

# The Northern Illinois Conference OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH Reporter

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DO NOT DELAY. DATED MATERIAL.

## Fresh Expressions ministries give hope for the future of the church

by Rev. Harriette Cross, First UMC in Wilmington

In a time of uncertainty about what the future of The United Methodist Church—and most denominations—will look like, Fresh Expressions brings some hopeful direction.

You may have heard of “church” taking place in some unusual places in some unusual ways, such as dinner church and pub hymn-sings. These are examples of Fresh Expressions, an intentional, interdenominational creative movement of Christians who bring the gospel to those who would probably never come to a traditional church setting. Begun in 2004 by the Methodist Church of Britain and the Church of England, Fresh Expressions creates community that welcomes new people and helps them feel comfortable at God’s table.

“The United Methodist Church is changing,” says Amania Drane, a Northern Illinois United Methodist layperson and consultant to the Anti-Racism Task Force and Discipleship Task Force. “This may bring some fear and anxiety, but we remain hopeful and eager to share God’s love with all, especially those hurt, harmed, or marginalized by the church. Through this time of change and uncertainty, we rejoice in an unchanging God who welcomes and loves all.”

Amania, four other clergy, and I attended “Futuring Forward: The Reawakening of the People Called Methodist,” the first-ever Fresh Expressions United Methodist (FXUM) national gathering, Feb. 7-9 in Charlotte, N.C. Also attending from NIC were Rev. Zaki

Zaki, pastor of Wheatland Salem UMC in Naperville; Rev. Jin Hee Kang, pastor of Galena UMC; Rev. Matthew Smith, pastor of Warren UMC and Red Oak UMC; and Pastor Jacob Tipantasig-Wolverton, pastor of Community UMC in Naperville.

Bishops, scholars, and practitioners across the connection led presentations and workshops. These provided practical tools and processes and tours of Fresh Expressions sites in the Charlotte area.

### Countering the post-COVID slump

At the event, we learned that one in three practicing Christians dropped out of church completely at the beginning of COVID-19 and have not returned. A significant number of adults say they have no intention of walking into a church. Yet these people are still looking for community and some are seeking some type of faith conversation.

After attending the workshops and working on projects together, we in the NIC group believe that Fresh Expressions is key to the conference’s reaching such disaffected adults. It opens doors to reaching new generations for Christ.

### Seniors ministry attracts partners

My church began a Fresh Expressions ministry for seniors in our Wilmington neighborhood. We were inspired by a coaching opportunity with Paul Nickerson, an expert in church vitality, provided by the NIC.

We decided that since most of our active church members are older people, we would like to target their outreach programs to seniors. We thought that if they could attract seniors to existing programs, then in time the seniors would bring their children and grandchildren to church.

Our church’s Nurture, Outreach and Witness Committee determined that one of the greatest needs of seniors in the area was fellowship with other people during the day. The NIC Code Red Congregational Development Committee gave us a



The Fresh Expressions National Gathering included lively worship, workshops, and presentations.

microgrant that helped us to begin a Community Senior Lunch.

We served the first meal in March 2023. Now we host it twice a month and 30 to 35 people attend. Grace Lutheran Church in Wilmington helps to prepare the lunch. The Wilmington Pastors’ Association supported it by promoting it and urging their church members to attend.

A significant part of the gathering is games and fellowship. Community organizations that serve seniors offer presentations. This has been so successful that other organizations are asking for presentation time.

The Rotary Club has decided to conduct a city-wide survey to ask seniors about their needs, which will inform its sponsorship of more programs at our luncheons. In April, the police department will lead a community-wide presentation on scams that target seniors.

The NIC Fresh Expressions grant helped us get the ministry off the ground. Now the church can support it with the help of free-will donations.

As a Fresh Expressions program, the intent of the ministry is to provide a place where seniors can gather. But a few of our lunch guests now attend our church.

From our experience, I can confirm that Fresh Expressions is not just for reaching young people. It helps all kinds of people see church in a new way.

*continued on page 3; see Fresh Expressions*



The NIC table at the Fresh Expressions National Gathering.





From Your Bishop:

## Containers and Fresh Expressions

*For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*

(Galatians 5:1)

Lent is a container—or a set of training wheels that give way to whatever grace has done in us and through us all. We have this season in time to be formed and set free for the newness of Easter. We are Holy Spirit people, a movement. Followers and sojourners. The walk of faith is contemplative, sure, but the Spirit is always moving. At some point, the Jell-O must go on without the mold.

I was glad to pick up a book of poetry at First United Methodist Church in Lombard recently. It is a collection of devotions by the late Mary Oliver, and the church is using it as one aspect of their Lenten study. One of the poems had me thinking of containers and limits that must give way.

*I have refused to live  
locked in the orderly house of  
reasons and proofs.  
The world I live in and believe in  
is wider than that. And anyway,  
what's wrong with Maybe?*

Mary Oliver

In early February, a team from the Northern Illinois Conference attended "Futuring Forward: The Reawakening of the People Called

Methodist," the first Fresh Expressions United Methodist (FXUM) national gathering.

Read Rev. Harriette Cross's report on their experience (see page one) and you will likely catch their infectious enthusiasm for the Fresh Expressions movement. While it's been around for several years, increasingly more churches are inspired by it to pursue new ways of providing community and faith to neighbors who are unlikely to enter a church building on a Sunday morning.

Amania Drain, a Northern Illinois United Methodist layperson and consultant to the Anti-Racism Task Force and Discipleship Task Force, was one of the people who attended the event. "This is a pivotal time in the history of The United Methodist Church," she said. "Fresh Expressions gives us that opportunity to get things right, where we 'see all the people' [a Discipleship Ministries phrase] and invite them into spaces where they feel valued and welcome."

For Rev. Matt Smith, pastor of Warren UMC and Red Oak UMC, it's not so much a new direction as it is a return to our roots.

"I believe the UMC needs a renewal of Wesleyan spirit and I think Fresh Expressions will fulfill that need," he said.

John and Charles Wesley worked alongside the Church of England but challenged its constraints when they found it necessary in order to help others grow in faith. Bishop Ken Carter, one of the speakers at the FXUM event, said, "I am a denominational bishop in a post denominational world."

Perhaps this is a time to pray about the spiritual training wheels in your life, or the shoe determining the size of your church's foot. For freedom Christ would set us free.

A holy Lent to you.

Know that I am praying for you.

The Mary Oliver verse is excerpted from "The World I Live In," found in *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver* (Penguin Random House, 2020)

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## New superintendents will serve the Lake North and Prairie Central districts



Rev. Wendy Hardin Hermann



Rev. Jeffrey Bross



Rev. Victor O. Melad Jr.



Rev. Brittany Isaac

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck,  
NIC Director of Communications  
Bishop Schwerin announced two new district superintendent appointments, which will begin on July 1. Rev. Wendy Hardin Hermann will become superintendent of the Prairie Central District and Rev. Victor O. Melad Jr. will become superintendent of Lake North District

"I am excited to work with Rev. Hermann's gifts as a grounded, contemplative spiritual leader who brings a collaborative spirit," Bishop Schwerin said. "She is a person of integrity, a quality needed as superintendents will be given even more responsibility in 2024 as we share episcopal leadership with another conference and build teams that can share our span of care."

Of her upcoming appointment, Rev. Hardin Hermann said, "I look forward to getting to know the good people of the Prairie Central District, coming alongside you as we seek God's leading for the future. I give thanks for the fruitful and dynamic

leadership of outgoing District Superintendent Rev. Jeffrey Bross, and I look forward to learning from Rev. Bross in this time of transition."

"Rev. Melad has gifts in administering the church, understanding multiracial congregations, and leadership," Bishop Schwerin said. "He is committed to revitalizing congregations through vibrant ministries. His experience as a district superintendent in the Philippines is of particular value."

In response to Bishop Schwerin's invitation, Rev. Melad said, "I am humbled by the invitation to serve in the cabinet under the leadership of Bishop Dan Schwerin. It's another affirmation of the conference's core value of diversity. I am standing on the shoulders of all Asian immigrants and Filipino-American United Methodists who struggle and contend for representation, voice, and shared leadership in the church. I marvel at the way God calls, that an ordinary servant can be seen and given the opportunity to serve in a larger capacity in the body of Christ."

Rev. Jeffrey Bross, superintendent of the Prairie Central District, will become pastor of Libertyville United Methodist Church. Rev. Brittany Isaac, the superintendent of the Lake North District, will become lead pastor of First United Methodist Church in Arlington Heights. Both appointments are effective July 1.

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### Submissions

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 the Communications staff.

### Job Openings

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



# Rev. Martin Lee, director of congregational development and redevelopment, retires this year



by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications  
Rev. Jongmin Martin Lee, director of congregational development and redevelopment for the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church, will retire on

July 1, announced Bishop Dan Schwerin, who oversees the conference.

"I give thanks for the amazing wisdom and work Rev. Lee brought to the life of the Northern Illinois Conference over the past two decades while serving as Director of Congregational Development and Redevelopment," Bishop Schwerin said. "Rev. Lee has guided us in turbulent times, creating programs, training opportunities, and new church starts that strengthened our disciple-making mission."

Rev. Lee is respected across the United Methodist connection, particularly for his innovative work to expand the conference's ministries with new communities.

"Martin's gifts in leadership development have positively impacted the ministry practices of many of our clergy. His model for the Hispanic Academy has been replicated

throughout the United Methodist connection," Bishop Schwerin said. "His work individually and with groups has equipped our congregations in countless ways. Martin's boundless energy and deep commitment to Christ has been a sevenfold blessing to the life of the Northern Illinois Conference."

"I have had the honor of serving with Rev. Lee for only a brief period, but I am grateful for his skills, his passion, and his deeply rooted faith."

Rev. Lee previously served Freeport: Faith, Chicago: First Korean, Bensenville and as NIC's director of congregational development and redevelopment.

"I look forward to the ways in which Rev. Lee will continue to share his gifts and skill with our annual conference in coaching, consultation, and leadership as he moves into retirement," Bishop Schwerin said.

The conference's Personnel Committee, in partnership with the United Methodist General Board of Finance and Administration, will launch a denomination-wide search to fill the position.

"Please continue to pray for Rev. Lee, the person God is preparing to come next, and our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world," said Bishop Schwerin.

A celebration of Martin's ministry will be held on April 7. For more information, visit [umcnic.org/calendar/celebration-of-rev-martin-lees-ministry](http://umcnic.org/calendar/celebration-of-rev-martin-lees-ministry). Read Rev. Lee's article on generosity, page 8.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the office of congregational development and redevelopment.



Rev. Martin Lee teaching at Freeport: Harmony UMC in 2019. His academies, workshops, and training events have equipped pastors and church leaders for the work of evangelism and outreach.

## Fresh Expressions

from page 1

Rev. Martin Lee, the NIC director of congregational development and redevelopment, has been encouraging conference pastors and laypeople to explore Fresh Expressions. Rev. Lee has organized, among other opportunities, training by denominational leaders of Fresh Expressions.

In March 2021, Bishop Kenneth Carter, author (with Audrey Warren) of *Fresh Expressions: A New Kind of Methodist Church* (Abingdon Press, 2017), led an online training in the NIC. In 2022, Rev. Dr. Michael Beck presented a workshop to introduce Fresh Expressions as a wave of new Christian churches emerging to reach unchurched and de-churched people living in an increasingly non-religious and multi-religious culture. Beck also visited every district to teach how to start a Fresh Expressions ministry. (View a recording of the event at [vimeo.com/753066632](https://vimeo.com/753066632).)

"We have been planting small seeds here and there through this program," Rev. Lee said. "We've also experimented with giving microgrants of \$500 each to help churches implement a Fresh Expressions ministry" (see sidebar).

Find many resources for Fresh Expressions ministries at these websites:

- [freshexpressions.com](http://freshexpressions.com), the nondenominational resource center
- [umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/fresh-expressions](http://umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/fresh-expressions), a United Methodist site that provides training and informational content
- [amplifymedia.com/fresh-expressions-2](http://amplifymedia.com/fresh-expressions-2), Abingdon Press's collection of resources from Rev. Adam Beck

## Microgrants grow Fresh Expressions in Northern Illinois

NIC's congregational development and redevelopment ministry offered microgrants of \$500 to churches that wanted to start Fresh Expressions ministries. Rev. Martin Lee, director of that ministry area, offers a few examples of how these small grants made a big difference.

**Oregon UMC** used a conference grant to start special-event worship services (many of which included a meal). One service, Pancakes and Praise Worship, took place in the church's Family Life Center, starting with a pancake breakfast and including a personal story from a congregant. For another, Sinners and Cinnamon Rolls, a local bakery provided large, delicious cinnamon rolls for everyone. The pastor told a modern parable that included cinnamon rolls as a focal point. At both services, worshipers discussed the faith implications of what they heard that morning. Since then, worship attendance is often double its post-pandemic low of 35 and eight young families have become part of the church.

**Wheatland Salem UMC in Naperville** used their grant to build community relationships with the city police department—especially in South Naperville, which is becoming increasingly ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse. The church's pastor, Rev. Dr. Zaki Labib Zaki, has served as a

Naperville Police chaplain, talked with the department about police-community relations and the increasing diversity in Naperville, and catered a dinner for officers during National Police Week. The church gave the guests \$10 Starbucks gift cards. They also distributed 500 "God's Got This" wrist bands, packaged with a message from Wheatland Salem UMC, to police officers, first responders, and community members.

**Community UMC in Naperville** created its Center Street Table/Dinner Dialogues meals. They started by offering "dinner church" activities for the congregation to experience (a community luncheon following worship, Friendsgiving, and a Christmas Eve jazz brunch). The format of the last two included people cooking together, the sharing of a Jesus story or a parable, and directed conversations at the table. They've invited Wesley UMC, First Congregational UCC, A New Way (LGBTQ+ faith community meeting in Community UMC), and others to partner with them. They also hope to invite North Central College students to these meals on the weekends, when the school cafeterias are closed.

**First UMC in Belvidere** used their grant to seed their "Kingdom Assignment" project. (See Liliana Smith's story, page 11.)



Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the office of Development and Redevelopment. Your giving to General Church apportionments supports the national Fresh Expressions efforts.



# Northern Illinois & Wisconsin Shared Bishop Task Forces affirm common values

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

Conversations among leaders of the Wisconsin and Northern Illinois Conference express increasing confidence and enthusiasm for the conference's sharing a bishop beginning Sept. 1.

The name of the new area is the Northern Illinois–Wisconsin Episcopal Area, the task forces determined at their joint meeting on Feb. 26 in Kenosha, Wis.

The establishment of a new episcopal area is not a conference merger. The Wisconsin and Northern Illinois conferences will continue to govern themselves separately. They will share support of their bishop and may collaborate on areas of mutual concern.

Groups from each conference began meeting separately and together even before the North Central Jurisdiction voted on Jan. 23 to pair Wisconsin and Northern Illinois into an episcopal area. (East Ohio and West Ohio conferences were likewise paired).

Each conference has a task force that meets regularly. From time to time, the two meet jointly to compare notes, express hopes and concerns, and identify decisions they will make together.

Meeting on Dec. 19 in Rockford, Ill., the two groups took a deeper look at the practical details of sharing a bishop. The teams had already met together for a retreat earlier in the year, where they learned about ministry in each conference and found common passions for ministry.

"Our continuing conversations are making it clear that our two conferences share common essential core values and aspirations," said Rev. Steve Zekoff, chair of Wisconsin's Shared Ministry Task Force. Members and leadership from both Wisconsin and Northern Illinois will

benefit as collaborative training and missional opportunities become reality and we support each other in our crucial justice-oriented and diversity-affirming ministries."

"Despite any apprehension we may have had coming to our task, we discovered great alignment in our values and opportunities for collaboration that will enhance the ministries of both conferences," said Rev. Myron Coy, chair of Northern Illinois's Shared Bishop Task Force.

## Lessons learned

Because this is not be the first partnership between conferences sharing a bishop, the group asked other bishops about their experiences of overseeing two conferences in an episcopal area. In-depth information about each conference, effective use of the bishop's time, deploying more leaders in each conference, and clarifying the bishop's role were among the top concerns that the bishops mentioned.

The two task forces have been discussing some of the factors involved in determining the location of an episcopal office and residence, the costs of sharing a bishop, and the importance of soliciting more suggestions and questions from lay and clergy in the conference.

As they considered the question of the location of the bishop's office, the task-force members noted that the bishop would not often be in an office as much work will take place in various parts of Wisconsin, Northern Illinois, and the

world, given the responsibilities that bishops have across the connection.

The lease at the episcopal office at the Chicago Temple expires on Aug. 31, 2024. At this point there is no expectation regarding the next location of the bishop's office. The episcopal area office in Wisconsin has been at the Wisconsin Conference center in Sun Prairie for many years.

With the creation of a new episcopal area, the bishop's office can be located in either of the two conferences, with perhaps outposts in various parts of the episcopal area.

A decision on office location(s) will be made by the two conferences.

Regarding the cost to each conference of sharing a bishop, the NIC task force noted that the UMC Episcopacy Fund provides some funds toward a bishop's office. The North Central Jurisdiction will likely give the episcopal area up to \$20,000 for start-up costs for the formation of the new episcopal area. A preliminary look at expenses and income suggests that sharing a bishop will require less of the NIC budget than having its own bishop.

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Wisconsin and Northern Illinois task force members met as a group for the first time in Racine, Wis., in September 2023.

## NIC General Conference delegation gains background on legislation



by Rev. Alka Lyall,

Chair of Delegation and  
Adrian Hill, Vice Chair

Your delegates to the twice-postponed 2020 General Conference had been anxiously waiting for January 2024. We entered the

year with the energy and anticipation for all that we have been waiting for: new/updated legislation, orientation to the schedule, and expectations on how we will need to pivot from how we were preparing in 2019.

Our world is different from what it was in 2020, but one thing is common and true for us as delegates: we are United Methodists and we continue our work as United Methodists committed to a fully inclusive church that seeks justice and equity for all.

At our meetings in December, January, and February, we heard from a number of people regarding various issues facing General Conference.

In December, Wespeth, The United Methodist Church's pension and health benefits agency, explained the changes they are proposing for clergy pensions. People from the Creation Justice Movement talked to us how we can be better partners and stewards of God's resources. United Methodist Kairos Response asked us to support the legislation they submitted for General Conference vote.

Rev. Izzy Alvaran visited us in January and described the collaborative work done by the leadership of the Christmas Covenant, the Connectional Table, and the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters on a proposal to regionalize the UMC's policy-making process and how we can continue to support and promote it. We also met with leaders from the United Methodist Africa Forum to build relationships with them, applaud their work of organizing and speaking for themselves, and express our support for them in our mutual commitment to fully be the church God is calling us to be.

## Lesser-known concerns matter

In February, we met Bishop Cedrick D. Bridgeforth of the Greater Northwest Episcopal Area in the Western Jurisdiction. He spoke about his hope and vision for the UMC. As a former delegate to General Conference, he gave us much-appreciated tips about building coalitions with other like-minded delegates to maximize our impact. Bishop Bridgeforth also encouraged us to pay attention to legislation that may not have gained the same traction as those proposing regionalization, revision of the Social Principles, and removal of prohibitive language, but, if passed, will have great impact on ordained ministry.

Rev. Bob Burkhart, a retired elder, talked to us about the inequities he sees in Wespeth's proposed new pension plan. He believes it would likely give lesser benefits to incoming clergy and those who do not serve congregations that can afford the same package as larger, better-resourced churches.

Jessie Cunningham, one of our faithful and committed lay delegates, had to step down this year because of her health and family needs. We are grateful for her leadership and for all the ways she made a difference in our conference and denomination. Ronnie Lyall was elected to the North Central Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy, to replace Jessie. Nancy Pendergrass became a voting lay delegate. This leaves us with no lay reserves for jurisdictional conference in July.

Our meetings are always open. We next meet on March 10 at St Mark UMC in Chicago, from 3 to 8 p.m. If you would like to schedule a time to speak with us or simply want to share an interest or concern with us, please send us a message to [2020nicdelegation@gmail.com](mailto:2020nicdelegation@gmail.com).

We are always grateful for your trust and your prayerful support.

Read the delegation's updates at [umcnic.org/news/updates-from-your-nic-delegation-to-general-and-jurisdictional-conferences](http://umcnic.org/news/updates-from-your-nic-delegation-to-general-and-jurisdictional-conferences).

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# Meet this year's annual conference leaders and speakers

The theme for the 185th Northern Illinois Annual Conference is "Yield." It is inspired by John Wesley's phrase in his Covenant Prayer: "I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal." The scriptural grounding is James 3:17: "the wisdom from above . . . is willing to yield."

Bishop Sally Dyck will preside and preach at the ordination and commissioning service. Bishop Dan Schwerin will preach at the memorial service. Leading the Bible study will be Rev. Dr. AHyun Lee, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology, Care, and Psychotherapy at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Rev. Dr. Addison Shields Jr. will lead worship, and Rev. D. Josiah Montgomery will provide musical accompaniment. A mass choir, led by Pastor Jacob Tipantasig-Wolverton, will assist in worship during the ordination and commissioning service.



## **Bishop Sally Dyck**

Bishop Dyck is a retired bishop of The United Methodist Church, having served from 2004 to 2020. She serves as the ecumenical officer of the Council of

Bishops. She previously oversaw the Northern Illinois Conference and Minnesota Conference. Deeply committed to justice, she worked for full inclusion of the church, immigration reform, women's and racial justice, climate justice, and peacemaking as essential to discipleship.



## **Rev. Dr. AHyun Lee**

Rev. Dr. Lee is an Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology, Care, and Psychotherapy at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary. An ordained member

of the Wisconsin Conference, Rev. Dr. Lee has

had the privilege of serving in diverse pastoral roles, from small, rural churches to bustling urban congregations, and in various cross-cultural and cross-racial ministries. With a heart for service and a dedication to learning, Rev. Dr. Lee eagerly anticipates sharing her experiences and insights at annual conference.



## **Rev. Dr. Addison Shields Jr.**

Rev. Dr. Shields is a United Methodist elder who retired after serving six congregations in 34 years of active ministry. He also served

as superintendent of the former Rockford and Chicago Southern districts. He is currently serving as senior pastor for Transformation Community United Methodist Church in Harvey. Dr. Shields started his music ministry at a young age. He was the organist for many churches across the Chicago metropolitan area. He studied voice under the late Thelma Wade Brown at the American Conservatory of Music at Roosevelt University. He sings baritone as a member of the South Holland (Ill.) Master Chorale.



## **Rev. D. Josiah Montgomery**

Rev. Montgomery, senior pastor of Hartzell Memorial UMC in Chicago, is a native of Chicago's South Side, having grown up in

the Grand Crossing neighborhood. An organist by trade, he heard a calling to ministry in 2015, while serving at First UMC in LaGrange. He graduated from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in 2018,



June 16-18, 2024 Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center  
185<sup>th</sup> Northern Illinois Annual Conference

with concentrations in moral theology and African-American religious history. He holds membership with the Chicago Chapter of the American Guild of Organists (board member), Black United Methodist Pastors, and Black Methodists for Church Renewal. Rev. Montgomery also serves as the assistant conductor of the Chatham Choral Ensemble in Chicago.



## **Rev. Jacob Tipantasig-Wolverton**

Rev. Tipantasig-Wolverton is the lead pastor at Community UMC in Naperville. He brings over 25 years of experience in leading both

traditional and contemporary worship, children's and youth ministries, adult discipleship, and pastoral ministry. He holds a master of divinity degree from the Methodist Theological School of Ohio. His ability to transcend worship styles to meet each group has been a testament to his ministry. His approach to worship draws from his experiences in creative arts, choral music, tradition, contemporary Christian music, and his love for the Word of God.

Read the full bios and learn about our other leaders at [umcnic.org/2024-annual-conference/speaker-and-leader-bios](http://umcnic.org/2024-annual-conference/speaker-and-leader-bios).

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## **Legislation**

ALL historical documents and proposed legislation for the conference must be submitted by April 15 using the online submission form linked from [umcnic.org/AC2024docs](http://umcnic.org/AC2024docs). No exceptions will be allowed for failing to meet the deadline or use the form. Legislation and historical documents will be posted online by May 16.

## **Presentation Requests**

Groups requesting presentation time during the annual conference, whether in person or via media and videos projected onscreen, must fill out the request form available on [umcnic.org/AC2024](http://umcnic.org/AC2024) by April 15. Final decisions regarding scheduling are made by the Daily Proceedings Coordinator in conjunction with the Annual Conference Committee. They will schedule presentations as time and agenda permit. Prerecorded videos are preferred.

## **Display Tables**

Displays will be open all three days in the Nirvana Threshold. The cost is \$50 per eight-foot table. Reservation requests are due May 1. Assignments will be made after May 25. Find the registration link and guidelines at [umcnic.org/AC2024](http://umcnic.org/AC2024).

## **Childcare**

Based on survey results, the Annual Conference Committee will again offer grants to offset childcare costs. They will also try to connect families who may want to coordinate their childcare plans. Find the grant form at [umcnic.org/AC2024](http://umcnic.org/AC2024). Request deadline is May 15. (The committee plans to investigate a number of options for the 2025 session.)

## **Ordination Choir**

Do you have a gift for singing? Consider joining the mass choir that will participate in the Ordination and Commissioning Service on June 16. Worship planners hope that each church will send four or five singers. Those interested should fill out the form at [umcnic.org/AC2024](http://umcnic.org/AC2024). For more information, please contact Rev. Jacob Tipantasig-Wolverton at [jacob@onecumc.net](mailto:jacob@onecumc.net).

## **Group meals**

Conference-related organizations and groups are encouraged to hold their group meals at the hotel. Plated meals, buffet, and reception-style food station options are available. Participants will be able to sign up for group meals when they register for conference session. For more information, contact Bri Wadlington at [events@umcnic.org](mailto:events@umcnic.org).

## **Bishop's Appeal**

This year's Bishop's Appeal will benefit United Voices for Children. UVC, a coalition of congregations, agencies, and individuals in the Northern Illinois Conference, speaks and acts on behalf of children, youth, and families in need. The three primary affiliated organizations are Kids Above All, MYSI, and Rosecrance. Please urge your church to take up an offering and/or raise funds for the Bishop's Appeal and bring the total gift to annual conference session.

## **Blueprint for Wellness Screenings**

Health screenings will be offered June 16 and 17 for those on NIC health insurance. More details and sign up are coming soon. Make an appointment through your Health Flex/WebMD account.

## **Hotel Reservations**

Room reservations for the Renaissance Hotel are open. Find a link for room reservations at [umcnic.org/AC2024](http://umcnic.org/AC2024) or call the hotel directly at (888) 236-2427.

Watch for updates and details in the coming months through the NIC eNews and website at [umcnic.org/AC2024](http://umcnic.org/AC2024).



# Laypeople bring God's love to

## Leading the Laity

### Reviving and extending grace



by Eugene Williams,  
Conference Co-Lay Leader

To my sisters and brothers of the Northern Illinois Conference and our siblings in the Wisconsin Conference, I greet you with the love and peace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Let us celebrate anew these forty days of Lent from Ash Wednesday to Psalm Sunday and finally, to Resurrection Sunday. This is a sincere time for prayer, reflection, repentance, and forgiveness as we consider the very essence of what, who and whom we are as United Methodist siblings. We are in fact, children of the Most High. We believe in and live in the covenant of grace under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The 2016 Book of Discipline and *The United Methodist Church Handbook* (published by United Methodist Communications) describe our Wesleyan heritage of a theology of grace. It is profound and flows from God's love for us. I draw on those for these reflections.

We live out the prevenient grace of God, which goes before us and surrounds us prior to our consciousness or awareness of its presence—yes, blessing us while we were yet in our mother's womb. It is unmerited and undeserved and there is nothing we can do to earn it! Siblings, prevenient grace stirs within us a desire to know the God who actively seeks us. God's grace enables us to discern differences between good and evil. It allows us to choose good over evil and moves us to turn toward God through repentance to accept God's gift in faith.

We also believe that God reaches out to us repentant believers, with justifying grace through accepting and pardoning love. Then the guidance of the Holy Spirit brings about a decisive change in the human heart. In justification, we are, through faith, forgiven for our sin and restored to God's favor. We acknowledge our human condition and seek to make a conscious decision to turn toward God and a life of service as a disciple of Christ. This process of salvation involves a change we call "conversion." It represents

changes of belief, spiritual outlook, and manner of life.

Sisters and brothers, what a mighty God we serve! Because the acceptance and pardon that come through justifying grace do not end God's saving work towards us. It continues as the Holy Spirit enables us to grow in knowledge and love of God and neighbor. John Wesley called this dimension of God's grace "sanctification," "holiness," or "Christian perfection." Wesley described sanctifying grace as a heart "habitually filled with the love of God" and he understood it to be a continual process of being made perfect in our love of God and each other by removing our desire to sin.



I confess that I still have quite a way to go on my spiritual journey to achieve sanctification and Christian perfection. Nevertheless, the seeds have been planted and I will continue in my effort to be more like Jesus every day. As we move forward through this season of Lent and beyond, we will face many challenges in life of our denomination, in the upcoming political landscape and the many acts of senseless violence in our streets (and yes even during parades and celebrations). For every challenge that may arise, I invite you to RECEIVE AND EXTEND GRACE in our interactions with each other. Let us continue with our theme from Laity Convocation: "Growing Together in Love" through courageous and respectful conversation as we extend to others the grace that God has given to us.

Whatever lies ahead, let us remain on task for the mission before us; to make disciples for Christ. Let us continue to RECEIVE AND EXTEND GRACE, not just during Lent, but on every day. May God's grace continue to bless us. Always remember our baptism and keep it holy.

The Board of Laity thanks you for your support of our Laity Convocation, especially our hosts, Rev. James Bell and the First Belvidere congregation.

Watch a recording of the Laity Convocation worship and speakers at [umcnic.org/calendar/laity-convocation-2024](http://umcnic.org/calendar/laity-convocation-2024).



## Rural Church Grant applications are due March 31

Are you a church in a rural community? Do you have a great ministry idea but you need some money to get it off the ground? Then consider applying for a PACK Grant (Planned Act of Christian Kindness) or Keagy Grant.

PACK Grants range from \$100 to \$500 and support strategic ministries for reaching out and blessing the lives of your neighbors. Examples of PACK grants recipients are efforts to support teachers by donating school supplies for their classrooms, providing snacks and water at a local parade, or treating first responders to pizza as a thank you.

Keagy Grants range from \$500 to \$3,000 and also assist community-facing ministry. It can be used as seed money to start a new ministry or as a boost for an existing ministry. Examples include a summer reading program for kids, a senior ministry with meals and entertainment, and start-up funds for a teen ministry.

Find the grant application at [umcnic.org/grants](http://umcnic.org/grants). Applications are due March 31. For more information, contact Rev. Libby Rutherford at [rutherford.libby@gmail.com](mailto:rutherford.libby@gmail.com).



Your giving to NIC Apportionments supports the Board of Laity, Laity Convocation, Lay Servant Ministries, grants and more supports for our laity.



Wishing you  
a blessed  
Holy Week  
and  
Happy Easter.





## Categories of Lay Servant Ministries

### Certified lay

**servant:** a professing member of a United Methodist church or ministry who has received specific training to witness to the Christian faith through spoken communication, to lead within a church and community, and to provide caring ministry.



**Certified lay speaker:** a certified lay servant whose call has been affirmed by the conference committee on Lay Servant Ministries to serve the church in pulpit supply.

**Certified lay minister:** a certified lay servant, certified lay missionary, or equivalent as defined by his or her central conference, who is called and equipped to conduct public worship, care for the congregation, assist in program leadership, develop new and existing faith communities, preach the Word, lead small groups, or establish community outreach ministries as part of a ministry team with the supervision and support of a clergy person.

**Lay missionaries:** committed laypersons, mostly volunteers, who are willing to be trained and to work together as a ministry team with their pastor-mentor, in order to develop and lead faith communities, establish community ministries, develop church school extension programs, and engage in congregational development with and into the local community. Lay missionaries are formed according to, and follow the guidelines established by, the National Committee of the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry, working in conjunction with the annual conference.

Visit the NIC Calendar at [umcnic.org/calendar](http://umcnic.org/calendar) for information about upcoming Lay Servant Academies.

For more information about Lay Servant Ministries in the NIC visit [umcnic.org/layservantministries](http://umcnic.org/layservantministries).



## Stronger Together Our Laity in action

by Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer, NIC Director of Connectional Ministries

At the January meeting of the National Association of Directors of Connectional Ministries, I had the opportunity to preach at the opening worship service. I shared about the call that God has given to all of us to go and make disciples, despite the daily uncertainty and unknown.

I emphasized that there is always hope because our hope comes from Jesus, not from the circumstances around us. I relate this with one of the questions that Bishop Dan Schwerin invited us to discuss at the Bishop's Days on the Districts. He asked us to tell each other where we see hope in our churches. My source of hope today is in the laypeople of our conference. There are faithful laity all over our conference who keep serving, investing their gifts and talents, and going above and beyond to do God's mission here on earth, no matter what.

We recently experienced the commitment and faithfulness of our laypeople at the Laity Convocation in February, under the theme "Growing Together in Love: Learning to Have Courageous, Respectful Conversations." There was a beautiful spirit of camaraderie and fellowship with laypeople from all the districts.

Our Book of Discipline states in ¶ 127, "The ministry of the laity flows from a commitment to Christ's outreaching love. Lay members of The United Methodist Church are, by history and calling, active advocates of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every layperson is called to carry out the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20); every layperson is called to be missional."

The work of the laity is essential in the life and mission of the church. There are different ways for our lay people to get equipped and trained to continue serving the Lord. Lay servant ministries is one of the most significant

lay leadership development programs available within the United Methodist connection. It equips our lay people to become lay servants, lay missionaries, lay speakers, and certified lay ministers for varying contexts of ministry. Our Conference Board of Lay Servant Ministries offers good and inspiring classes in spring and fall in all our districts.

Each congregation also has a lay leader as well as lay members of annual conference session. Each church elects the same number of annual conference lay members as they have appointed clergy. (An equal number of lay and clergy make up the voting membership at annual conference session.)

There is often confusion about these two categories. Lay leaders represent the laypeople in the congregation when working with the pastor for the mission and vision of the congregation. Lay members of annual conference session are voting members and they interpret the annual conference's to the congregation.

Our laity are in action! Our laity are important! Our laity are valued!! Whether you serve as a lay servant, lay speaker, lay missionary, certified lay minister, church lay leader, or lay member of annual conference session, please know that your work is appreciated, valued, and essential to fulfilling the mission that God has called us to do in each context and in our Northern Illinois Conference.

If someone invites me to think again about my source of hope in our church today, my answer will be the same. My hope today is in our laity, who are faithful, perseverant, and committed to the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Our laity are in action!!

## Deaconesses and Home Missioners

Deaconesses and home missioners are laywomen and laymen in full-time ministries of love, justice, and service. Together they form a lay covenant community reaching back to the deaconess movement of the late nineteenth century. While the UMC has an order of men and women deacons in ordained relationship to the church, deaconesses and home missioners are in a lay order.

Many deaconesses (women) and home missioners (men) say they feel called to ministry but not to ordination. The lifetime commitment of being a deaconess or home missioner,

serving within or outside the church, fit their ministry calling and provided a formal relationship with the church.

Deaconesses and home missioners dedicate themselves to a lifetime of service to alleviate



NIC Deaconesses with the Bishop at his February 2023 Installation.

suffering, eradicate causes of injustice and all that robs life of dignity and worth, facilitate the development of full human potential, and share in the building global community through the church universal. Deaconesses and home missioners serve in the U.S., Africa, and Asia in many ways, such as providing diversity training in schools, working with women and children in shelters, organizing Freedom Schools, leading youth in mission, providing health care, and more.

Find more information visit [uwfaith.org/what-we-do/deaconess-and-home-missioner](http://uwfaith.org/what-we-do/deaconess-and-home-missioner).



# 2023 Golden Cross Award winners are compassionate caregivers

by Amy Reimer, Older Adult Ministries Chair

Five exemplary leaders in senior services have been recognized with Northern Illinois Conference's Golden Cross awards.

Each year, donations to Golden Cross Sunday offerings fund grants for deserving workers in senior-serving institutions to further their service among older adults. Pong Javier, Deaconess Martha Lundgren, and Deaconess Joy Hayag, members of the annual conference Older Adult Ministry Committee, presented this year's awards to these deserving recipients.



**Jillian Price and Lana Pearson**  
Oak Crest DeKalb Area Retirement Center

Jill started serving at Oak Crest in March 2013 as a housekeeper. In addition to her positive attitude and strong sense of professionalism, Jill has always been known to connect on a deeper level with her clients.

Lana started working at Oak Crest in February 2000 as a certified nursing assistant. Providing unmatched care and services, Lana goes above and beyond to recognize each person's individuality."

Jill and Lana now coordinate the Oak Crest Salon and the bustling community hub that it has become, said Elizabeth Hoppenworth, resident services administrator for Oak Crest DeKalb.



**Chaplain Melanie Myatt**  
Bethany Methodist

As chaplain at Bethany Methodist, "Melanie provides spiritual care for residents, clients and employees," said Sunny Lopez, president and chief executive officer of Bethany Methodist. "She is known for her calm and comforting presence in all that she does."

It is one of Chaplain Melanie's greatest joys "to companion with those who are searching for meaning and exploring their spirituality," Ms. Lopez observed.



**Jobert Dulay, Chicago**  
Methodist Senior Services

Jobert started working at CMSS in 2017 as a nurse. He has since received his doctorate as a nurse practitioner and now serves as the director of nursing at Harwell House, CMSS's dementia facility. He uses his knowledge and strong dedication to others to support the residents in his care. "Residents, family

members, and staff love and respect him," said Rose Policarpio, chief executive officer of United Methodist Healthcare Recruitment.



**Ashley Pinedo-Belmontes**  
Wesley Willows

Ashley serves as an integral part of the dining team at Peterson Meadows/Wesley Willows. She is known as a leader in the kitchen, training new staff and helping others as needed. She always goes above and beyond to help her colleagues. Coworkers say that by keeping track of the residents' birthdays and making them feel special on their day, Ashley inspires seniors to celebrate life.

Across The United Methodist Church, Golden Cross Sunday gifts focus on the work of annual conference health-and-welfare ministries and institutions. In the Northern Illinois Conference, this offering supports older adult ministries. The Older Adult Ministries Committee administers the collected funds.

Please observe Golden Cross Sunday on May 5. For more information on how to celebrate this Special Sunday and the work of the Older Adult Ministry Committee, please contact Deaconess Amy Reimer (OAM chairperson) at amyjan@comcast.net or (847) 691-8903.

Your giving to Mission Links supports Golden Cross Sunday.



## A glimpse at a culture of gratitude and generosity

by Rev. Martin Lee, Director of Congregational Development and Redevelopment

How many of you have ever received a card in the mail with a gift in it? What kind of occasions prompted those gifts? Maybe a birthday, a wedding, a baby, Christmas, or just to say thanks.

In the United States we give one another gifts to mark important moments in our shared life together. Sometimes we give those gifts because we are supposed to. But most often we give gifts as way to say, "You are an important part of my life. And I want to honor you, thank you, or bless you with this gift."

Every few years, I bring a group of pastors to South Korea on a Vital Church Immersion Experience trip. When they experience a South Korean Methodist church, they are often confused when they see people putting their offering in not just one envelope, but several. "What are all these different colored envelopes?" they ask.

Many Korean churches have color-coded envelopes to signify different reasons for making an offering. There are normal "tithes and mission" offerings. Almost all leaders tithe. But above and beyond that, people wish to express thanks to God for the many ways God has blessed them. People give thanks for birthdays, for wedding anniversaries, in celebration for one's first paycheck, and for all sorts of celebrations.

They give when they have recovered from illness, and to show thanks for birth, death, and resurrection. There are many things to thank God for, and in the Korean church culture, one way to celebrate by giving. It shows appreciation for the church's and for the Lord's presence in their lives.

There are so many things to be thankful for, and in the Korean church culture, one way to celebrate and give thanks is by giving.

Giving is a not only a way to support your local church, but a way to show your thanks. When I was a college student in late 1970s (a poor student in a poor country at that point!), I was once so moved that I took out all the money from my wallet and put it on the offering plate in a thanksgiving envelope. It wasn't until after the service as I was heading home that I realized I didn't save any money to take the bus back. It took me an hour and fifteen minutes to walk back home!

I guess I was living by John Wesley's words of earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can! While it wasn't easy to walk so long home, this is one my most precious memories of how I was moved by God to give.

What do you have to celebrate today? A birthday? An anniversary? A blessing from God? Might that blessing you celebrate move you to give to the giver of all good gifts? What might God be able to do if we thought about thanking God in this way beyond just what we are supposed to give?



UMNews photo. Used with permission.

Are you grateful for your church? How has your church blessed you and the community you live in? As you give to its ministry today, perhaps consider an extra gift in honor of the many blessings of God in your life.

Originally posted in October 2020 at [umcdiscipleship.org/articles/a-glimpse-at-a-culture-of-gratitude-and-generosity](http://umcdiscipleship.org/articles/a-glimpse-at-a-culture-of-gratitude-and-generosity).

## New Bethany Methodist CEO: Vera Lampe



Vera Lampe has been named the new chief executive officer of Bethany Methodist Corporation. Bethany Methodist provides senior community living and healthcare.

Lampe has been a member of the Bethany Methodist management team for 16 years, the last 14 as executive director of Chestnut Square at The Glen, the organization's flagship retirement community in Glenview.

Lampe is the eighth CEO of Bethany Methodist since its founding in 1889.

"She brings competence, compassion, and an unflinching commitment to our mission," says Jennifer Christy, chair of the organization's board of directors. "We believe her outstanding leadership, experience and dedication will be invaluable in guiding the organization on our path to a thriving future."

Lampe is pleased to serve the organization. "The heartbeat of our mission has always been the shared sense of community between staff, residents, clients and families," she says. "This organization has held a special place in my heart for a long time, and I'm honored to be serving in this new role and for the opportunities ahead."





## Connected through giving

Churches in bold paid 100% in General Church and NIC Apportionments

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

The Northern Illinois Conference is grateful for its many churches for their faithful apportionment giving and celebrates those who paid in full, despite these challenging times. In 2023, 197 churches paid 100 percent of their calculated apportionments to the conference. Ninety-six churches paid 100 percent of their apportionments to both the conference and the general church funds.

“We give thanks for the ways that our local churches are inviting people into and deepening their own relationships with God and the ways that those relationships turn into a response of God’s love through our connectional giving,” said Rev. Tammy Scott, chair of the NIC Council on Finance and Administration. “That helps to create loving, caring ministries locally and globally.”

Because of your apportionment giving in 2023, the conference will be able to help fund a budget for programs and ministries, both local and global. Apportionments denote an understanding that the purpose of the church is not just to care for its members, but also to reach beyond itself to engage with, minister to, and be in mission with the world. They are used to fund our church’s global mission and witness; help provide the necessary structure to respond in moments of crisis here and around the world; and to develop and nurture the leaders we need today and tomorrow.

“CCFA recognizes that many of our local churches continue to struggle financially as we rebound from COVID,” Scott said. “However, we also know that we are stronger together than we could ever be apart.”

Kingswood UMC, with campuses in both Buffalo Grove and Deerfield, has for many years supported its apportionments at 100 percent.

“Kingswood is committed to serving others in the name of Christ,” said Rev. James Preston, lead pastor and Buffalo Grove pastor. “Apportionments are an amazing way to impact lives and communities locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. We support missionaries, outreach efforts, Justice For Our Neighbors, United Methodist Committee on Relief, and more because indeed our gifts through connectional giving make a beautiful difference in so many lives.”

For more information visit [umcnic.org/apportionments](http://umcnic.org/apportionments).

Albany  
Algonquin: Christ  
**Alsip: Christ**  
**Antioch**  
**Apple River**  
**Argo Fay**  
**Arlington Heights: First**  
Arlington Heights: Incarnation  
**Batavia**  
Belvidere: First  
Belvidere:  
Iglesia Esperanza y Vida  
Bensenville: First  
Blaine  
Bolingbrook:  
Crossroads of Faith  
Bolingbrook: Friendship  
Brookfield Compassion  
Brookville  
**Buffalo Grove: Kingswood**  
**Burlington**  
**Capron**  
**Carol Stream: St. Andrew**  
**Cary**  
**Cedarville**  
Chadwick: Hope  
**Chana**  
Chicago: Adalberto Memorial  
Chicago: Berry Memorial  
Chicago: Big Shoulders  
**Chicago: Chicago Lawn**  
Chicago: Clair Christian  
Chicago: Edison Park  
**Chicago: El Redentor/ Redeemer of Calvary**  
Chicago: Emanuel  
Chicago: Englewood/Rust  
Chicago: Faith  
**Chicago: First (Temple)**  
**Chicago:**  
**Grace of Logan Square**  
**Chicago: Hartzell Memorial**  
**Chicago: Humboldt Park**  
**Chicago:**  
**Hyde Park Korean**  
Chicago: Indo Pak  
**Chicago: Ingleside Whitfield**  
Chicago: Lincoln  
Chicago:  
Ravenswood Fellowship  
Chicago: Resurrection

**Chicago: South Shore**  
Chicago: Southlawn  
**Chicago: St. Mark**  
Chicago:  
Union Avenue  
Chicago:  
United Church of Rogers Park  
Chicago: Wesley  
Chicago: West Ridge  
**Coleta**  
**Creston**  
Crystal Lake: First  
**Dakota Rock Grove**  
**Davis Junction**  
DeKalb: First  
**Des Plaines: First**  
Des Plaines: Neuvo Amanecer  
**Downers Grove: First**  
Earlville  
**Elgin: Journey of Hope**  
Elizabeth  
**Elmhurst: Christ**  
Erie  
**Esmond**  
Evanston: Emmanuel  
**Evanston: First**  
**Evanston: Hemenway**  
**Evergreen Park: First**  
**Forreston**  
Franklin Park: First  
**Freeport: Faith**  
Freeport: Harmony  
**Galena**  
Geneva  
German Valley  
Glencoe: North Shore  
Green Garden  
Hampshire: Zion  
**Hanover**  
**Harmon**  
Harvey: Transformation  
Community  
Hebron  
**Highland Park: Galilee**  
**Hinckley: First**  
Hinsdale  
Hunter  
Ingleside  
Joliet: Grace  
Joliet: Hope  
**Kaneville**

**Kingston**  
Kirkland: First  
**Lanark**  
**Leaf River**  
Leland  
**Lemont**  
Lena  
Leon  
Libertyville  
Lighthouse  
Lockport: First  
Machesney Park:  
New Life UMC  
Malta  
Maple Park: Grace  
**Marengo**  
**Maywood: Neighborhood**  
McHenry: Mount Hope  
Mendota: First  
**Mendota: Zion**  
**Millbrook**  
**Milledgeville**  
Morrison  
**Mount Carroll**  
Mount Morris: Disciples  
Mount Prospect:  
Sam Mool Korean  
**Mount Prospect: Trinity**  
Naperville: Community  
**New Lenox**  
Northbrook: Northbrook  
Norway  
Oak Park: Euclid Avenue  
Oak Park: First  
**Oak Park: St. John’s**  
Oregon  
Orland Park: Faith  
Orland Park: First Korean  
**Oswego: Good Shepherd**  
**Oswego: Wellspring**  
Ottawa: First  
Palos  
Park Forest: Grace United  
Protestant  
Park Ridge: First  
**Paw Paw**  
**Pecatonica**  
Plattville  
Polo: Faith  
Poplar Grove  
**Princeton: First**

**Red Oak (Bureau)**  
**Reynolds**  
**River Forest**  
Riverside: Woodside  
**Rochelle**  
**Rockford: Aldersgate**  
**Rockford: Beth Eden**  
Rockford:  
Centennial Multicultural  
**Rockford: Christ**  
**Rockford: Evans**  
**Rockford: Grace**  
Rockton  
Roscoe  
**Roselle**  
Sandwich: United  
Savanna: First  
**Schaumburg: Our Saviour’s**  
**Seneca: First**  
**Serena**  
**Shannon: Bethel**  
Sheridan  
**Shirland**  
Skokie: Central  
**Skokie: Jesus Loves Korean (NFC)**  
**South Elgin: Community**  
Sterling: First  
Sterling: Wesley  
**Steward**  
Stockton: Wesley  
Sugar Grove  
**Tampico**  
**Thomson**  
**Triumph**  
Urban Village  
Villa Park: Calvary  
**Waterman**  
**Waukegan: First**  
West Dundee: First  
Wheaton: Aldersgate  
**Wheaton: Gary**  
**Wheeling: First Korean**  
**Wilmette: Trinity**  
Wilton Center  
Federated Church  
**Winthrop Harbor:**  
**North Prairie**  
Woodridge  
Yorkville: Trinity

## Mission Links giving connects across the globe

Antioch  
Argo Fay  
Arlington Heights: First  
Carol Stream: St. Andrew  
Cary  
Chana  
Chicago: Humboldt Park  
Des Plaines: First  
Downers Grove: First  
Esmond  
Evanston: First  
Geneva  
Hanover  
Harmon  
Hinckley: First  
Lanark  
Lemont  
Marengo

Mendota: Zion  
Millbrook  
Milledgeville  
Mount Prospect: Trinity  
New Lenox  
Oswego: Good Shepherd  
Princeton: First  
Reynolds  
Rockford: Beth Eden  
Rockford: Christ  
Roselle  
Schaumburg: Our Saviour’s  
Serena  
Tampico  
Thomson  
Triumph  
Waukegan: First

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

The Northern Illinois Conference appreciates the churches that went the second mile as Mission Links churches. To become a Mission Links 100% Supporter, a church needs to pay its conference and general church apportionments in full and donate to at least one Mission Links project in each of the giving areas.

In addition to their apportionment giving, Mission Links 100% Supporters gave almost \$451,500 in second-mile gifts and over \$89,500 in Special Sunday offerings.

“Our Missions Committee uses the Mission Links materials each year to select our monthly mission focus,” said Rev. Lynn Mikels, pastor of discipleship at First UMC in Arlington Heights. “We appreciate that the materials

highlight the diversity of missional needs. By working with others from across the connection, we can be part of a global mission effort.”

“As the saying goes, ‘many hands make light work,’” said Rev. Caleb Hong, pastor of Grace UMC in Rockford. “As part of a connectional system, our support of apportionments and Mission Links allows us to do far more together than alone.”

Find a detailed listing of the missionaries supported by our conference and choose projects to support in from the NIC Mission Links booklet at [umcnic.org/missionlinks](http://umcnic.org/missionlinks).





# A ministry of prayer and presence in the Middle East

by Christie R. House, writer with Global Ministries & UMCOR

As Israel's bombardment and ground invasion against the Gaza Strip approaches its fifth month, Palestinians across the region, in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, experience the loss of their jobs and the inability to move across checkpoints, or buy or sell food. They face a constant threat of harm and harassment, not because they are anywhere near Gaza, but because they are the Palestinians within reach.

Amid the scenes of overwhelming death and destruction, by God's grace, small miracles happen each day.

Amir\*, a Palestinian youth, finds it nearly impossible to cross the Palestine/Israel line to get to his school in a safe way. Yet, his school, community and United Methodists giving through the United Methodist Committee on Relief created a way for him to continue his education. Hope Secondary School opened a remote learning station in his neighborhood and provided him with an electronic tablet and a place where wi-fi still works.

In this way, Amir has been able to rely on the safety of his own community and continue his education; a small but important miracle for him and other students.

"As we support our partners across the Middle East, we continue with faith and hope to encourage one another at this time," said Roland Fernandes, general secretary of Global Ministries and UMCOR. "In the face of so much loss; that is, Muslim, Christian and Jewish lives, the 28,000 men, women and children lost in Gaza, our hearts are breaking."

## No news is not good news

Gaza is bound by the Mediterranean Sea down its entire west coast and an Israeli fence more than 37-miles-long on its east side. All crossings but one into Israel have been closed by Israel since Oct. 7, 2023. There is a crossing into Cairo, Egypt, at Rafah to its south, which Israeli authorities close much of the time. Rafah is where hundreds of trucks wait in line for a chance to cross the border into Gaza to provide emergency aid. Food, water and medical supplies go unused until something happens to stop the bombardment and allow drivers to complete their mandate to deliver aid.

Just as nothing gets into Gaza, nothing and almost no one can get out. Even news is sparse because of communication. David Wildman, Global Ministries' United Nations and Middle East liaison, traveled to the region in December 2023 with a South African international solidarity delegation. They met with Palestinian Christian colleagues and human rights leaders across Palestine, Jordan and Egypt, as well as in Tel Aviv with the families of hostages being held by Hamas in Gaza. "There is a trickle of aid getting through," Wildman said. "There should be more than 500 trucks going into Gaza every day, but there are at most 120 allowed to pass from Cairo to Rafah, but the little aid that gets in cannot reach all the people safely."

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinians in the Near East has had its shelters in Gaza bombed and reports 152 of its workers have been killed in the current crisis, more than in any other crisis in the world.

"We're watching the world struggle with what to do to stop the genocide," Wildman said. "There is a growing call around the world for an immediate cease-fire as a necessary first step.

The only time since Oct. 7 that any hostages have been released was during the humanitarian pause in November, which saved lives. Palestinian prisoners were released, but since Oct. 7, more than 6,300 Palestinians have been detained, often without charge. The message to us from families of hostages was: 'release all for all' – all hostages for all Palestinian prisoners."

Among the members of the visiting delegation was also Bishop Ivan Abrahams of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and the general secretary of the World Methodist Council. "We decided that Christmas can only have meaning for us if we heed the call from our siblings in Palestine, and we go and stand in solidarity with them."

UMCOR, like other humanitarian agencies, has found it difficult to get relief into Gaza. A long-time Global Ministries' partner, the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees of the Near East Council of Churches, has staff in Gaza that have been working with what they have, but they, like 90 percent of all Palestinians in Gaza, have been displaced. UMCOR affirms the Action by Churches Together appeal for Gaza relief that will support the work of DSPR, but how soon the aid can reach Gaza is a real challenge. An emergency grant to provide 14,000 people with emergency food rations made it to the DSPR in Gaza early in the conflict.

A grant to Princess Basma Centre in Jerusalem served an urgent need for the development of a telemedicine program for Palestinian children with disabilities whose families confronted closed check-points when they tried to take their children to their medical appointments at the center. Another grant is in the works for the Four Homes of Mercy for Disabled Children.

A grant to the Al Quds Foundation provided counseling to children and youth in the Shufat Refugee Camp. This Palestinian camp, like others in the West Bank, has received multiple incursions by Israeli soldiers, sometimes in the middle of the night, during raids that end with young men being removed and jailed.

## Hold them in prayer

Rev. Jane Eesley, a Global Ministries missionary and a clergy member of the Northern Illinois Conference, serves as the advocacy coordinator with the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem. "The United Methodist Church chose not to start another church but to support what is here through Greek Orthodox, Lutheran and Anglican churches," she explained. "We trust in the body of Christ that is already here and in the indigenous Palestinian Christians. They are grateful for the ways we con-

duct a 'servant ministry' alongside them. A lot of people turn away and flee from suffering. It is important to be here among those who suffer."

Another way to support Palestinians in the region is to continue to give through the Advance, as the projects in the Middle East are still operating. Though Gaza is the territory under bombardment, Palestinians in the West Bank and other places have experienced repercussions. The UMCOR International Disaster Response is another way to give.

Finally, Palestinian Christians have reached out to Christians across the world to call for an immediate cease-fire and to trust in God and pray for them. "They believe God will find a way we can't even see," noted Eesley. "Tell others about Palestinian Christians. There is great anxiety among them that before too long, there will be no more Palestinian Christians to witness in the place where Jesus was born."

*\*Name changed to protect identity.*



Missionary Jane Eesley (standing far right back row) with the Palestinian planning team for World Day of Prayer 2024. (Photo: Courtesy of Jane Eesley)

Your giving to Mission Links supports UMCOR.



Your giving to General Church Apportionments supports the Global Ministries and work in Palestine.



**KIDS ABOVE ALL** **HEALTHY BABIES DRIVE**  
Faith & Community Partners  
Fleece Blanket Making Service Event

SATURDAY,  
APRIL 13, 2024



[kidsaboveall.org](https://kidsaboveall.org)

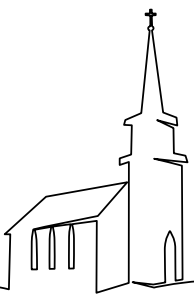
**WHEN:**  
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.  
(Doors open at 12:30 p.m.)

**WHERE:**  
KAA's Better Life Distribution Center,  
1801 E. Oakton Street, Des Plaines, IL

**WHERE:**  
Contact our Manager of Faith & Community  
Relations, Catherine Inserra, to RSVP at  
(847) 224-2870, or at  
[cinserra@kidsaboveall.org](mailto:cinserra@kidsaboveall.org), by Sunday, April 7.







# Local Church News

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 [communications@umcnic.org](mailto:communications@umcnic.org).

## Kingdom Assignment provides love ripples

by Liliana Smith, daughter of NIC Communications Specialist, Lisa Smith, and Rev. Matthew Smith

The ripple effect of love was felt throughout the Belvidere community and beyond when the people of First United Methodist Church in Belvidere turned \$100 bills into acts of compassion.

In September, Rev. Jim Bell, senior pastor at FUMC, gave a "Kingdom Assignment" to 60 members of the church: he gave \$100 bills to each and told them to do good with the money. It was inspired by a project started by Denny and Leesa Bellisi, pastors from California, who had read the book *Pay It Forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde.

On Dec. 17, those 60 people shared the results at the Belvidere High School Performing Arts Center.

Over 20 projects were initiated with the money. Some took the opportunity to partner with other members to make the money go further, some people took the money and made an individual impact, and some members reached out to other close family friends and associates and asked them to take part in their projects.

"One of the objectives was multiplication; multiplication of partners and impact, not necessarily of money," said Rev. Bell. "The assignments that are the most meaningful touch the most neighbors."

During the gathering, the church's praise band led lively music for all to enjoy. Bell shared words of inspiration, and then those who fulfilled the assignment described their projects.

Sue Holmes shared how her husband, Dan Holmes, used the money. He bought a loom

from Midwest Mission and gathered plastic bags to make plarn (plastic yarn) mats for the homeless. They then donated these mats to Miss Carly's in Rockford and other organizations that help those without homes.

Ann Wandike, from Rock Valley College, was a foster mom of more than 50 kids. She started scholarships for young individuals coming out of foster care, with additional funding from a local foundation.



The Tillmas with the donated backpacks at Carpenter's Place.

Mark and Jenny Tillema sent 33 letters to close friends and family, asking them to match the \$100 or donate food and money. What started with \$200 turned into \$1,500. They used the money to fill 18 backpacks with daily needed items for those experiencing homelessness,

like socks, food, blankets, etc. At Carpenter's Place in Rockford, these backpacks were given out to the newly homeless. The ripples of the people receiving backpacks will continue to positively impact the community.

Rev. Pam Rossmiller, a retired pastor, made kindness manger kits (something like an



Kindness Manger

Advent calendar) with Jeff Straight, another church member, and a multigenerational group of volunteers. The Frazier family worked with a local Hispanic church to provide Bibles for 35 youth. Terry Trip helped homeless veterans in Arizona.



One of the Kingdom Assignment groups with their donations.

Many of the projects focused on helping children in the community, such as supporting Perry Elementary School's gardening club; purchasing fitness equipment for those in risk of obesity; and providing reading materials, phonics equipment, diapers, and personal care items for schools and families. This increases kids' positive attitudes and education, creating a helpful change for our community.

More projects included breakfast for a Bible study group, providing a potato-bar meal as a thank-you for teachers, a text-message communication system for the church, and organizing a parent's night out before Christmas.

The church's associate pastor, Rev. Jay Shin, said that the Kingdom Assignment shows that "the people we have touched are the people God cares for."

The church plans on doing the Kingdom Assignment again next year. They are looking to add more money and to more people. Bell plans on making it open to the community and convincing other churches to offer the Kingdom Assignment.

Visit [umcnic.org/news/kingdom-assignment-provides-love-ripples](http://umcnic.org/news/kingdom-assignment-provides-love-ripples) for more information, photos and a recording of the

## Walk to Emmaus: a journey with Christ

by Linda Bjur, Northern Illinois Emmaus, Walk 167 Lay Director

*While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and walked with them.*

— Luke 24:15

When is the last time that you spent 72 hours working on your spiritual life? The Northern Illinois Emmaus community invites you to consider attending a Walk to Emmaus Weekend.

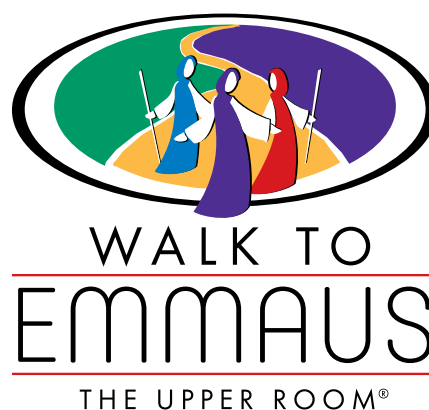
The Walk to Emmaus develops Christian disciples and leaders by inspiring, challenging, and equipping active adult church members for Christian action in their homes, churches, workplaces, and communities. It also benefits less-active members who are seeking to renew a relationship with God, grow spiritually, or discover firmer foundations for their lives.

The program begins with a 72-hour short course in Christianity that is wrapped in prayer and signs of sacrificial service. It continues for

the rest of participants' lives with follow-up groups that, along with the local church's robust spiritual development opportunities, contribute to participants' ongoing growth in grace.

The Emmaus community has shown me the meaning of agape and grace. It has given me a path on how to live out my Christian walk.

The application process starts with prayerful discernment and an openness to the Holy Spirit's invitation. After one accepts this invitation, they complete an application. The Emmaus leaders prayerfully consider each applicant and in God's time, the person



is invited to attend a three-day experience of New Testament Christianity as a lifestyle. The Walk to Emmaus is held in the spring and fall of each year. The spring walks for 2024 are April 4-7 (Men's Walk) and April 11-14 (Women's Walk). Both walks are held at the Bishop Lane Retreat Center in Rockford.

An applicant needs a sponsor from the Emmaus community. If you do not know anyone currently in the community, please contact one of these people: Dave Stivers, sponsor chair ([davidstiver09@gmail.com](mailto:davidstiver09@gmail.com) or 224-715-8756), Tom Wood, community lay director ([twood@nationalfibersupply.com](mailto:twood@nationalfibersupply.com) or 312-406-7324), or Nancy Pitsch, assistant community lay director ([nancy@pitschfamily.com](mailto:nancy@pitschfamily.com) or 815-499-3802).

Find more information at [nil-emmaus.org](http://nil-emmaus.org).

Walk to Emmaus Ministries is overseen by The Upper Room, a division of United Methodist Discipleship Ministries.





## DYK DID YOU KNOW?

# Leaning into the past to plan the future

by Rev. Arlene Christopherson,  
Assistant to the Bishop

This winter my husband, Gary, and I have been cleaning out my mother-in-law's house as she transitions to assisted living. It was her home for 62 years, the place where she raised her family and spent much of her life.

Sifting through the contents of her home revealed much about the joy and fullness of life. Yellowed and brittle kindergarten report cards for her three boys, a thank-you note I wrote to her in 1982 for hosting our wedding shower, baby blankets, and family photos.

With the decision of our North Central Jurisdictional Conference delegates to move the Wisconsin Conference and Northern Illinois Conference into a relationship of sharing a bishop (not merger) beginning in September, we can lean into our past to plan for the future.

Rev. Dan Swinson, a much-relied-upon historian in our conference, offered some research to the Shared Bishop Taskforce for their work. Dan reminds us that when the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 sketched out five new states, the

northern borders of what would become Indiana and Illinois were both set on a line south of the southern shore of Lake Michigan. This line roughly followed the present course of Interstate 80. Were it not for politicking, it would have placed the entirety of the present Northern Illinois Conference in the state of Wisconsin.



Wood from the original Rock River Conference cabin was carved to make these two gavels, which have been used by NIC bishops.

In 1840, when the Methodist Church set its conference boundaries, it included Wisconsin, Iowa, and the northern part of Illinois as one conference area. The first five sessions of the Rock River Conference were held respectively in Mt. Morris, Ill.; Platteville, Wis.; Chicago; Dubuque, Iowa; and Milwaukee. A plaque in Mt. Morris marks the spot where the Rock River Conference first convened.

Sharing a bishop as part of a wider regional area is not new in our history. In the 1800s the role of the bishop was tailored to meet the needs of this vast territory. Bishops equipped the leaders of the church to equip the laity in the pews, as they made disciples of Jesus Christ. The work predated phones, highways, and Zoom.

Over the years conference boundaries changed, the role of bishop changed, but the mission always remained the same: making disciples. This season we lean into change once again as we rethink the ways in which a bishop can most effectively lead in equipping the saints both lay and clergy as we make disciples of Jesus Christ. Leaning into the past, we can learn for the future.

## 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, 2024 (unless otherwise noted):

**Luther Mason** (Licensed Local Pastor) to Chicago: Eastside (¼ time) (Lake South) while remaining at Chicago: Greenstone (¼ time) (Lake South). Effective Oct. 1, 2024.

**Ha Nguyen** (District Superintendent Supply) to Chicago: First Vietnamese (¼ time) (Lake North). Ha follows Mai Le, who has concluded her ministry. Effective Jan. 1.

**Rachel Grover** (District Superintendent Supply) to Davis: Calvary (¼ time) (Prairie North). Rachel follows Brenda Byrne, who is retiring. Effective Jan. 1.

**Jay Shin** (Licensed Local Pastor) to full-time at Belvidere: First Associate (Prairie North) from ½ Associate and ¼ time at Capron (Prairie North). Effective April 1.

**Hwan Kyu Kim** (Licensed Local Pastor) to Hampshire: Zion and Hampshire: First (Prairie North). Kyu follows Jenny Weber, who returned to extension ministry. Effective Dec. 1, 2023.

**Adrienne Stricker** (Full Deacon) to Transforming Center in Wheaton from Office Administrator at First Congregational Church of LaGrange. Effective Jan. 31.

**Seth Botts** (Licensed Local Pastor) to Chicago: United Church of Rogers Park and Recovery NFC (½ time) (Lake North). Effective Feb. 1.

**Laura Barkley** (Full Elder) to Joliet: Grace (Prairie Central) from 346.1 status in Kentucky. Laura follows Romir Esguerra, who is retiring.

**Grace Oh** (Full Elder) to Hinsdale (Lake South) from Chicago: Englewood-Rust and Thornton (Lake South). Grace follows Young-Mee Park, who is retiring.

**David Hamer** (District Superintendent Supply) to ½ time interim at Paw Paw (Prairie South). David follows Dana Cox, who is withdrawing her provisional membership from the NIC and concluding her ministry. Effective Feb. 1.

**Brenda Morris** (Licensed Local Pastor) to Durand (Prairie North) from Shannon: Bethel (Prairie North). Brenda follows Lesley Stanford, who is serving Durand as an interim.

**Nancy Blade** (Full Elder) to Oak Park: Euclid Ave (Lake North) from Kaneville (Prairie

South). Nancy follows Tony Asta, who has been serving as an interim.

**Ryan Sutton** (Full Elder) to Roscoe (Prairie North) from Princeton (Prairie South). Ryan follows Paul Meyers, who is retiring.

**Jeremiah Lee** (Full Elder) to Shannon: Bethel (Prairie North) from Addison: Good Samaritan (Prairie Central). Jeremiah follows Brenda Morris, who is appointed to Durand.

**Lino Aragon** (Licensed Local Pastor) to interim at Chicago: Amor De Dios (¼ time) (Lake South) while remaining at Des Plaines: Nuevo Amanecer (¼ time) (Lake North). Lino follows Ramiro Rodriguez, who is concluding his ministry.

**GaHyung Kim** (Retired Elder) to Lockport: First (¾) from retirement.

**Kelly McKune** (Licensed Local Pastor) to Kaneville (Prairie South) from Red Oak & Wyanet (Prairie South). Kelly follows Nancy Blade, who is appointed to Oak Park: Euclid Ave (Lake North).

### Retirements

**Gavin C. Brandt** (Retired Elder) returning to Retirement from German Valley & Winnebago (Prairie North). Gavin officially retired in Jan. 2014 and in Feb. 2015 was appointed to Cedarville, Red Oak until April 2016. He was then appointed to German Valley/Winnebago (½ time).

**Jay D. Carr** (Full Elder) to Retirement from Libertyville (Lake North). Jay was ordained a Probationary Elder in 1984 and became a Full Elder in 1987. During his ministry, Jay served at Dixon: First, Oswego: Prairie, Princeton, Roscoe, New Lenox and Libertyville.

**Romir Reyes Esguerra** (Full Elder) to Retirement from Joliet: Grace (Prairie Central). Romir was ordained a Probationary Elder in 1984 and became a Full Elder in 1987. During his ministry, Romir served at Thomson, Argo Fay, Ashton, DeKalb: First, Wheaton: Aldersgate, Oak Park: St. John's, Villa Park: Calvary, Chicago: Berry Memorial, Schaumburg: Our Redeemer's and Joliet: Grace.

**Catiana McKay** (Retired Elder) returning to Retirement from Chadwick: Hope, Hickory

Grove, and Fairhaven (½ time) (Prairie North). Catiana officially retired in July 2022, and served the Chadwick charge.

**Young-Mee Park** (Full Elder) to Retirement from Hinsdale (Prairie Central). Young-Mee was ordained a Probationary Elder in 2005 and became a Full Elder in 2008. During her ministry, Young-Mee served at Dixon: First, Oak Park: First, DeKalb District Superintendent and Hinsdale.

**Gary Rich** (Licensed Local Pastor) to Retirement from Cedarville (¼ time) (Prairie North). Gary received his Local Pastor's License in 2017 and served at Red Oak (Prairie North District) and Cedarville. He officially retired in July 2023, while continuing to serve at Cedarville.

**Wendy A. Witt** (Full Elder) to Retirement from Dundee: First (Prairie Central). Wendy was ordained a Probationary Elder in 1987 and became a Full Elder in 1989. During her ministry, Wendy served at Plattville, Joliet: Ottawa Street, University UMC (Oklahoma Conference), Dolton: Faith, Chicago: Faith, Chicago: Willard, Chicago: Trinity, United Campus Ministries/Wesley Foundation (DeKalb), Suydam, Cortland, Earlville, Chicago: First (Temple), Dundee: First.

**Regina Davis-Bridges** (Full Deacon) to retirement from Leave of Absence. Regina became a Provisional Deacon 2001 and ordained a Full Deacon in 2004. During her ministry she served Homewood: St. Andrew; South Holland School District (Principal); and Season's Hospice, Des Plaines, IL.

**GaHyung Kim** (Full Elder) to retirement from Lockport: First (Lake South). GaHyung was ordained a Probationary Elder in 1988 and in 1993 became a Full Elder. During GaHyung's ministry, she served Aurora: Wesley (Associate), Winthrop Harbor, North Prairie, Wauconda: Federated, Chicago: Calvary, DeKalb: First (Associate), Naperville: Community (Associate), Oak Lawn, First, Sycamore (Lead), Lake Bluff: Grace, Lockport: First/Lisle: Faith and Lockport: First.

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

