

# The Northern Illinois Conference OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH Reporter

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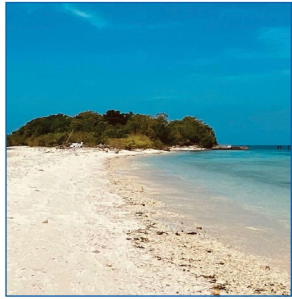
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DO NOT DELAY. DATED MATERIAL

## NIC Youth Learn Who Are Their Neighbors of Other Faiths

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

Religious people who pursue peace and unity among all people are among our neighbors—and they are not all Christians.

About forty adults and youth from across Northern Illinois learned about a few of these faiths during the Who Is My Neighbor? NIC Youth Interfaith Bus Tour on April 18. They visited a Hindu



Nearly 40 Northern Illinois youth and adults traveled by van visiting various houses of worship. Their first stop was a Hindu mandir in Bartlett, Ill.

Photo by Rev. Victoria Rebeck

*mandir* (worship and learning site), a Jain temple, a Buddhist temple, and a Sikh house of worship, all in the western suburbs of Chicago.

At the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Bartlett, the United Methodist visitors were awed by the visual beauty that is an important part of the Hindu tradition. They were led into a large, airy *haveli*—a courtyard-like space—surrounded by intricately hand-carved teak and marble walls and columns. One youth, Chloe from Rochelle United Methodist Church, said she found this to be one of the more awe-inspiring aspects of the day's trip.

The guide explained that faith, service, the family unit, nonviolence, and tolerance are Hinduism's values. "Peace is at the heart of it," he said. "It's about how we live our lives."

Over a billion people worldwide are estimated to practice Hinduism around the world, with most living in India.

Hindus perceive that God is manifest in various ways and times (*murtis*). "Truth is one but told in many ways," the guide elaborated. They also believe there are celestial beings with some powers, but these beings are all obedient to God.

They also believe in reincarnation, the soul's journey through various lives until it reaches a place beyond suffering.

Next the group visited a community of faith that also has roots in India. At the Jain Society of Metropolitan Chicago in Bartlett, the United

Methodist learned that this faith's foundation is right faith (understanding what is right), right knowledge, and right conduct. At the core is *ahimsa*—nonviolence in thought, speech, and conduct toward any life form.

"It is a way of life and a philosophy rather than a religion per se," the guides explained. They follow the teachings and examples of 24 prophets that have taught over centuries. They, too, believe in the soul's journey through various lives until it reaches "liberation" to an ultimate life of peace.

There are an estimated five million Jains in the world, including about 100,000 in the U.S. and about 5,000 in the Chicago area.

A third India-based house of worship visited by the group was the Illinois Sikh Community Center (or *gurdwara*) in Wheaton. This faith was formalized in 1699 in the Punjabi region.

Its focus is on God as one creator. Worship practices include meditation on the name of the one creator. When the United Methodist visitors arrived, they experienced a portion of a service in which community members took turns reading aloud and singing through the entire Sikh scriptures, from Saturday through Sunday morning.

The guide explained that the word "sikh" means student. They believe that there is an equal spark of the divine in everyone, and thus see all people as equal.

*continued on page 3: see Faithful Neighbors*

## Last Words from the NIC Reporter

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

As we look at the present and the future, we find that reliance on print news sources is waning and use of electronic and video media continues to rise. This is true also of the Northern Illinois Conference.

You may have taken part in a communications survey we recently sent. If so, we are most grateful. This is part of an audit that will provide us some reliable statistics and expert recommendations on moving forward. So far, survey results are showing that interest in the Reporter is shrinking.

Furthermore, the annual conference communications budget will be smaller this year. The cost of the Reporter would require half of the communications program allotment and we would have very little left to use on media that more of our people and churches are requesting.

Therefore, we've made the difficult decision to end publication of The NIC Reporter with this issue. This enables us to pay for other obligations.

We've enjoyed creating the Reporter for you and hope you have found it useful. We encourage you to continue to turn to our weekly eNews and semi-monthly district eNews issues, as well as our social media accounts, to stay abreast of conference happenings, opportunities, and decisions. Our new website will debut in a few months and you will find it easier to navigate. As is our current site, it is loaded with resources and information.

Thank you again for your loyal readership of The NIC Reporter.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports conference communications.





From Your Bishop:

# Signs of Hope

by Bishop Dan Schwerin

A blessed Eastertide to you. I praise God for the ongoing love in resurrection that lures us into God's possibilities. In this year of practicing hope, I have enjoyed your voices amplifying the deep goodness in our "good news" work. We enjoyed some attendance increases and a life-full spirit on Easter. Many of you joined with neighbors to worship on Holy Thursday or Good Friday, and many are joining cohorts and work that deepen our anti-racism commitments. These are signs of hope.

I was telling one of our clergy people (we have so many gifted lay and clergy leaders) that dispiriting signs of authoritarianism, the rise of detention centers, and brutal immigration enforcement have changed my poetry. My eyes have been on the sparrow, the small things among us that whisper gently about our interdependence—that by grace we are here for a kin-dom of mutual benefit.

This is nesting season. Every dry spear of grass made into a nest and every egg being cradled is a quiet resistance to this culture's desperate appetite for going it alone. Where the King James Version renders Paul's words in Philippians 2:3 and Galatians 5:26, the word "vainglory" shows up as a fruit of a desperate mind that often becomes guilty of overreaching behavior. Hear Philippians 2:3: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

Mutual benefit is breaking out and *ubuntu* steps are among us each day. For this article, I would offer some *tanka*, a form of poetry that comes from Japan. They gently register diary-like moments. These keep an eye on the small as signs of hope. I will intersperse these with signs of our ministry so that your practice of hope is amplified as well.

Both the Northern Illinois and Wisconsin conferences are gearing up for the United Methodist Church-wide appeal on May 17 to endow theological education in the formerly Central, now Regional, Conferences, those in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines. Learn more about the Bishop's Appeal in the Northern Illinois Conference (on page 5 or at [umcnic.org/2026BishopsAppeal](http://umcnic.org/2026BishopsAppeal)).

A new ministry was launched in the Northern Illinois Conference on Palm Sunday: Table of Grace, led by Rev. Violet Johnicker. Details can be found at the faith community's website, [tableofgracerockford.org](http://tableofgracerockford.org).

In the Wisconsin Conference, Rev. Carlos Sandoval and his modest-sized congregation in Johnson Creek have been praying with area farmers who have lost workers due to the immigration crackdowns and with the farm workers and their families about how God is guiding their steps in this moment of hardship. We know ministry comes to life at the speed of relationship.



By way of apportionment numbers: in the Northern Illinois Conference, the first quarter looks great, especially compared to 2025. So far in 2026, we are running to project at receiving 75 percent of billed apportionments through March 31, compared to 60 percent in 2025.

In the meantime, we pray for peace with flourishing for the planet, its people, and the relationships that contribute to mutual benefit. In my opinion, we are called to follow Jesus in footsteps that demonstrate God's relentless solidarity with the powerless and the immigrant, and to bear witness to Easter inclusion in a world of division.

*geranium  
a character  
in my poem  
that someone cares for you  
the salient detail*

Both conferences are being changed by their increasing relationship with Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. Cohorts for cross-racially appointed clergy and for European-descent clergy are increasing understanding and healing alongside our ongoing antiracism work.

Garrett-Evangelical's Faith and Leadership Collaborative is developing a multi-partner ecosystem that reimagines collaboration for mutual benefit. In addition, check out Garrett's new Laity Discernment Cohort for those discerning God's call and what level of theological education is right for them. We know we are changed by relationships and partnerships increase our impact.

We are working with Kenda Creasy Dean, author of *Innovating for Love*, to offer leadership for clergy and laity for this moment of responding to the Spirit's call to new life and new forms of ministry.

*a tombstone sky  
obscures what is  
behind it  
my dialogue  
with light*

*imperfect but  
by grace  
pine needles  
soften  
my steps*

Whatever your call—lay or deaconess or certified lay minister or deacon or local pastor or elder—The United Methodist Church is the place for you. Baptism is our call forward.

*sandbar  
the river  
can make  
more of  
your life*

Peace to you.

Your giving to General Church apportionments support the Episcopal Office.



## The Northern Illinois Conference Reporter

umcnic.org

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Resident Bishop  
Director of Communications  
Managing Editor

Dan Schwerin  
Victoria Rebeck  
Lisa Smith



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### Stay in Touch With Us!

#### eNewsletters

The eNews NIC is a weekly newsletter sent out every Wednesday. It will give you up-to-date information about Conference happenings and events. You will also receive special announcements such as sympathy notices and appointments. The District eNews is sent out on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays. It will give you specific information from your district. Sign up at [umcnic.org/newslettersignup](http://umcnic.org/newslettersignup).

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# Teens through Adults Ignited for Ministry

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

Kalyn Merritt, a junior at Crystal Lake (Ill.) High School, is active in leading children's and youth ministry at First United Methodist Church in Crystal Lake. She wasn't necessarily thinking about ordained ministry.

But her pastor, Rev. Lisa Kruse-Safford, encouraged her to attend Ignite, a North Central Jurisdiction event to showcase opportunities to serve through the United Methodist Church and help people discern where they may be called. So Kalyn joined about 80 others who attended the gathering March 13-15 at Wespeth Benefits and Investments in Glenview, Ill.

For many, the event led them to think of calling in new ways. Kalyn arrived thinking that she might pursue children's and youth ministry, but after hearing a presentation by the General



Kalyn Merritt (left) and Miriam Safford talk about mission work at the General Board of Global Ministries workshop.

Photo by Rev. Victoria Rebeck

Board of Global Ministries, she's now interested in learning more about mission work.

Participants—who represented a broad range of ages—joined in worship and chose among 12 workshops. These addressed ministry for the lay and ordained, in such topics as “What is Ordination and is It Right for Me?” “Church Planting/Fresh Expressions,” “Mission and Missionary Ministry,” and “How to Pay for Seminary,” among others.

Bishop Tracy Smith Malone, resident bishop of the Indiana Conference and the Council of Bishops president, set an encouraging tone at the opening worship service on March 14. Preaching from 1 Samuel 3:1-10, she reminded listeners that “calling rarely begins with a road map. It begins with a nudge.”

One need not wait to feel completely prepared and ready. “God does not call the fully formed. God forms the called,” she said.

Miriam Safford, a young adult Global Mission Fellow, in GBGM's US-2 program, serves as a missionary at Northwest Immigrant Rights Project in Seattle. Her mother—Rev. Kruse-Safford—encouraged her also to attend Ignite.

“I thought it would be a good opportunity to connect with seminaries,” she said. The list of workshops intrigued her even more.

While young adults filled the hallways at Wespeth, seasoned adults were also present and exploring ministry possibilities.

Once such adult was Amania Drane, a project manager for the Northern Illinois Conference and member of Friendship United Methodist Church in Bolingbrook, Ill.

“Ignite was an encouraging and discerning space that affirmed that God is already at work in calling, preparing, and equipping clergy and laity to serve and lead the church into missional, just, and empowering ways to share the love of God in our local church, communities, and in the world,” she said.

Your giving to General Church and NIC apportionments supports discernment events.



## Faithful Neighbors

(continued from page 1)

Three members of the Nichiren Shoshu Myogyoji Buddhist Temple in West Chicago taught the group about Buddhism. Like Jainism, this is not a theistic religion. Rather, adherents strive to emulate Buddha and overcome ego. Serving others is a practice toward overcoming ego, the guide explained.

The visitors experienced a chanting service, which the words “nam, myoho, renge, and kyo” were repeated. “It speaks to the causes that one wants to practice that can result in positive results,” affecting karma (the law of cause and effect), the guide said.

The United Methodist youth largely found their faith strengthened by the experience. Ben of Geneva United Methodist Church was struck by how close these faiths' beliefs are, even amid their differences. The teaching that we can see God within ourselves and others and the principle of nonviolence—both values in Christianity—particularly resonated with him.

“People need to work on these more,” he said as a challenge to Christians to practice their beliefs.

Pedro of Our Redeemer's UMC in Schaumburg said that “seeing how people view God and their history was a lightbulb moment. It developed my own Christianity.”

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Council on Young People's Ministry.



A youth guide describes to the United Methodist visitors some of the notable locations for Jain centers around the world.

## Camp and Retreat Ministry Task Force Seeks Feasibility Planning Approval

by Rev. Rob Hamilton, chair of the Camp and Retreat Ministry Task Force

The Northern Illinois Annual Conference will consider legislation this year to continue the work of the Bishop's Camp and Retreat Ministry Task Force and provide a framework for discernment, feasibility, and transition planning for 2026-2027. At its heart, the legislation affirms Outdoor and Retreat Ministry as a vital part of the conference's disciple-making mission and seeks a sustainable, mission-aligned future for that ministry.

Bishop Dan Schwerin launched the task force in August 2025 in response to longstanding challenges facing camp and retreat ministry. Since then, the task force has worked with Outdoor and Retreat Ministries Board, the Conference Board of Trustees, and the Annual Conference Shepherding Team to evaluate program realities, financial sustainability, governance structures, and long-term stewardship needs.

A key development came in February 2026, when for the first time the task force, ORMB, and the conference trustees reached alignment around a strategic direction toward a focused single-site comprehensive model. This does not represent a final decision about a location, nor does the legislation ask the Annual Conference to approve a specific site. Instead, it authorizes the next phase of feasibility work so that future decisions can be made carefully, transparently, and faithfully.

The legislation also recognizes that camp planning timelines do not match the Annual Conference session calendar. Because preparation for the 2027 camp season must begin before the 2027 Annual Conference session, this proposal gives the task force and ACST authority to continue studies, develop recommendations, and take preliminary transition steps while remaining accountable to the conference.

Some may have heard questions about a recent Reynoldswood land sale. To be clear, this completed sale is a separate concern from the task force's plan. With approval from ORMB, the Board of Trustees sold a small strip of land at Reynoldswood to the Dixon Rural Fire Department. The sale affects only a very small portion of the property, does not impact current ministry or future direction, and improves site security.

Annual Conference legislation will be available after May 14 at [umcnic.org/ac2026docs](http://umcnic.org/ac2026docs).

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Outdoor and Retreat Ministries.



Campers at Camp Reynoldswood participating in archery.

Photo courtesy of JOY Camp



At Camp Reynoldswood hayrides through the property are an activity that is a favorite.

Photo courtesy of JOY Camp

# Stronger Together Holy Conferencing as a Practice of Hope



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

Alongside Scripture reading, fasting, prayer, and holy communion, John Wesley taught that Christian conferencing is a means of grace—an intentional practice through which people encounter God’s transforming grace.

This vision calls us to embody Christ’s love not only in what we say, but how we say it and how we treat one another. Holy conferencing creates space where truth can be spoken in love, where listening is as vital as speaking, and where connection is sustained even across difference and disagreement. It is a way of being together that seeks understanding before winning, and communion before conclusion.

At its heart, holy conferencing is a spiritual practice where God is present in our conversa-

tions, guiding, correcting, healing, and drawing us into deeper unity. It invites us to slow down, to pay attention to one another, and to recognize that every voice carries dignity and worth. In this way, our conversations become more than exchanges of ideas; they become moments of grace.

As we look ahead to the Annual Conference session in June, we recognize this gathering as more than an annual event on the calendar. It is an expression of the means of grace at work among us. Throughout the session, we will worship together, celebrate the ministry of the church, and hear

reports that reflect the life and mission of our conference. We will engage in conversations, consider legislation, and make decisions that shape our shared future.

In all of this, holy conferencing becomes essential. It shapes how we engage with one another in plenaries, lunch-and-learn sessions, small-group conversations, and informal interactions. It reminds us that every voice matters and that every exchange is an opportunity to reflect Christ’s love.

This year, I invite you to embrace holy conferencing as a practice of hope. In a time when differences can easily divide us, choosing to remain in holy conversation is itself an act of hope. When we listen deeply, speak truthfully, and extend grace generously, we bear witness to God’s love and presence among us. Hope is not merely a feeling; it is a way of being together. We practice hope as we dream, discern, and work together for the good of the Body of Christ.

As we gather in June, may our holy conferencing be rooted in love and guided by the Holy Spirit. And may it lead us not only to wise decisions, but to deeper connection, renewed trust, and a shared vision for the ministry to which God calls us.



Holy conferencing during laity session of Annual Conference 2025.

Photo by Kris Aves

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports Connectional Ministries.



## CCFA Chairperson Celebrates Conference’s Strengths

by Kim Emery, CCFA Chairperson

As my time as Conference Committee on Finance and Administration chair comes to an end, I would like to thank the Northern Illinois Annual Conference and Bishop Dan Schwerin for the opportunity to serve on Conference Council on Finance and Administration. When I was first asked if I would consider serving I never expected I would become the chairperson. One never knows what God has in store.

It has truly been a blessing and a learning experience. I joke that if you want to learn more than you every thought you could about the NIC and you want to step out of your comfort zone, chair the CCFA.

I have had the true honor to serve with so many wonderful and supportive siblings in Christ. I have learned so much and have grown in my understanding of how the annual conference works. Speaking before a large crowd of people is not something that I feel comfortable with but no matter how nervous I was, I felt great support from the floor of the annual conference, the conference staff, and the members of the CCFA.

CCFA has and continues to work hard on behalf of the annual conference. We have made some tough recommendations to annual conference. My terms on CCFA were filled with changes. I worked during the terms of three bishops, two NIC treasurers, and a new assistant to bishop, and the adoption of a new appointment formula.

My message for the laity is that local churches, districts, and conference need laity. We can make a difference. We cannot sit on the sideline and complain that our churches are declining if we are not willing to help. Even if we are busy with children or parents, full-time jobs, and other responsibilities, we are needed to keep the church alive and well. We laypeople bring our perspectives, skills, and talents. If we as the church are not growing, we are dying. It truly takes both lay and clergy to keep the church growing.

My message for the churches: Thank you for being part of the connectional system and choosing to pay the apportionments. We appreciate each dollar you have given to the conference from your collection plate. We

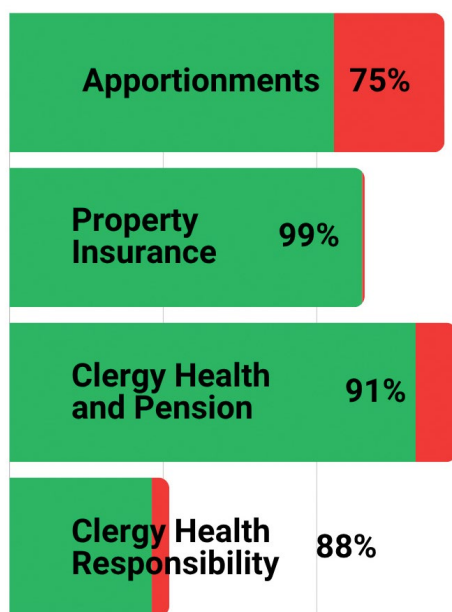
recognize that many churches have financial strains. The importance of our conference apportionments allows us to continue to do the connectional work and have the resources to lean on other United Methodist churches. I have had the opportunity to see firsthand NIC churches’ helping each other. I encourage all churches to continue to support each other through prayers and paying apportionments. It will make us all stronger.

Again, thank you for allowing me to serve as your CCFA chair for the last two years. I look forward to seeing my laity siblings using their gifts, graces, and skills in leadership roles to help the conference and seeing all the wonderful ministries we can do together.

### Connectional Giving Update

### Celebrating Growth:

### 2026 Giving Off to a Remarkable Start



\* For invoices and payments through March 31, 2026

First quarter giving in 2026 is off to a strong and encouraging start across the Northern Illinois Conference, with significant gains in every area compared to this one year ago. Apportionment giving has reached 75 percent (up from 60 percent last year), with more than \$1 million already received. Health and pension insurance premium payments stand at 91 percent (compared to 69 percent at this point last year). Clergy contributions to their health insurance premiums

reached 88 percent (up from 74 percent), and property insurance premium receipts have seen the most dramatic improvement—99 percent, compared to just 45 percent at this time last year.

These numbers reflect a shared commitment to strengthening the ministry and mission of the church.

“I’m grateful for the results and the good process,” says Bishop Dan Schwerin. “We will get healthier, innovate, and impact more people for Jesus Christ.”





# Practicing Hope

## 187th Northern Illinois Annual Conference

Sunday, June 14 -  
Tuesday, June 16, 2026

Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center  
1551 N. Thoreau Dr., Schaumburg Ill.

The 187th Northern Illinois Annual Conference members will gather from June 14 to 16 at the Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center under the theme "Practicing Hope." The event's worship services and plenaries, including the bishop's episcopal address, Bible study, and reports, will be livestreamed on the NIC YouTube channel ([youtube.com/c/Annual-ConferenceofNorthernIllinoisUMC](https://youtube.com/c/Annual-ConferenceofNorthernIllinoisUMC)).

Recordings will be posted for later viewing. If you will be attending, be sure to visit the display tables in the Ballroom foyer.

Look for full coverage and photos online afterward.

Find updates online at [umcnic.org/AC2026](https://umcnic.org/AC2026).

## Dates to Note:

- **Proposed legislation and historical documents posted:** May 14
- **Pre-conference briefings:** online June 8 (7 p.m.) and June 9 (10 a.m.)
- **Clergy session:** June 14, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.
- **Laity session:** June 14, 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.
- **Celebration of Ministry** (ordination and other recognitions): June 14, 7 p.m.
- **Bible Study:** June 15 & 16, mornings
- **Lunch-and-Learn sessions:** June 15, noon
- **Memorial service:** June 15, 1:45 p.m.
- **Retirement recognition:** June 16, 11 a.m.

## Details

### Registration

Registration for Annual Conference is open through May 22, and all voting members and guests must register in advance. No on-site registration will be available. Participants can sign up for sessions, meals, and accessibility needs through a link at [umcnic.org/ac2026](https://umcnic.org/ac2026). Childcare is offered during conference sessions, registration is available at the same link; registration closes May 22.

### Lunch-and-Learn

Back by popular demand, the Lunch-and-Learn sessions offer a chance to enjoy a meal while connecting with others. On Mon., June 15, from noon to 1:30 p.m., all registered participants will receive a box lunch. Box lunches are available for guests as well, but they need to have registered to attend the conference. Learn more at [umcnic.org/annual-conference/meals-at-ac](https://umcnic.org/annual-conference/meals-at-ac). Options include:

- **Practicing Hope, Living Mission:** Sponsored by the NIC Board of Global Ministries
- **Practicing Hope as an Anti-Racist Christian:** Sponsored by the NIC Commission on Religion and Race
- **Practicing Hope with Discipleship:** Sponsored by the NIC Committee on Discipleship and Spiritual Formation
- **Fresh Expressions, Sharing the Gift of Community in a Lonely World:** Sponsored by the NIC Office of Congregational Development
- **Roots, Resilience, and the Road Ahead:** Sponsored by the Chicago Black Methodists for Church Renewal
- **Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary**

### Volunteers

We need registration volunteers, ushers/plenary pages, greeters, information desk volunteers and more to help Annual Conference run smoothly and efficiently. Volunteers need to be at least 16. Clergy & Lay Members of Annual Conference (voting members) may volunteer only on Sunday before the 1:30 p.m. Clergy/Laity Session. Those who are interested should fill out the form at [umcnic.org/ac2026](https://umcnic.org/ac2026) by May 22.

### Mass Choir

This year we are again inviting churches to send 4-5 members from their church choirs to join in a large NIC Mass Choir to sing during the Celebration of Ministry Service on Sunday, June 14, at 7 p.m. All are welcome. Those interested should fill out at [umcnic.org/ac2026](https://umcnic.org/ac2026).

### Celebrations

Annual Conference is a sacred time for worship, discernment, and connection, and it is also an opportunity to honor the important anniversaries and milestones that shape the life of The United Methodist Church.

This year we will celebrate the following anniversaries:

- **Women's Ordination (full clergy rights):** 70 years
- **United Methodist Volunteers in Mission:** 50 years
- **NIC's becoming a Reconciling Ministries Network Conference:** 40 years
- **Order of Deacons:** 30 years

### Public Demonstration

After adjournment on Monday at 5:45 p.m., the Conference Commission on Religion and Race invites all who are interested to take part in an optional public demonstration, "Faithful Action: Love Your Neighbor."

Participants will gather immediately following the session and can choose a sign to carry. The group will walk together to Meacham Road as a visible expression of our shared commitment to loving our neighbors. The purpose of this peaceful demonstration to provide a meaningful opportunity to witness to our values in the broader community.

The demonstration will conclude by 6:15 p.m., allowing ample time for participants to attend any evening events.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Annual Conference session.



This year's Bishop's Appeal will benefit two ministries: the construction of a high school in Tanzania, led by Rev. Young Seon Kim, and the Endowment for Theological Education in the Central Conferences. Gifts will be shared equally to expand educational opportunities and equip future church leaders around the world. Learn more and how to give at [umcnic.org/2026BishopsAppeal](https://umcnic.org/2026BishopsAppeal).

### Mission Collection

The Conference Board of Global Ministries continues its partnership to support disaster relief and communities in need through this year's Mission Challenge. Donations of home care and personal dignity kit supplies will be collected at a truck in the parking lot on June 14 and 15. Financial gifts are also welcome. Find full details and a list of needed items at [umcnic.org/2026MissionChallenge](https://umcnic.org/2026MissionChallenge).



# Laity Convocation Offers Many Reasons to Hope

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

We are interrelated as a network that is Beloved Community—and young adults bring commitment and open hearts to their lives of faith, laypeople learned at “Moving Forward with Hope,” the Northern Illinois Conference Laity Convocation held on March 21 at First United Methodist Church in Glen Ellyn.

Even more people participated distantly at churches in Freeport (Faith), Orland Park (Faith), and Princeton.

Bishop Dan Schwerin tied together, hope, relationships, and Beloved Community in his presentation.

He noted that the Chinese word for sincerity is acknowledging that we are part of something more than ourselves, for mutual benefit. Our baptisms brought us together, “and we have nothing else to do but build Beloved Community.”

The notion of Beloved Community is a vision of a society based on justice, love, and reconciliation, originally articulated by philosopher Josiah Royce and popularized by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Rev. Hope Chernich, pastor of First United Methodist Church in Des Plaines and a member of NIC’s Rapid Response Team, spoke about the bravery of the Rapid Response Team members as they assisted those targeted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. She encouraged the gathering with her explanation of the team’s work to advocate for people detained by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement raids as well as identifying United Methodist assets that make the church “uniquely equipped for what is happening in our world.”

Vanessa Cisneros of La Gracia de Dios in Alsip told the gathering that “We need a purpose, a goal, to have hope,” and that hers is to serve God.

“Hope is active,” said Arunima Sudhaker of LaSalle United Methodist Church. “Hope

is trust, choosing faith over fear. It is something we have in happy and difficult times.”

She expressed what the others also mentioned: that young people are looking for belonging, to be heard and seen.

Daniel Dunlap of Christ United Methodist Church in Rockford noted that he “sees hope in brokenness.”

“Young people are looking for something they do not have,” he said. “Church can be that community. Give young people a place to belong.”

Joshua Hayag, also a member of Christ UMC, found hope in a distressing event at the church: there was a fire in the church sanctuary on Feb. 23. “I see hope in others in the church.

“It’s still a time for hope. It pushing us out of the building.”



Daniel Dunlap, youth member, shared where he sees hope.

Photo by Aquilino “Pong” Javier, Jr.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Board of Laity and Laity Convocation.



## Leading Laity

### Keep Hope Alive



by Eugene Williams, Conference Co-Lay Leader

Easter people, greetings on behalf of the laity of the Northern Illinois Conference. We will continue to celebrate Christ’s victory (and ours), not just during Eastertide, but always and forever. So let us pause to consider how blessed we are and what our task is: to keep hope alive!

As a reminder, the mighty works of Christ that shape us as Easter people are really not fully consummated until the book of Revelation. There, on the Isle of Patmos, what John now realized (and we Easter people must also realize) is that the one who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey was not simply the king of Israel or the king of the world. No, he was and is the lord of the universe, the one with whom history begins and ends; the Alpha and the Omega; the Almighty. Yes, we can move forward with hope, and we can practice a year of hope because Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. Seated there on the throne is the one who is, always was, and who is still to come. He is the Almighty One!

We have focused on “Practicing a Year of Hope” for 2026. The Laity Convocation took place on March 21 and was a huge success. Laity Convocation was an in-person event, along with three satellite listening locations.

We were blessed by the generosity of our in-person hosts, Rev. David Price, and the Glen Ellyn community of faith. We also extend thanks to Pastors Joel McClellan at Freeport, Michael Hickok at Princeton, and Jenny Weber of Orland Park. Our theme was “Moving Forward With

Hope.” Attendees included Bishop Dan Schwerin, along with laity, clergy, district superintendents, and annual conference staff.

Bishop Schwerin provided reflections on “Practicing Hope” and showed a video about this year’s Bishop’s Appeal for Central Conference Theological Education. Rev. Hope Chernich reflected on her work with the NIC Rapid Response Team. We then enjoyed a special presentation by four amazing young adults about where they see hope in their lives, the world, and their ministry settings. A very special thank you to Vanessa Cisneros, Arunima Sudhakar, Daniel Dunlap, and Joshua Hayag.

A huge thanks to all who assisted, participated, attended and otherwise supported the Laity Convocation. An extra special posthumous thank you to our beloved sister, Rev. Char Hoffmann, who, we grieve to say, has died since the convocation. She always kept hope alive and was the very heart and soul of our Board of Laity. Please continue to keep Rev. Char’s family in prayer.

The Board of Laity will continue to build on “Moving Forward With Hope” at the laity session of Annual Conference at 1:30 p.m. on June 14. All are welcome. Go with God and be well.



A portion of Laity Convocation is set aside for breakout groups with discussion questions to help the laity fellowship and share ideas.

Photo by Aquilino “Pong” Javier, Jr.

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” -MICAH 6:8

**PEACE WITH JUSTICE SUNDAY**

**Fostering Just and Peaceful Initiatives**

[resourceumc.org/pwjs](http://resourceumc.org/pwjs)

**May 31, 2026**

**JOY CAMP**

United Methodist Christian Camp

**June 21 - 27**

Located at Camp Reynoldswood, Dixon, IL

Serving youth from ages 5th grade to high school seniors.

[umcnic.org/calendar/joy-camp-2026](http://umcnic.org/calendar/joy-camp-2026)

# Faithful Servants Among Us: Honoring Our Older Adults

by Deaconess Joann Melad, member of the NIC Council on Older Adult Ministries

When my spouse, Rev. Victor Melad, Jr., and I were newly appointed to Edison Park United Methodist Church in Chicago, one of the first couples we met was Bob and Nancy. They were among the older adults in our congregation and lived within the same community as the church. From the very beginning, their presence and service made a lasting impact on us.

Whenever there was an issue with the church property, Bob was always the person to call. No matter the time, he was ready and willing to help. Nancy, on the other hand, faithfully took care of matters related to the kitchen and the altar. Together, they served quietly, consistently, and joyfully—never seeking recognition but always offering their time and gifts for the good of the church.

Their kindness extended beyond service. One winter, they brought my husband and me to the Chicago Botanic Garden to see the orchid show. It was a simple gesture, yet deeply meaningful—a reflection of their generous and caring hearts.

Bob and Nancy are just two of the many older adults in our churches who serve faithfully



behind the scenes. Their lives remind us that ministry is not only found in the spotlight, but also in the steady, everyday acts of love and dedication. We are truly grateful for them.

In May, we honor and celebrate our older adults by designating a Sunday as Older Adults Sunday, a time to recognize their contributions and give thanks for their presence in our faith communities.

Also in May, churches take the Golden Cross Offering. Donations support Northern Illinois Conference ministries with older adults and help provide scholarships for individuals serving in partner caregiving agencies and support training and educational opportunities for caregivers and those involved in older adult ministry.

The conference encourages all churches to take part in this meaningful celebration by honoring our older adults and by giving generously to support the ongoing ministry that uplifts and cares for them.

Your giving to Mission Links/Golden Cross Sunday supports the Council on Older Adult Ministries.



## Illinois Pilgrimage Unites Faith and History

by Tim Alexander, NIC CCORR Co-chair

Bringing together faith, history, and a shared commitment to justice, United Methodists from across Illinois will take part in a four-day pilgrimage designed to deepen understanding and build community. The Illinois Pilgrimage, set for June 25–28, will guide participants through significant cultural and historical sites, fostering reflection, learning, and connection across regions.

The pilgrimage is a collaborative effort between the Northern Illinois Conference Commission on Religion and Race and the Illinois Great Rivers Conference Board of Global Ministries. Supporting sponsors reflect a shared commitment to education and relationship-building and include the NIC Committee on Native American Ministries, First United Methodist Church of Ottawa, Grace United Methodist Church in Lake Bluff, Greenstone United Methodist Church in Chicago, North Central College in Naperville, Our Saviour's United Methodist Church in Schaumburg, and Trinity United Methodist Church in East St. Louis.

Designed as both a learning experience and a time of spiritual reflection, the journey begins on June 25 in Chicago with visits to key historical landmarks. On June 26, some participants will depart from North Central College and some from the Illinois Great Rivers Center in Springfield to go first to Ottawa to visit a Lincoln-Douglas debate site. Next they will

continue to the El Paso Voting Rights Museum and end the day in Springfield. Saturday includes additional historic site visits in Springfield before traveling to Collinsville.

The pilgrimage concludes on June 28 with worship at Trinity UMC in East St. Louis, followed by lunch and a visit to Cahokia Mounds, one of the world's most significant Indigenous historical sites.

To participate, learn more at [umcnic.org/calendar/nicigr-illinois-pilgrimage](http://umcnic.org/calendar/nicigr-illinois-pilgrimage). Pricing includes lodging, meals, and entrance fees, with options ranging from a \$50 one-day Chicago experience to three- and four-day packages. A \$100 discount is available for participants ages 18 to 25.

Registration is open through May 31, with space limited. A mandatory online orientation will be held June 2 to review final details.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the work of the Conference Commission on Religion and Race.



## Reimagining Church

### Attending to the Faithful Few

by Rev. Christian Coon, NIC Director of Congregational Development



For several years while I pastored Christ United Methodist Church in Deerfield, I held a three-hour Good Friday vigil in the sanctuary. I had written a dramatic retelling of the Passion story and so every 15 minutes, I would stand read

a passage from John, read a bit of my own writing and then sit back down in the silence. A handful of people would come in and out during those hours and I was glad to do it.

But by year four of offering this vigil, I was having second thoughts. Three hours is a good chunk of time that I could be using to prepare for Easter Sunday. After all, only a few people came to the vigil, but many more would come on Sunday. That's where my energy should go!

But there was one person who always stayed the whole time and every year in the days leading up to Good Friday, he would tell me, "I'm really looking forward to the vigil." So I would, albeit a little grudgingly, continue to offer it.

Every Easter I would send out notes, emails, texts, Facebook messages, carrier pigeons, whatever it took to the sporadic attenders of my church and encourage them to come on Easter. I would pray that visitors would make their way to us and that something about the service would compel them to return. A lot of my energy would go toward the maybes. A little of my energy would go toward the certainties, like the one individual who stayed for the entire Good Friday vigil.

I don't think these are bad impulses, but as we celebrate the Easter season and look ahead to Pentecost in the hopes that newcomers will continue to attend, I hope we also take a few moments to give thanks for the faithful few who are there, come rain or shine. I confess I did not do that very often. But they are the Marys of our churches, those who stayed and stay close to the cross when death appeared. And those likely are the ones who will continue to quietly proclaim resurrection. I give thanks for the faithful few in our congregations!

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports Congregational Development.



# #BeUMC

# Racism, Environment, Immigration, and Youth Focused Springfield Advocacy Day

by Lisa Rogers, chair of the CCORR Advocacy group

About 40 people of faith from across Illinois traveled to the state Capitol on April 15 to advocate for public policy that aligns with the United Methodist Social Principles.

The Northern Illinois Conference Commission on Religion and Race organized this event for the third year in a row. United Methodists from Illinois Great Rivers Conference joined the group this year.

Throughout the day, participants met with their elected officials to discuss current legislation that addresses environmental and food justice, support for immigrants, and youth education and empowerment.

Carol Jeanne Davis, from First United Methodist Church in Downers Grove, met with Rep. Anne Stava (District 18) to share her support for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Rep. Stava pledged her support for the United Methodist position to support marginalized people.

When considering why she joined the CCORR Advocacy

Day Team, Paula Roderick said that “as a Black woman and an attorney who is passionate about civil rights, working with the CCORR advocacy team is so critical in this challenging time.

“I went to Springfield because I knew our group would be grounded in UM Social Principles and comfortable with sharing experiences in advocating for our principles with elected officials. And I knew it would be a great opportunity to meet almost 40 people from the NIC and IGRC in small groups so that we could hear what concerns differing churches have.”

In addition to meeting with legislators, participants gathered with other people of faith to sing and pray in the Capitol rotunda. Some

toured the building. The group ended the day with a vigil at the foot of the Lincoln statue on the steps of the Capitol. Led by inspiring words from Pastor Abby Holcombe, we sang, chanted and prayed for justice for all.

We were blessed to receive breakfast and lunch from the people of Douglas Avenue United Methodist Church in Springfield, led by Pastor Meredith Brown. Over breakfast we heard from Rep. Abdelnasser Rashid (District 21) about why he proposed HB2723 and worked with Sen. Mike Porfiri (District 11) to introduce SB2462, the Illinois Human Rights Advocacy Protection Act.

Our closing prayer at the end of our vigil was a beautiful conclusion for this trip as well as a

call to continue the work:  
Today is the day  
God brings good  
news to the poor, pro-  
claims release to the  
captives, gives sight  
to the blind, and sets  
the oppressed free.  
And so shall we.  
Amen.



The day ended at the Lincoln Statue, moving into a time of vigil and prayer. Photo by Fernando Fuentes

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports CCORR activities.



## 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, 2026 (unless otherwise noted):

**Natarsha Gardner** (Licensed Local Pastor) to Lanark (PN) from Freeport: First (PN). Natarsha follows George Woosnam, who returns to retirement and is currently serving as interim.

**Rosa Lee** (Full Elder) to Glenview (LN) from Dixon: Grace (PS). Rosa follows Eun-Hye Choi, who is retiring.

**Sam Stanes Stephen Raj** (Licensed Local Pastor) to Rockford: Brooke Road (PN) ½ time and a newly created position of Pastor of Justice & Social Witness of the Rockford Urban Ministries (PN) ½ time, from Chicago: The Redeemer's of Calvary (LN). At Rockford: Brooke Road, Sam follows Audrey Rochet.

**Paul Lee** (Full Elder) to Evanston: First (LN) from Sterling: Wesley (PS). Paul follows Grace Imathiu.

**Jonathan Crail** (Full Elder) to Wheaton: Gary (PC) from DeKalb: First (PS). Jonathan follows Mary Zajac, who is retired and serving as interim.

**Joey Garcea** (Full Elder) to Freeport: First (PN) from Leon and Prophetstown (PS), Joey follows J. Natarsha Gardner, who is appointed to Lanark.

**Tiffany Garcea** (Full Elder) to Freeport: Harmony (PN) from Erie (PS). Tiffany follows Brian LeBaron (Interim), who is returning to retirement.

**D. Josiah Montgomery** (Provisional Elder) to Waukegan: First (LN) from Hartzell (LS). Josiah follows Barbara Morgan, who is retiring.

**Mi Sook Yoo** (Full Elder) to Good Samaritan UMC in Cupertino, CA (California-Nevada Annual Conference) from Algonquin: Christ (PC).

**Hyewon "Sophia" Carno** (Full Elder) to Naperville: Grace (Associate) (PC) from Chicago: First Temple (LS). Hyewon "Sophia" follows Eric Blachford, who is appointed to Plainfield: First.

**Alex Lee** (Licensed Local Pastor) to Cherry Valley and New Milford UMCs (PN) from Harvard (PN). Alex follows Mark Harkness, who is appointed to Dixon: First.

**Howard "Doc" Newcomb** (Full Elder) to DeKalb: First (PS) from Marengo UMC (PN). Howard "Doc" follows Jonathan Crail, who is appointed to Wheaton: Gary.

**Satya Sudhakar** (Full Elder) to Algonquin: Christ (PC) from Ottawa: Epworth (PS). Satya follows Mi-Sook Yoo, who is appointed to Cupertino, California: Good Samaritan (California-Nevada Conference).

**Solomon Sudhakar** (Full Elder) to Carol Stream: St. Andrew (PC) from LaSalle: Grace (PS). Solomon follows Chan Ik Choi, who is appointed to Voluntary Leave of Absence (Family Leave).

**Mary Lou Eubanks** (Licensed Local Pastor) to retirement from extension ministry. Effective May 1, 2026. Mary Lou was licensed Local Pastor in 2015. During her ministry she served as chaplain at Wesley Wellness and Kindred Hospital, Sycamore, IL.

**Bromleigh McCleneghan** (Full Elder) to attend school from extension ministry.

**Ronald Allan Balang** (Full Elder, ¶1346.1) to Leon and Prophetstown (PS) from the Philippines Annual Conference. Ronald Allan follows Joey Garcea, who is appointed to Freeport: First.

**Norval Brown** (Retiring Elder) to Lansing First (LS) from Cary (PC). Norval follows G. Morris Jarkloh, Jr., who is appointed to Chicago: First Temple, Associate.

**Dexter Ceballos** (Full Elder, ¶1346.1) to Erie (PS) from the Southern Tagalog Provisional Philippines Annual Conference East, Global Mission-

ary to Mongolia. Dexter follows Tiffany Garcea, who is appointed to Freeport: Harmony.

**Jim Fu** (Full Elder) to Marengo (PN) from Elmhurst: First (PC) and Elmhurst: Christ (PC). Jim follows Doc Newcomb who is appointed to DeKalb: First.

**Grace Imathiu** (Full Elder, ¶1346.1) to Napa UMC in California-Nevada Conference from Evanston: First (LN).

**Sejoon Jang** (Full Elder) to Elk Grove UMC in California-Nevada Conference from Rockford: Grace (PN).

**G. Morris Jarkloh, Jr.** (Full Elder) to Chicago: First Temple, Associate (LS) from Lansing: First (LS). G. Morris follows Sophia Carno, who is appointed to Naperville: Grace, Associate.

**Matthew Krings** (Full Elder) to Sterling: Wesley (PS) from Chicago: Renewed Hope (LN). Matthew follows Paul Lee, who is appointed to Evanston: First.

**Min Woo** (Full Elder) to Zion: Memorial and North Prairie (LN) from North Northfield (LN). Min Woo follows Kwadwo Ntim and Miguel Nieves, who are both retired.

**Jeff Brace** (Licensed Local Pastor) to Milton UMC in Wisconsin Conference from Mendota: Zion (PS).

**Jacqueline Ford** (Full Elder) to Chicago: Hartzell Memorial (LS.) from Ingleside: Whitfield (LS). Jacqueline follows D. Josiah Montgomery, who is appointed to Waukegan: First.

**Chanje "CJ" Woo** (Licensed Local Pastor) to Rockford: Grace (PN) from Arlington Heights: Church of the Incarnation (LN) and Northbrook: Vision (LN). CJ follows Sejoon Jang, who is appointed to the California-Nevada Conference.

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

