, and budgeting and project planning.

I started on June 2, a week before Annual Conference. Before that I was like most parishioners: very active in my local church and but knowing very little about the conference. I have learned that there is an extraordinarily strong resolute team working for your church, dedicated to doing what is best in its entirety for the conference. Also, they are all helpful, initiative-taking, and genuinely nice people and so have made the start of a new position a positive experience. Thank you!

I met many people at Annual Conference and look forward to meeting many more. I want to work with each church to facilitate managing the risk at your church the most effective way we can. Effective risk management is a collaborative effort. I welcome dialogue on the challenges that your church is facing so we can meet those needs.

While we know there is some loss

that is out of our control, we know how we can mitigate risk, and I am ready to work on implementing strategies with you. As stated in Proverbs 14:15, "the simple believe everything but the prudent gives thought to his steps." By looking at our risk, we can make more informed decisions and take initiative-taking measures to avoid needless exposure.

The following are my priority areas of focus:

- safety on our properties and off (transportation)
- maintenance of properties; maintenance plans with local church board of trustees
- Safe Sanctuaries training and documentation of completion
- education: Webinars, newsletter articles, resources on the website, and collaboration with your board of trustees on seasonal items.

Please review the Risk Management web page (umcnic.org/riskmanagement) for resources. There is a lot of information there now and I will continue to add to it.

I look forward to mitigating risk as much as possible to protect our ministries. Please email me at estahl@umcnic.org if you have any questions or concerns.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Office of Risk Management



Regionalization may influence Pan-Methodist Africa

By Eveline Chikwanah,

UM News correspondent in Harare, Zimbabwe

Leaders of 55 Methodist denominations on the African continent have pledged to support each other as Methodism continues to thrive and grow in the region despite myriad challenges.

The Africa Methodist Council members met May 14-19 in Nairobi, Kenya.

"The meeting reflected not only the unity of the Methodist people across Africa, but also the enduring commitment to uphold the values of faith, justice, and compassion that have guided Methodists for generations," said the Most Rev. Paul Kwabena Boafo, Africa Methodist Council president. He is also the presiding bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana.

The church leaders learned about the proposed regionalization amendment to the UMC constitution. Under this organizational schema, the U.S. and each central conference — UMC regions in Africa, Europe and the Philippines — would become regional conferences with the same authority to adapt parts of the Book of Discipline, the denomination's policy book, for more missional effectiveness.

The UMC General Conference passed the amendment last year and it now is being considered for ratification by all annual conferences.

Bishop Ande I. Emmanuel, who leads UMs in Nigeria, Cameroon, and

Senegal, said regionalization would affect not only the UMC but also African Methodism as a whole.

"Its impact goes beyond our imagination," Emmanuel said. "It is a plan that has given Africa the autonomy to contextualize its theology and its ministry."

"Today, this is something Africa needs, so the impact of contextualization goes beyond The United Methodist Church but to all African Methodists. It brings back our contextual theology that Africa is known for," he explained.

The Rev. Reynaldo Ferreira Leão Neto, top executive of the World Methodist Council, encouraged Methodists to remain united. "United we are stronger than separate," he said. "The Lord calls us to be one body who share the same bread and the same cup."

Neto told UM News: "We are called to be one and one we should be. That's my prayer

for the churches in Africa. We have heard of many problems including violence. [Three UMs were killed in December in clashes between members of the UMC of Nigeria and the breakaway Global Methodist Church in Munga Dosso, Taraba State.]

"That's not the way of Christ. We reject it and affirm the way of Christ: the way of love, of embracing and respecting each other."

Bishop Emmanuel, who was the only UMC episcopal leader at the gathering, said he expects more United Methodist bishops at the next conference planned for May 2026. "This is a place for us," he said. "We have the potential to lead African Methodism to ensure that we strengthen and contextualize our theology and our church in a way that will better serve ministry in Africa."

The Rev. Martin Mujinga, Africa Methodist Council general secretary, said the leaders'

summit confirmed that Africa is the hub of 21st century Christianity. "Methodists are part of this worldwide expansion and the meeting demonstrated that the problem of one denomination is a problem for all," he said. "Theologizing, speaking truth to power, ecclesiology and connectionalism are the tenets that should define Methodism in Africa."



The Kenya Prison Service band leads procession at the start of the Africa Methodist Council's heads of Methodist conferences summit on May 14 in Nairobi, Kenya. Photo by Eveline Chikwanah, UM News.

Your giving to General Church apportionments supports the UM News and the church around the world.



United Methodists and allies gather to speak up in Springfield

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

On a mission rooted in faith and justice, a coalition of over 65 United Methodists and partners gathered in Springfield for the second annual Advocacy Day on May 7, 2025. The day, planned by the Advocacy Partners of the Northern Illinois Conference Commission on Religion and Race and the Illinois Great Rivers Conference Church and Society Committee, drew people from the NIC, Illinois Great Rivers Conference, United Voices for Children, and Children’s Advocates for Change.

Inspired by the sacrifices and vision of past activists, participants representing over 1,000 churches and nearly 50,000 members from across Illinois came to engage directly with Illinois legislators. Through Advocacy Day, United Methodists took direct action to promote the values of justice, compassion, and inclusion in state policies.

“Springfield Advocacy Day is an excellent example of United Methodists coming together to raise our collective voices to let our legislators know what we stand for,” said Lisa Rogers, chair of the NIC Advocacy Partners. “Using our Social Principles as a guide, we shared our United Methodist values with our elected officials and asked them to consider those values when they vote for or against bills.”

Multiple points of engagement were built into the day, including pre-arranged meetings with participants’ state legislators, sitting

in on legislative discussions, and touring the capitol. Participants organized themselves into small groups and met with their legislators. They brought with them position papers, talking points, and a reminder of the strength of United Methodists.

“Illinois Great Rivers Conference was thrilled to join our brothers and sisters of the Northern Illinois Conference in Springfield,” said Deaconess Christina Krost, chair of the IGRC Church and Society Committee. “I’m looking forward to making this a yearly event that helps build relationships with our legislators and uplifts our witness across Illinois: from Chicago to Carbondale.”

Douglas Avenue UMC, just a few blocks from the capitol, hosted a lunch for the group. This also served as a time of learning

and debriefing from the meetings earlier in the day. Rev Curtis Brown, IGRC Director of Connectional Ministries, shared words of encouragement for the participants, reminding them that we are one Illinois with many

members who stand on a long history of United Methodist activism. “There is much to do, we have been here before, and we have won before,” he encouraged.

The day closed with a public prayer and drum circle at the Lincoln statue, a moment of spiritual reflection and unity before departing for home.

The work of NIL’s Religion and Race Advocacy Partners did not start on May 7. This hands-on advocacy experience is a continuation of the group’s broader work, which includes anti-racism education and community action inspired by the 2023 NIC civil rights pilgrimage to Selma and Montgomery. Multiple learning sessions included information on how to talk to legislators, relationship building, listening, advocacy skills, and strategies for speaking with elected officials.

The group’s 2025 advocacy agenda centered on three key priorities: environmental justice, immigrant and migrant services, and youth education and mental health. These three key priorities are supported by our United Methodist Social Principles and are important in creating a nation is truly equitable for all.

Environmental justice is not separate from social justice, particularly in urban areas where pollution and lack of green spaces disproportionately affect communities of color. The UMC affirms the inherent dignity of all people and stresses that comprehensive immigrant support reflects our moral responsibility. Education has long been a cornerstone of Methodist tradition, and we acknowledge the connection between educational opportunities in safe and nurturing environments, and mental health and a student’s ability to perform.

As this faithful and focused group walked the halls of the capitol, they carried with them not just talking points, but a vision for an Illinois where justice, compassion, and equity are more than ideals—they are lived realities. Their presence was a reminder that advocacy is an act of faith, and that hope takes root when people show up, speak out, and stand together.



The public prayer and drum circle included signs to notify those passing by of some UM priorities.



Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the CCORR.

Clergy Appointments and Retirements

Bishop Dan Schwerin announces the following clergy appointments and retirements for the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church, effective July 1, 2025 (unless otherwise noted):

Joe Johnson (Elder) to Extension Ministry (Illinois EPA) from Elmhurst: First (PC). Eff. 6/1
James Fu (Elder) to Elmhurst: First (3/4) (PC) and Elmhurst: Christ (1/4) (PC) from Lombard: First (Associate) (1/4) (PC) and Elmhurst: Christ (3/4) (PC). At Elmhurst: First, James follows Joe Johnson, who is appointed to Extension Ministry. Eff. 6/1
Matthew Johnson (Elder) to Voluntary Leave of Absence from Barrington (Associate) (PC).
Carolyn Lukasick (Elder) to Poplar Grove (PN) from Rockton (PN). Carolyn follows Tercio Junker, who is appointed to Bolingbrook: Friendship (PC).
Amos Oladipo (Retired Elder) to Park Forest: Grace United Protestant (1/2) (LS) from retirement. Amos currently serves at Park Forest: Grace United Protestant and will continue to serve as a retired elder.
Audrey Rochet (LLP) to Rockford: Brooke Road (1/2) (PN) while continuing to serve at Rockford: Centennial Multicultural (1/2) (PN). At Rockford: Brooke Road, Audrey follows Violet Johnicker who is appointed to Rockford: New Faith Community (1/2) (PN).
Beverly Dukes (Elder) to Oak Lawn: First (1/2) (LS) from Alsip: Christ (LS), while continuing to serve Morgan Park (1/2) (LS). Beverly follows Amos Oladipo who is retiring.

Sanha Kang (DSS) to Southlawn (1/2) (LS). Sanha follows Colleen Norman, who is retiring.
Hyo Sun Oh (Elder) to Morris: First (PS) from Roselle (PC). Hyo Sun follows Keck Mowry, who is appointed to Lake Bluff: Grace (LN).
Megan Thompson (Elder) to Downers Grove: First (Associate) (LS) from Seneca: First & Mar-seilles (PS). Megan follows Andi Voinovich, who is appointed to Voluntary Leave of Absence.
Lindsey Joyce (Elder) to Co-op Strategist (1/4) (Office of the Congregational Development and Redevelopment) from Chicago: United Church of Rogers Park (1/4) (LN), while remaining at Chicago: Grace of Logan Square (3/4) (LN).
Adonna Reid (Elder) to Transitional Leave of Absence from Oak Park: First (LN).
Roberto Moreno (LLP) to Franklin Park: First (1/4) (LN), while continuing to serve at Franklin Park: The Movement in the City (1/4) (LN). Roberto follows Harlene Hardin, who returns to retirement.
Grace Oh (Elder) to Voluntary Leave of Absence from Hinsdale (LS).
Megan Tobola (Elder) to Oak Park: First (1/2) (LN) and Riverside: Woodside (1/2) (LS) from Naperville: Wesley (PC). Megan follows Adonna Reid, who is appointed to Transitional Leave of Absence, and Kimberly Lewis-Davis, who is appointed to Evergreen Park: First (LS).

Eun Bae Doh (Elder) to Naperville: Wesley (PC) from Channahon (PS). Eun Bae follows Megan Tobola, who is appointed to Oak Park: First (LN) and Woodside: Riverside (LS).
Seth Botts (LLP) to Chicago: Holy Covenant (1/2) (LN) from Chicago United Church of Rogers Park (1/2) (LN), while continuing to serve at Recovery Community NFC (1/2) (LN). He follows Jennifer Stephens, whose ministry concluded.
Hannah Kardon (Elder) to Chicago: United Church of Rogers Park (1/4) (LN) while continuing to serve at Interfaith American as extension ministry. Hannah follows Seth, who is appointed to Chicago: Holy Covenant.
Jason Princer (LLP) to South Elgin: Community (1/4) (PC) while continuing to serve Elgin: Journey of Hope (3/4) (PC). Jason follows Tina Shelton, whose ministry at South Elgin: Community is concluding.
Ayla Samson (Elder) to Channahon (PS) from Morris: First (Associate) (PS). Ayla follows Eun Bae Doh, who is appointed to Naperville: Wesley (PC).
George Woosnam (Retired Elder) to Lanark (1/2) (Interim) (PN). George follows Marilyn Nolan, who is appointed to Pecatonica (3/4) (PN).
Penny Volkert (DSS) to Wyanet (1/4) (PS). Penny follows Melissa Engel (1/4) (Interim).
Correction: Kwan Chong’s retirement effective date is March 1, 2025.



Your giving to NIC apportionments supports clergy appointments, moves and retirements.