

The Northern Illinois Conference OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Reporter

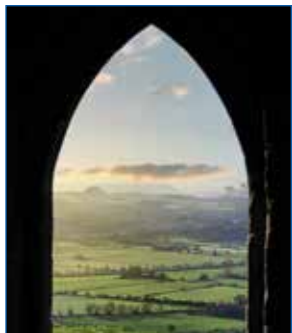
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DO NOT DELAY. DATED MATERIAL

Hager's story: a refugee finds a new life in Northern Illinois



Hager, who came to the U.S. as a refugee from the Syrian civil war, is pleased to raise her three daughters here.

by Karime Sanchez, Development and Communications Coordinator for Northern Illinois Justice For Our Neighbors

The ongoing Syrian civil war has driven over 180,000 migrants from Syria to seek refuge in the U. S. since the outbreak of violence in 2011. Hager (a pseudonym) and her family were among these refugees. Hager is one of the first Syrian clients served by Northern Illinois Justice For Our Neighbors, which provides affordable, high-quality legal assistance for immigrants.

When the war began, Hager and her family made the difficult decision to move to the U.S. Although the family contemplated going back to Syria, Hager knew that they would have no home to return to. Instead, she began her search for asylum in the U.S.

Hager and her three daughters found themselves in a refugee camp in the state of Georgia. She began by applying for asylum in Atlanta and Savannah, but both requests were rejected. An employee working at the refugee camp took notice of Hager's situation and directed her to help in Chicago. When they arrived in Illinois, Hager and her daughters stayed at a shelter in Evanston for close to two weeks.

Eventually, Hager contacted NIJFON Attorney Jenny Grobelski for help with applying for asylum. Jenny first spoke to Hager over the phone and asked to meet her in person.

On her way to meet Jenny, Hager recalls feeling afraid because she had no papers. She

had three daughters to care for, but no job or documentation, because her visa had expired. In her search for a place to rent, Hager found that landlords would not lease to her because she had no paperwork. Jenny would have to work quickly because Hager was close to the one-year limit to apply for asylum. Hager was in a precarious situation.

However, Hager's feelings changed once she met Jenny in person. From their first meeting, she experienced Jenny as a kind person. Jenny cared about Hager's life and offered her help that far exceeded Hager's expectations. Jenny even reminded Hager of one of her daughters. Hager came to appreciate Jenny's presence, such as when Jenny accompanied Hager to her legal appointments.

Jenny recalls of Hager's asylum interview, "As the officer was walking us out to the hallway after the interview was over, she leaned over to me and said, 'I like your client's style,' meaning that she liked Hager's attitude and that she had a lot of fight in her, despite her terrible circumstances. I've never had an immigration officer or judge so candidly and off the record root for one of our clients. *Everyone* she comes across just pulls for her; she has that effect on people."

Indeed, people rallied around Hager. The doctor in Chicago whom the refugee camp employee referred Hager took Hager and her three daughters into her home. Hager

New Reporter Publishing Schedule

Starting in January 2024, The Reporter will be printed every other month (six times per year). Issues will be dated January-February, March-April, May-June, July-August, September-October, and November-December. They will be mailed to arrive at subscriber addresses early in the first month. (For example, the January-February issue is scheduled to arrive in early January.)

If you wish to submit news for possible inclusion in The Reporter, please observe these deadlines:

January-February issue: December 11

March-April issue: February 14

May-June issue: April 10

July-August issue: June 21

September-October issue: August 14

November-December issue: October 9

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expresses immense gratitude to that family, who gave her much-needed assistance and a place to stay.

Hager moved into the city as she awaited a response from Jenny about her asylum case. Hager could feel the pressure of her current status and awaited asylum with anticipation as she continued to reach out to Jenny for updates on her case. Finally, Jenny called Hager to tell her the good news: Hager received asylum! Gaining asylum made Hager feel like she was already a citizen.

Meanwhile, friends and kind strangers around Hager continued to offer the family support. Jenny helped Hager with another important step by helping Hager get a work permit. Before that, Hager felt like she was

continued on page 3, see Hager



From Your Bishop:

Faithful living in the unknown

by Bishop Dan Schwerin

God still chooses to share the work of co-creation. Might the giver of all grace have second thoughts about sharing the work of creation with humankind?

One need not look far to see our penchant for violence and self-interest. Would you risk sharing the work of creation with humans? Such a risk requires a deep faith in the mission and in the people called to serve it. God continues to be steadfastly engaged in the mission of reconciling the world and making known the kin-dom of God. God continues to call us to make disciples of Jesus, baptizing and teaching all that Jesus commanded, even to the close of the age, to quote Matthew's Gospel. Despite the pain that surrounds us, the focus of our mission is healing.

I just received an email from a pastor who named our context well. He says that the most committed disciple-leaders in his congregation are not very engaged, either physically or financially. The complexity of serving as a clergy person and the technology to shepherd both virtual and in-person community is increasingly challenging. Insurance costs are up. Fuel costs are rising. Add to this the increased secularization of our mission field and our own internal dynamics that have diminished the love inherent in our witness.

Liminal refers to being at a threshold.

This period has been called liminal space. Liminal comes from the word limen, which refers to being at a threshold. Many leaders are using this language to describe the uncertainty facing us in our conference and

local church context.

In her book *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), Susan Beaumont writes, "The Christian story is by design an invitation to liminality" (p.4). She writes that we need to make three spiritual shifts: moving from knowing to unknowing, advocating to attending, and striving to surrender. This is a moment of yielding, letting go, and letting be so that we have hands open to grasp God's newness.

This season in our life together takes me to prayerfully consider "negative capability," coined by the poet John Keats. Keats wrote to his brothers about remaining in a mind of uncertainty and unknowing so that he can be attentive to creating. I know from writing my own poetry that it is uncomfortable to step out of the known to risk real creativity.

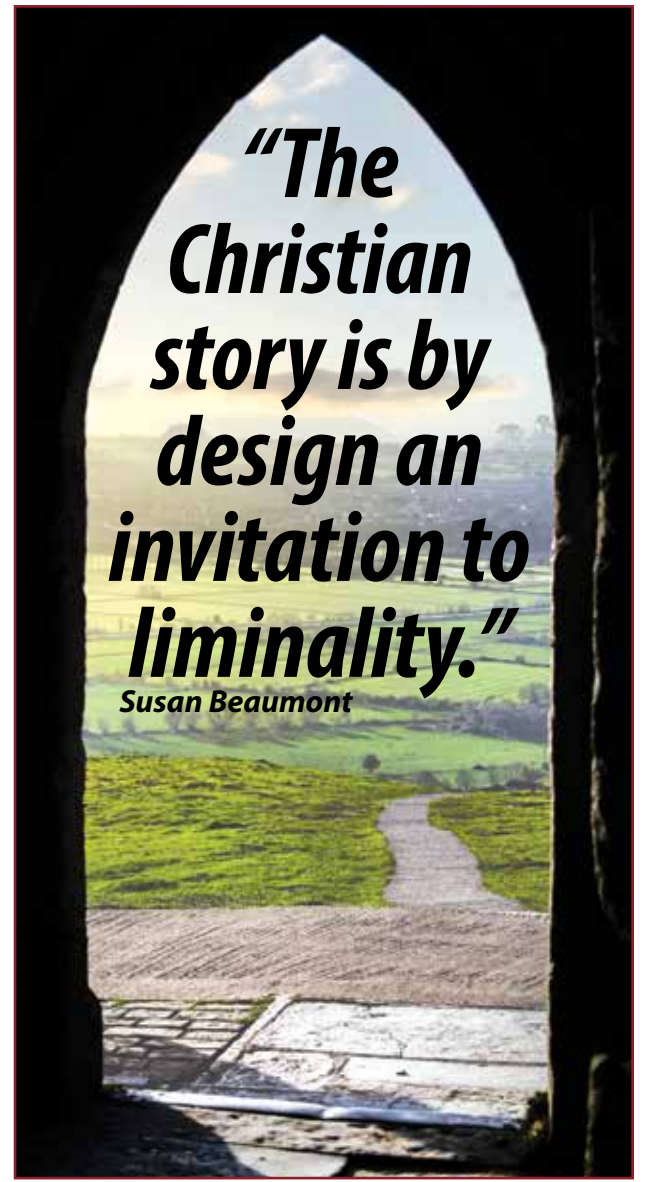
This balance reminds me of the work of therapists: they have a great deal of technical knowledge, but they also must, like a midwife, prepare an environment in which the client risks facing the unknown newness that needs to emerge for healing to take place. In this way, deeper is the way forward.

In Mark 4:27, Jesus tells a parable of a sower who is spreading seeds. He ends it by saying that the seeds that will sprout, though the sower "does not know how." Spiritual leadership in this season must be grounded in a deep trust and capacity for negative capability, so that we can deal with troubling uncertainty.

God continues to go before us and with us. God continues to believe and invest in the mission. I believe our mission is slowly moving from institutional maintenance to kin-dom influence, from internally focused to missionally focused.

Fellow disciples, thank you for your faithfulness. There is nothing as satisfying or healing as being an open-table people, living into beloved community. It is good to be in ministry with you.

Know that I am praying for you.

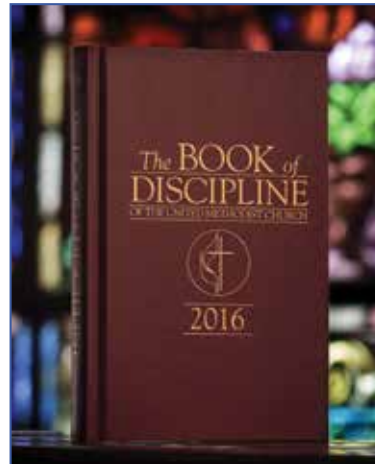


Northern Illinois Conference regretfully files lawsuit against Naperville Korean Church

The Northern Illinois Conference has, with a heavy heart, filed a lawsuit on Oct. 10 against a breakaway faction of the former Naperville Korean United Methodist Church, alleging that it unlawfully took possession of property and funds rightfully belonging to the Northern Illinois Conference.

The Naperville Korean United Methodist Church sought to leave the NIC because it did not agree with the conference's recognition of the sacred worth of LGBTQ+ persons and their eligibility to receive and participate in United Methodist ministries. The conference contends that the Naperville Korean congregation later withdrew from the disaffiliation process and ignored church rules and the law by taking possession of property and funds rightfully belonging to the NIC. The conference seeks return of its property and funds.

In late 2022, the conference began working with the Naperville Korean United Methodist Church to honor its request to explore disaffiliation from the UMC. Through the spring



of 2023, the Northern Illinois Conference worked faithfully on the process required by the denomination.

In May, the agreement for Naperville Korean Church's exit from the denomination was finalized. Included in the exit agreement was full payment of the mortgage and arrearages related to church property.

The NIC notes that, prior to the final vote, the Naperville Korean congregation abandoned the disaffiliation process, blocked conference authorities from entering the property, and a breakaway faction took possession of the parsonage, church building, and church financial accounts.

During the subsequent months, the conference worked in good faith to negotiate a return of its properties and funds. When the breakaway faction refused to return the properties and funds, the conference had to take the last resort of filing a lawsuit.

Bishop Dan Schwerin, who oversees the Northern Illinois Conference, invites people to hold all concerned in prayer.

The Northern Illinois Conference OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH Reporter

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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.

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Hager (continued from page 1)

imprisoned as she would only leave the house to shop for groceries or walk.

The work permit made her feel freer and provided her more security. She felt like she “could do anything.” Hager’s neighbor helped her apply for a job. Hager learned how to drive and received her driver’s license. Although Hager began studying English for two months, she says she learned the most English at work through speaking with customers. Her job began to feel easier because she formed connections with others. Today, Hager works at a senior home with her oldest daughter, Sara.

Finally, in 2017, Hager received her green card—her permanent residency identification. Today, Hager expresses her love for the people around her. She says she does not do her work for compensation but rather for the fulfillment she receives when she gives back. Although everything around her seemed new and scary when she arrived, today she feels happy to learn about her neighbors and their cultures and customs. Jenny’s diligent dedication to Hager’s case culminated in 2022 when Hager became a naturalized U.S. citizen.

When asked what is next for her, Hager says she wants to relax. Her journey has empowered her to be proud of herself. She feels like a strong woman who is happy that she does not need a husband to succeed and affirms that the U.S. has brought her relief and options for what she wants to become.

Here in the U.S., she says, she has the opportunity to be the best person she can be. “If you want to be a good person, this country will support you. I can live an honest life here,” she says.

Hager is grateful to NIJFON and describes the organization as full of warm people. “NIJFON takes care of me like family,” she says. “I feel like a family member.”

As an organization that benefits from the ongoing Bishop’s Appeal for Migrant Needs (umcnic.org/bishopsappeal2023), NIJFON offers high-quality free immigration services to clients in the cities of Chicago, Rockford, Buffalo Grove, Aurora, and Crystal Lake, Illinois. Hager was one of NIJFON’s first Syrian clients, so she has a long personal history with the organization. The Bishop’s Appeal allows NIJFON to continue supporting clients throughout years of immigration issues, such as in Hager’s case. Gifts to the Bishop’s Appeal directly help migrants like Hager. The fund continues to accept donations until Dec. 31.



Your giving to Mission Links supports NIJFON.



Two District Superintendents installed



Dr. Audrea Nanabray’s mother places the stole on her daughter during the service.

On Oct. 8, laity and clergy celebrated the installation of Lake South District Superintendent Dr. Audrea Nanabray at Faith United Methodist Church in Orland Park.

The presentation of the signs of District Superintendency reminded all present of the roles of the position and how they connect us all. The items were presented by children from around the district, some speaking in their native languages. Many members of Rev. Nanabray’s extended family attended and participated in the service. The offering of over \$1,200 will benefit the Repair the Harm campaign, which assists those who had suffered abuse while in a Boy Scout program.

Read more and see photos at umcnic.org/news/dr-nanabray-installed



Your giving to NIC Apportionments supports the District Superintendents and district programs.



Rev. Dr. Hwa-Young Chong receiving a blessing by cabinet members and all those present.

On Sept. 24, laity and clergy gathered at Grace United Methodist Church in Rockford to joyfully celebrate the installation of Rev. Dr. Hwa-Young Chong, the new Prairie North District Superintendent.

The moving service incorporated many voices from around the district and Rev. Chong’s Korean heritage. Rev. Jeremiah Lee opened the service by ringing a ching, a gong-like Korean instrument. The psalm of praise was accompanied by the singing of “O So So (Come Prince of Peace).” The NIC Korean-American pastors beautifully sang the anthem “He Leadeth Me” in Korean. Worshipers contributed \$1,600 to procure eyeglasses for students at the Methodist Middle School in Tanzania.

Read more and see photos at umcnic.org/news/rev-dr-hwa-young-chong-installed



Appreciating—and preventing—pastoral burnout

by Rev. Matthew Smith, Warren and Red Oak UMC

In case you missed it: last month was Pastor Appreciation Month. In many Northern

Illinois Conference congregations, Staff-Parish Relations Committee chairs said words of appreciation, passed out gift certificates, and/or offered a hearty handshake in celebration of their pastor(s) efforts. In other congregations, no such appreciation was offered. This was not necessarily due to pastoral issues, but simply because church members were unaware.

In either case, it is important for congregations to know that it is highly probable that their pastor(s) had considered quitting ministry at some point over the past couple of years ... and may even have been considering it while smiling and accepting their gift certificate.

A Barna survey released in March 2022 showed that 42 percent of pastors had contemplated leaving ministry, up 9 percent from a similar survey in January 2021. It is not impossible that the number has increased in the past year and a half. This is not because pastors are questioning their call or their faith. They are simply getting burned out.

Recently, a group of NIC pastors convened in an impromptu online meeting to talk about clergy burnout. Rev. Lindsey Joyce, a pastor in the Lake North District who convened the group, said, “Clergy burnout has been a topic of conversation for years in the church. When my colleagues and I saw clergy having strong reactions to an article on social media about clergy burnout we thought, ‘why don’t we

get together to talk about this and figure out what it means for the future of the church?”

The hour-long conversation was not a session of bemoaning our congregations. Instead, it focused on cultural and systemic issues affecting our ministry, highlighting pressure point areas such as navigating declining finances, maintaining oversized buildings, and struggling against a culture (internal and external) that seems to have less appreciation for and/or increased expectations of the role of pastor.

To a person, everyone in that meeting has a deep love for our Triune God, feels a deep sense of call to Christian ministry, has a deep feeling of love toward their congregations, and are doing fruitful ministry. However, upon completing a “burnout inventory,” everyone in the conversation found they were also approaching or surpassing the burnout threshold. It could be logically assumed that similar levels would be present in the remainder of NIC clergy who were not present at the meeting.

How can you help? First, check in with your pastor(s) regularly and ask them how they are doing. When they deflect with “I’m fine,” ask again, “No, really. How are you doing?” Second, ask how you can help—and mean it.

For in truth, while gift certificates and pats on the back are appreciated, what every pastor dreams about is working side-by-side, in partnership, with our congregations to glorify God in our mission to love and serve God’s people and make disciples for the transformation of the world. If church members see themselves just as responsible for the church’s mission as the pastor is, they are more likely to have a healthy church—and pastor.

Korean United Methodists gather to celebrate their passion and spirituality

by Rev. Thomas E. Kim, an NIC elder and director of Korean and Asian news at United Methodist Communications

Over 300 clergy and lay Korean-American United Methodists met in Northbrook, Ill., for the 2023 special session of the National Association of the Korean American United Methodists, Oct. 2-5. This was the first in-person gathering since 2019 and was filled with praise and worship with sermons, lectures, and discussions.

In his sermon at the opening worship service at First Korean UMC in Wheeling, Wisconsin Conference Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, president of the Korean Ministry Plan, quoted the healing story in Mark 2 and asked, "What if we came to Jesus today with a paralyzed denomination on our shoulders?"

"The future of the church lies in reconciliation, acceptance, friendship, repentance and self-reflection," said Bishop Jung, who also served as bishop of the Northern Illinois Conference from 2004-2012. "The future of the church lies in the envisioning framework of a theological interpretation through unity in diversity through God's creation."

New York Conference Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton, president of the UM Council of Bishops, said in his keynote address that one of his purposes for attending was to express honor and deep respect for the work of the Korean American churches and pastors in the UMC over the years.

He said that he particularly appreciates the unique passion and spirituality of Korean American churches in the UMC and called on them to aggressively offer to the skills, expertise, passion, and emphasis that they have placed on evangelism and spirituality.

Reporting on the current status of Korean American churches and Korean American pastors in the UMC, the Rev. Paul H. Chang, executive director of the Korean Ministry Plan, said there are 280 congregations, including 244 Korean-language congregations and 36 English-language congregations. There are

also some that are not yet officially chartered. Now, 871 Korean American clergy serve the denomination: 270 at Korean congregations, more than 550 at American congregations, 1 bishop, 21 district superintendents, and 30 connectional ministers.

"About 40 congregations are expected to leave, representing 15 to 17 percent out of 280 Korean congregations, and about 60 pastors are expected to leave," Chang said.

In a session for lay participants, Seokjung Yoon, former lay leader of First Korean UMC of Cherry Hill (Greater New Jersey Conference), described how he helped start a new church after his church left the denomination. He and 50 other members who wanted to stay United Methodist formed Unity Church in Christ.

"We chose to stay at The United Methodist Church because of the promise to honor the conservative faith of Korean American churches," he said, and cited a commitment to connectionalism and solidarity.

One of the highlights of the gathering was the testimony of the Rev. Eun C. Cho.

He said that when he came to the U.S. in the 1970s, the love and care he experienced from The United Methodist Church toward the Korean American church and the inclusiveness and openness of denominational leaders made him a "debtor of love," and he could not and would not leave The United Methodist Church — drawing much applause from the attendees.

The association celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Korean First United Methodist Church in Wheeling with a service of bap-



Participants sing during the opening worship service of the first day of the 2023 Special Session of the National Association of the Korean American United Methodists at Korean First United Methodist Church of Wheeling, Ill., on Oct. 2. Pictured, from left, are Bishop Dottie Escobedo-Frank of the California-Pacific Annual Conference, Bishop Hee-Soo Jung of the Wisconsin Annual Conference, Dr. Dana Lyles, the Rev. MiRhang Baek, the Rev. Prumeh Lee and the Rev. Ju-Yeon Julie Jeon.

Photo by the Rev. Thomas E. Kim, UM News.

tismal renewal to remember God's call and reaffirm their faith.

"When you think about it, it's really something special, something to celebrate, something to rejoice that this United Methodist church has been around for a hundred years in the Chicago area," Rev. Young Bong Kim said in his sermon at the service.

"We cannot control our future. But our God holds the future, and we are in His hands," Kim said. "So we have to leave the future to God and find out what we can do today, and that's how we see hope and create hope."

On the final day of the gathering, the Rev. Chang Min Lee, pastor of Los Angeles Korean United Methodist Church, was elected the new president of the association.

In his sermon at the closing worship service, Lee promised to lead the association as a visionary community that comforts the Korean American community, responds to its call, and moves forward together.

Your giving to NIC Apportionments and Global Apportionments support ethnic caucuses and associations.



First Korean celebrates 100 years of ministry

by Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

First Korean United Methodist Church in Wheeling celebrated 100 years of ministry on Oct. 4, and Korean-American United Methodists from around the nation were on hand to celebrate with them.

The celebration fell during the special session of the National Association of the Korean American United Methodists, held Oct. 2-5 in Northbrook. A number of the association members attended the service.

The church's pastors are Rev. Sun Hyung Jo and Rev. Juyeon Jeon.

Bishop Dan Schwerin, speaking at the service, recalled some of the significant moments in the church's founding.

"We are so grateful for your history and the legacy tied to your founding in 1923 by one of the signers of the nonviolent declaration of Korean Independence document during the Japanese occupation in 1919," he said.

"We are blessed by your mission from the beginning: raising funds at the start to support the Korean Independence movement, up to your recent support of the school building to support our missionary in Tanzania, Rev. Christina Kim."

Bishop Schwerin also called on the congregation to help lead the conference in birthing a renewed United Methodist Church.

"I believe a new United Methodist Church wishes to be born among us," the bishop said.



Members and visitors to First Korean United Methodist Church in Wheeling display signs of love at the close of the service celebrating the church's 100th anniversary of ministry.

"In a pastoral letter to Dorothy Furley in 1742, John Wesley wrote, 'I want you to be all love. That is the perfection I believe and teach.' Help us, help our conference, help the kingdom of God, help our connexion [the 18th century spelling] to be 'all love' people."

United Voices for Children recognizes leading NIC advocates

To address continued needs for children and youth, United Voices for Children and its affiliate organizations (Methodist Youth Services, Inc.; Kids Above All; and Rosecrance) hosted “Raising Our Voices Through Resources: A Bridge for the Gap, Part 2” on Sept. 29 in Des Plaines. Congresswoman Delia C. Ramirez (Third District) spoke to the



Congresswoman Delia C. Ramirez (Third District) spoke to the gathering from Washington, D.C.

group via web conference. Children’s Advocates for Change, UVC’s community partner, provided advocacy updates from the State of Illinois and led an open conversation on the needs of children and youth.

UVC also recognized several Northern Illinois advocates for children and youth.

2023 Advocacy Award Winners

Bishop Jesse R. DeWitt Child Advocacy Awards

St. Mark United Methodist Church’s Children’s Defense Fund Freedom School, Chicago, for providing scholars in kindergarten through high school with rich, culturally relevant pedagogy and high-quality books that deepen scholars’ understanding of themselves and what they have in common with others in a multiracial, multicultural democratic society.

Rev. Tura Foster Gillespie for Teaching Cultural Compassion, which maintains a website that highlights books that are sensitive to dignity, diversity, and differences.

Katherine B. Greene Child Worker Award

Dr. Dana Weiner for leading Illinois’s Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative to help families get the mental-health services they need. Dr. Weiner is a senior policy fellow at Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Rev. Margaret Ann Williams Service Awards

Shelley Frizelis, community organizer, Jefferson Park Chicago Precinct 16, for coordinating the Faith Leaders Association in her

precinct and her tireless advocacy for those children and families who are seeking asylum and living in the police station. Frizelis has effectively coordinated the sourcing and delivery of humanitarian aid in response to Chicago’s current homeless migrant crisis.

Tanya Lozano Washington, Lincoln United Methodist Church, for creating (with her sister, Joline Lozano) Healthy Hood Chicago, which serves Black and Brown communities limited by health-care disparities that were amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information, visit unitedvoicesforchildren.org/programs/awards.



Award Winners and UVC members at the event. Front: Mitch Lifson, Children’s Advocates for Change; Melissa Kirk, UVC communications coordinator; Sgt. Maj. Monica Cervantes, Chicago Police Department Precinct 16; Shelley Frizelis, community organizer for Chicago precinct 16, Margaret Ann Williams Service Award recipient; Tanya Lozano Washington, Lincoln UMC, Margaret Ann Williams Service Award recipient; Lillye Hart, UVC board member; Rev. Esther Lee, UVC board member; Vickie Powell Bass, UVC board liaison. Back: Rev. Bill Lenters, Rosecrance; Bishop Dan Schwerin, Northern Illinois Conference; Deaconess Catherine Inserra, Kids Above All; Kim Jones, vice president of programs, Kids Above All; Rev. Tim Biel Jr., UVC board president; Tanya Lozano’s mother

Your Mission Links giving supports United Voices for Children. 

United Methodists, others denounce Middle East violence

by Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

Church leaders are calling for an end to violence in the Middle East that is causing death and injury to Palestinians and Israelis alike.

The United Methodist Council of Bishops are “appalled and dismayed,” according to their statement, distributed on Oct. 9. (See united-methodistbishops.org.)

On Oct. 7, Hamas, a Palestinian militant group, conducted a surprise attack on Israel. Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded, “We are at war and we will win it.”

‘Inhumane attacks’

“We condemn the Hamas militants who have killed and captured civilians, women, and children in Israel,” the bishops say in their statement. “We equally decry the deaths of innocent civilians, women, and children caught in the crossfire of the Israeli retaliation in the Gaza Strip.”

In addition to decrying the “inhumane” Hamas attacks, the bishops find Israel’s declaration of war “deeply saddening.”

They implore United Methodists to pray and donate to relief efforts.

“We call on all United Methodists to renew a deepened commitment to pray for those who have been injured, abducted, or killed, and to deepen our prayers for those who have suddenly lost a loved one. . . . More than that, pray that God’s peace will permeate throughout the land and in the hearts of all those who are initiating this conflict.”

They also urge churches to prepare to collect offerings for United Methodist Committee on Relief, so the agency—can provide

specific resources to assist in providing shelter, food, and other necessities to those who have been left homeless, helpless, and afraid.

Complicated situation

The Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem released a statement calling on Methodists around the world “to continue to pray for peace and for an end to the violence.”

The Liaison Office is a partnership of the World Methodist Council, the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries, and the Methodist Church in Great Britain. Northern Illinois’s Rev. Jane Eesely is its United Methodist staff person.

“The situation is complicated, and we recognize the fear and sense of injustice that are felt, but we call on both sides not to resort to further violence and to engage in negotiation to establish a peaceful solution for all who live in the Holy Land,” the statement says.

Christians around the world speak

The World Council of Churches has also denounced the violence. The ecumenical organization’s general secretary, Rev. Prof. Dr. Jerry Pillay, “appeals urgently for an immediate cessation of this deadly violence, for Hamas to cease their attacks and ask both parties for de-escalation of the situation.

“We are deeply concerned about the imminent risks of spiraling conflict between Israel and Palestinian armed groups, and of the inevitably tragic consequences for the people of the region—Israelis and Palestinians alike—following a period of escalating tensions and violence in the West Bank and Jerusalem.”

The organization has also posted on its website statements from leaders of churches in Jerusalem and Jordan.

From those statements:

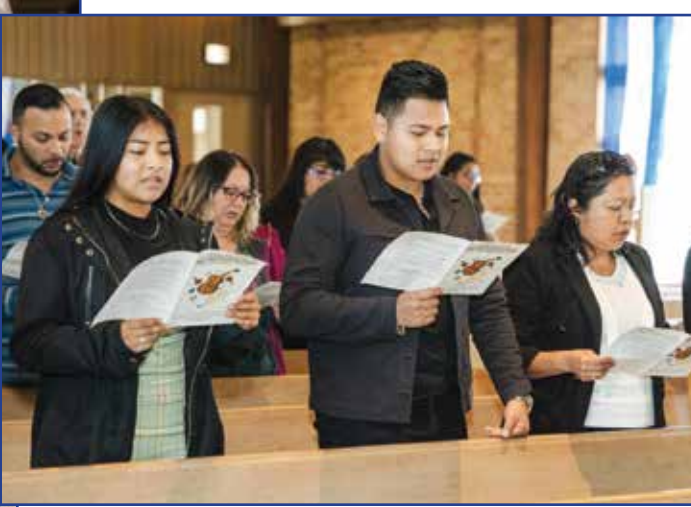
“The continuing bloodshed and declarations of war remind us once again of the urgent need to find a lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestine-Israel conflict in this land, which is called to be a land of justice, peace, and reconciliation among peoples.”—Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

“We implore political leaders and authorities to engage in sincere dialogue, seeking lasting solutions that promote justice, peace, and reconciliation for the people of this land, who have endured the burdens of conflict for far too long.”—Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem

“As a church, we continue to advocate for non-violence; but we also believe it is crucial to understand the circumstances from which violence emerges. In this case, it is a symptom of a people deeply wounded by extended and systematic violence and oppression. The Holy Land has also seen unprecedented attacks on religious sites in recent years, which makes our situation even more personal and emotional.”—The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land



Hispanic/Latinx ministry celebration



On Oct. 7, the Northern Illinois Conference celebrated Hispanic/Latinx ministries at Movement in the City UMC in Franklin Park. The day's festivities included worship and fellowship. Rev. Dr. Lydia Muñoz, executive director of the National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministries, provided training. See more photos and watch a video recap at umcnic.org/calendar/hispaniclatinx-celebration-1.

Your giving to NIC Apportionments supports the Hispanic Ministry Team.



Maple Park UMC celebrates 60th anniversary



Maple Park UMC observed 60 years of ministry in Chicago during a number of activities in September. They held an anniversary banquet and fashion show, Friendship Sunday, and a Pamper Me Day. The events culminated on Anniversary Sunday, Sept. 24, under the theme "How We Got Over: Standing Tall, Standing Strong." That day they baptized three youth and welcomed two new, indicating that they have a strong future ahead!

Film Series wraps up with focus on Latinx culture



by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist
The Northern Illinois Conference's 2023 Anti-Racism Film Series seeks to "go deeper" in valuing and appreciating the rich history, culture, and experiences of the ethnic diversity within our conference. It uses films and documentaries, paired with presentations, to start discussions. Viewers gather for a meal, presentation, and small group discussion. (Others can watch the presentation and discussion via web conferencing.)

This month, on Nov. 30, the final quarter of this year's series will highlight Latinx culture. Tim Alexander, chairman of the film series, says that the films shown so far this year have been well received. "The positive responses we have seen as a result of our evaluations show that folks have learned new details that will assist them in going deeper in their understanding of the roots of racism in America."

The first quarter event was hosted at the Illinois Holocaust Museum with a docent-led tour of The Negro Motorist Green Book exhibit. YoFresh Café provided participants with a sampling of desserts historically associated with African American culture. Dr. Richard Guzman spoke about the representation of Blacks in film as well as the contrast between

The Negro Motorist Green Book exhibit and the 2019 movie *Green Book*. Panelists then offered their thoughts on Black representation in film and the exhibit.

Asian history and culture were the focus of the second quarter event. Before the gathering, participants were urged to watch the documentary *Being Asian in America*, by Pew Research Center. Dr. Wonhee Anne Joh of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary gave a presentation, and NIC members participated in a panel discussion about their experiences of being Asian in America. Various Asian cultures were represented in the meal, which included Korean, Indian, and Pilipino dishes.

The Long Shadow documentary provided the basis for the discussion on privilege, power, and race for the third-quarter event. The director of the film, Frances Causey, talked about her experience making the film, and then participants divided into small groups for discussion. Most host sites provided soul food.

"The Anti-Racism Film Series gave guests a platform for learning and discussing hard issues," says Susan Wakefield Del Porto from Roselle UMC. "The sharing of ideas and insights was the capstone of the events. Participants engaged in meaningful and transformative conversations about issues that people are often uncomfortable discussing."

The fourth quarter presentation and discussion, scheduled for Nov. 30, will focus on Latinx cultures. The meals will feature the food

of different Latin American nations. Rudolph Reyes II, instructor of Christian ethics and Latinx studies at GETS, will lead the presentation. Participants are encouraged to watch in advance the film *The Bronze Screen: 100 Years of Latino Image*. This 2002 documentary was directed and produced by Susan Racho and Alberto Dominguez.

"Using *The Bronze Screen*, we will explore an aspect of racism that is often overlooked, though it has often been embedded in the films we have watched since childhood," Alexander says. "The films mentioned don't appear racist when watched for pure entertainment but the backstories of how they were made and the subtle racism that took place between the stars and the producers/directors are informative."

As with the other presentations, viewers can participate online, after the meal, at 6:45 p.m.

Learn more about the upcoming event and watch recordings of the previous events at umcnic.org/2023filmseries.

Nov. 30 2023 Film Series Latinx History & Culture

6 p.m.

Multiple locations across the conference & online via Zoom

Cost: \$5

For further details & registration visit umcnic.org/calendar/23-film-series-latinx-history-culture.

Your giving to NIC Apportionments supports the Anti-Racism Task Force and their events.



Leading the Laity

Let's walk a mile in each other's shoes



by Eugene Williams, Conference Co-Lay Leader

I recently had an opportunity to do some sincere reflection and soul searching. I looked at the past and present of who we are in the Northern Illinois Conference and The United Methodist Church as a whole. Then I pondered where we might be a year from now.

I took stock of the violence on the streets of Chicago and across the nation, especially as it pertains to gun violence. I considered the plight of migrants pouring into our sanctuary cities. I see the actions of our political system at the local, state, and federal level. I thought of the unprecedented allegations in the upcoming presidential race and unprecedented actions taken in the House of Representatives. Then I thought of the bloody carnage of terrorism and wars that intentionally and specifically targeted innocent civilians. As children of God, what are we doing and where are we trying to get to?

As I reflected, it took me back to 2007 and the song "Walk a Mile in My Shoes," written by Joe South (© 1969) and recorded by Grammy-nominated R&B singer Otis Clay, who was good friend of mine. Otis (may he rest in peace) performed at my church (Chicago South Shore) for our Men's Day Musical in 2007. One of the songs he performed was "Walk A Mile in My Shoes." When singing



this song, he reminded us of the more than 1,800 lives lost as Hurricane Katrina ravaged Louisiana and the Gulf Coast.

But that song speaks to so much more. Sixteen years later, I believe it offers us, the siblings of the NIC, an opportunity to do a reset as we consider the mission that God has placed before us. So, I ask

that we sincerely reflect upon the words of this song as we discern the kin-dom building work ahead of us. Please allow some of the words from this song to marinate in your soul.

In part, they are as follows:

If I could be you and you could be me for just one hour;
If we could find a way to get into each other's mind.

If you could see you through my eyes, instead of your ego, you would be surprised to see that you've been blind.

Walk a mile in my shoes, walk a mile in my shoes.
Before you abuse, criticize, and accuse, just walk a mile in my shoes.

And we spend our days throwing stones at one another, just because I don't think or wear my hair the same as you do.
Though I may be common people, I'm still your brother and when you strike out and try to hurt me, it's hurting you!

Then there are people in Mississippi, and Louisiana and Alabama, and brothers and sisters, but by the grace of God there go you and I.

If I had the wings of a little angel, don't you know I would climb to the top of a mountain to look down, and don't you know it would be enough to make you cry.

My siblings, let us take stock of all that is going on around us and what the Lord asks of us. As the book of James says, "Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger" (1:19); or as Stephen Covey has said, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood" (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, 2013).

Before we abuse, criticize, or accuse, let's try to walk a mile in each other's shoes! I pray that the Lord will watch between me and thee whenever we are absent one from another, in Jesus's name. Amen!

Your giving to NIC Apportionments support the Board of Laity.



See the full calendar at umcnic.org/calendar

December

16 Financiando las visiones dadas por Dios/Funding God's Given Visions

9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Franklin Park UMC,
9857 Schiller Blvd.
Franklin Park
Cost: \$20

*Almuerzo de tacos incluido/
Taco lunch included*

Evento de mayordomía hispana con la Oficina de Desarrollo y Reurbanización Congregacional/Hispanic stewardship event with the Office of Congregational Development and Redevelopment.

For further details visit umcnic.org/calendar/financiar-las-visiones-de-dios-funding-gods-visions



January



Saturday, January 20

Lake North
Lake South
Prairie South

Saturday, January 27

Prairie Central
Prairie North

SAVE THE DATE More locations, worship and classes offered. Visit umcnic.org/calendar for more information.



NOVEMBER
**NATIONAL
NATIVE
AMERICAN
HERITAGE MONTH**

[UMC.ORG/EN/WHO-WE-ARE/
OUR-PEOPLE/NATIVE-PEOPLE](http://UMC.ORG/EN/WHO-WE-ARE/OUR-PEOPLE/NATIVE-PEOPLE)

SPECIAL SUNDAY UNITED METHODIST STUDENT DAY

"Wisdom is a shelter, as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves those who have it."
— ECCLESIASTES 7:12 (NIV)

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November 26, 2023
ResourceUMC.org/UMSD



Leading with Presence in uncertain times

by Rev. Arlene Christopherson,
Assistant to the Bishop

This is the season of assessment and planning for most organizations. As we near the end of the year, our congregations are gathering for their church conference. They will reflect on the past and plan their future.

This cycle of reflection (evaluation) and planning is important for any organization. This work happens at many levels in an annual conference: in congregations' committees; at the Annual Conference Shepherding Team table, where chairs and leaders of the conference gather to coordinate and collaborate; in Cabinet meetings, and on the floor of the annual conference session.

The Appointive Cabinet is made up of the bishop, the five district superintendents, the director of connectional ministries, director of congregational development, and assistant to the bishop. The appointive cabinet meets at least twice monthly (more often during the first half of the year, when appointment work is most demanding). The conference also has a Full Cabinet, made up of the members mentioned above as well as the treasurer, director of communications, president of the Midwest

Methodist Foundation, and our conference co-lay leaders.

This Full Cabinet (sometimes referred to as the Extended Cabinet) meets quarterly. This fall marked a milestone in the gathering of the Full Cabinet. While there has been provision for a lay leader to be part of this work for several quadrennium, this fall was the first time a conference co-lay leader took part in a Full Cabinet meeting. This begins a new era of collaboration and connection.

To strengthen our vision and build transparency in our system, the Full Cabinet focuses on topics that intersect with all the areas of the life of the conference. In this setting, we build on one another's vantage points, bring each other on board in the work and life of our areas, and build relationships.

Bishop Schwerin, in his column in this issue (p. 2), introduces us to Rev. Susan Beaumont's work on liminal time. In her book *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going*, Rev. Beaumont guides us into an approach to leadership through what she calls Presence. Beaumont defines this as "God consciousness," the ability to lead with an open mind, open heart, and open will. Through presence we limit

the internal voices of judgment, cynicism, and fear. When we are present with one another, listen to each other, and plan together, we offer a better space from which to navigate the unknown.



This work is so informative for our life together that the Full Cabinet is reading Beaumont's book and using it as the foundation for our worship this fall. At our October meeting, we ended our reflections with these words from Beaumont (p. 46):

The good news is that the grace of God covers it all. We simply need to keep putting one foot in front of the other, engaging the journey that emerges. In the end, Presence is a gift of God. Our hope is that we are self-aware enough to step aside and receive the gift when it is given. And then, in the words of the great Christian theologian and mystic Julian of Norwich, "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

Your giving to NIC Apportionments support the work of the Cabinet.



NIC award-winning alums of United Methodist schools



Rev. Dr. Irene Taylor

by Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

Rev. Dr. Irene Taylor and **Nadia Kanhai** from the Northern Illinois Conference have been recognized as outstanding alumnae at two United Methodist higher education institutions this year.

Seven NIC people are among the Faithful 50 who will be recognized by Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary's Center for the Church and the Black Experience.

Rev. Dr. Taylor is one of GETS's 2023 Distinguished Alums. She is a retired clergy member of the NIC.

"The life and work of Rev. Dr. Taylor are

indeed characterized by faithfulness," the seminary notes. "Through her multiple appointments as an Elder of The United Methodist Church and her involvement with diverse types of ministries, Rev. Dr. Taylor has cultivated a holistic ministry of spiritual formation for the empowerment and transformation of God's people."

"My heart is filled with joy, and my faith is renewed in the reality that God sees us and rewards faithfulness," Rev. Dr. Taylor told GETS, as she reflected on the legacy of her seminary education after more than thirty years in ministry.

Nadia Kanhai has been added to North Central College's Wall of Witness.

Ms. Kanhai graduated from North Central College with a bachelor's degree in English and religious studies. Her service through the church and community is exemplary. She is an active lay member of Grace United Methodist Church in Naperville. Her leadership in the NIC includes chairing Northern Illinois Conference's Anti-Racism Task Force and co-chairing the Conference Commission on Religion and

Race. She also serves on the board of Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors, a United Methodist-affiliated nonprofit that provides free or affordable, quality legal services to immigrants. For the community, she volunteers with the League of Women Voters, United Women in Faith, the City of Aurora Indian American Community Outreach Advisory Board, and West Suburban Peace Coalition. She works as a senior proposal writer for ODP Business Solutions.

These seven NIC members have been named to GETS's of the Faithful 50, who will be recognized by Garrett-Evangelical's Center for the Church and the Black Experience on Nov. 9: **Revs. P. Devon Brown, Megan Tobola, Harlene Harden, Annie Lockhart-Gilroy, Dennis Oglesby Jr., and Pamela Pirtle;** and **Ms. Tina Shelton.** The 50 exemplify faithfulness, commitment, and perseverance in ministry through their leadership in academic, nonprofit, and congregational settings.

The Northern Illinois Conference proudly applauds these admirable Christian leaders.



Nadia Kanhai

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