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In This Issue:



2 How to invite the bishop



3 Health insurance rates set



4 Indigenous Peoples celebrated



6 Child advocates honored

DO NOT DELAY. DATED MATERIAL

Milestone anniversaries mark decades of faithful ministry

Northern Illinois Conference churches have been celebrating significant anniversaries this year and are looking ahead to continuing to serve God and neighbor in their communities.



United Methodist Church of Geneva, 185 years:

Members dedicated the last weekend of Sep-

tember to observing this anniversary. On Sept. 27, members and friends visited exhibits featuring videos about the development of the church and its congregation. Following this opportunity was a service attended by many of the church's previous pastors—including Revs. Rich Darr, Steve Good, Esther Lee, Jenny Weber, and Bill Obaliland—and District Super-

intendent Wendy Hardin Hermann. The mayor of Geneva sent a proclamation saluting the occasion.

A Saturday block party drew many neighbors to the celebration. Food trucks, games, a bounce house, crafts, scavenger hunts, and a professional face painter added to the fun. Inside the church, guests could watch a bell-ringing and visit the exhibits and the church's former building from the middle of the previous century.

The celebration culminated in a Sunday morning worship service that included Bish-



Youth at Geneva UMC pose with props during their block party.

op Dan Schwerin and a special piece of music arranged by Scott Stevenson, the church's director of music, and sung by the chancel choir while accompanied by the handbell choir. After worship, all present joined in a group photo. —Kimberley Larsen, communications assistant

Hurricane relief support is still needed

Hurricanes Helene and Milton left a trail of devastation across much of the southeastern U.S. this fall. There are still people whose homes are uninhabitable and relief workers continue to need supplies.

Please help by donating to United Methodist Committee on Relief and the NIC Disaster Relief Fund. You may give through your church. We recommend one of these funds:

- **Northern Illinois Disaster Relief Fund.**

This fund is used to support the work of Northern Illinois Conference's trained disaster response team, which will travel to the area when invited.

- **UMCOR U.S. Disaster Response Fund.**

One hundred percent of your donation directly supports recovery work for U.S. disasters, including the recent hurricanes. UMCOR is highly respected by other disaster response organizations for the quality and commitment of its work. It continues to assist with recovery for many months, even after other organizations have left the area.

Make your donation to your church and note the fund it is supporting.

Midwest Mission continues to collect and ship supplies. To learn what they need right now, visit midwestmission.org/helene.

The NIC Disaster Response Team will announce volunteer opportunities when they arise. If you have questions, contact Colin Monk, NIC disaster response coordinator, at monks5@comcast.net.



Volunteers in St. Petersburg, Fla. pray during hurricane cleanup. Photo by Mike DuBose, UM News.

Your giving to Mission Links supports UMCOR.



see *Anniversaries*, p. 8



From Your Bishop:

Reflections from a circuit rider

“What kind of day are you going to have?” I would ask my kids when dropping them off at school in the morning.

After an eye roll, they would say in a monotone, “A great day.”

“What are you going to use?” They grew tired of the question in kindergarten and loathed it more with each passing year.

“Imagination!” Either they would answer under duress, or I would say it for them.

Imagination moves us emotionally and spiritually; it matures us and creates our bonds.

We belong to the moral imagination of Jesus, who proclaimed a kingdom of God, a way of Love, a governance of love and justice, a prodigal-loving, latecomer-paying, and non-violent change agent of salt, light, and leaven.

The Northern Illinois Conference, according to its vision statement, is “making and supporting vital Christians and vital congregations that engage with their communities and the world for peace, justice, and mercy.” This helps us imagine that relationships of mutual benefit are at the heart of the way of Jesus. The restorative principle of *ubuntu* also affirms that we exist for interdependent good. *Ubuntu* is an animating principle that affirms that my well-being is your well-being and I need your healing for my well-being—and my harm undermines the well-being of all.

The concept of intersectionality points to the ways that categories such as race, class, and gender, as they apply to an individual or group, can create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or dis-

advantage. The timeless message of scripture is that we belong to a cosmic body of Christ.

While I was starting to serve as an assistant to Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, I heard the stories of how church boarding schools abused native peoples in Canada. That led me to wonder about the harm done by boarding schools in Wisconsin.

When I was the superintendent in Milwaukee, I met someone with firsthand experience of that abuse. The district had a Native American ministry at 11th and Maple. In an effort to help appoint a clergy leader there, I entered the building early for a meeting. There I got acquainted with someone who became my rabbi.

He taught me the dynamics and realities of those city-dwelling persons—most of whom were from Oneida and came to the city to make a living in the 1950s—and of their kids and grandkids. He described his boarding-school years, including being whipped for using his language, separation from his family, and the long-standing grief for all he lost. He made clear that these experiences impacted him each day.

When I see his face in my mind’s eye I am reminded how the healing of harm is tied up with our mutual well-being and how honest reckoning and even economic questions are unresolved with our reckoning of racism in this country. All of it is tied up with our flour-



ishing, and release from harm for a newness of life that demonstrates our baptism.

I leave you with a *sijo* from my collection *lightly*, published by Red Moon Press, and ask you to pray and consider your own *ubuntu* steps:

Honestly

How other trees gossip
about the rain comes to nothing.
Trees made honest by the breeze
have less malice to confess.
Be here lightly, even kindly.
There is mud, too, in your nest.

Be here, kindly. Thank you, all of you,
for your ministry.

Your giving to General Church
apportionments support the Episcopal Office.



How to request a greeting from Bishop Schwerin

Bishop Dan Schwerin celebrates the accomplishments of your church and organization. Now that he is overseeing two conferences, he regrets that time constraints limit him from celebrating many of these special occasions in person, as much as he would like to do so.

However, he would be pleased to address your church or organization via prerecorded video or letter.

Here’s how to request his greeting.

1. First, plan ahead!
2. Make your request in writing (via email) to Marva Andrews (mandrews@umcnic.org). She will send you a form asking for specific information that will help the bishop create the best greeting for your occasion. Please return that information immediately.
3. You must submit your request AT LEAST three months ahead of the event. As early as this may seem, balancing many demands and the time it takes to shoot and edit a video require this much advance notice.
4. If you would like the bishop to preach, contact Marva no later than SIX months ahead of the event.

Join the cabinet in keeping a Friday morning Sabbath

Wespath last year released study findings indicating that over the past decade, the number of clergy reporting “very good” or “excellent” health has steadily declined. (Visit wespath.org and search for “2023 Clergy Well-Being Survey.”) It seems that clergy are among the poorest practitioners of self-care.

In an effort to model a better way forward, Bishop Dan Schwerin and his cabinets have agreed to embody better self-care. In the coming months they will share more about this, but now they are starting with small steps.

Therefore, the cabinet has agreed that they will devote Friday mornings (until noon) to reflection and prayer,

focusing on a psalm chosen by the bishop. They will refrain from using electronic devices. Barring an emergency, they will not respond to phone calls, emails, or text messages from Thursday evenings until Friday noon.

They invite Northern Illinois United Methodists to join them in their weekly Sabbath media silence during this time. During the week, consider following the bishop on Facebook (facebook.com/DanSchwerinWI) to read a psalm and brief prayer focus. If you aren’t able to join the cabinet’s sabbath, please pray for them as they try to model a better way forward in self care.



The Reporter

Northern Illinois Conference
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

umcnic.org

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Sign up for the weekly NIC eNews, Appointment Announcements and Sympathy notices. Visit umcnic.org and scroll down and click on “Sign up for our Newsletter” to enter your name and email.

Submissions

Deadlines for submissions are Feb. 5, April 5, June 5, Aug. 5, Oct. 5, and Dec. 5. Include your name, address, email, phone number and name of local church. Space is limited. Electronic submissions are preferred with high-resolution attached jpegs. Submissions will be edited at the discretion of the communications staff.

Job Openings

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

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports this publication.





Health insurance rates and default plan set for 2025

by Rev. Cheryl Weaver, NIC Conference Benefits Officer

A new “default” plan and clergy flat rate (the portion of the premium paid by each church) are part of NIC clergy medical insurance for 2025.

Last summer, the Northern Illinois Conference Board of Pensions set the 2025 clergy flat rate to \$1,850. Churches will contribute this amount toward the insurance premium for each of their appointed full-time clergy (and partner or family).

The CBP determined the amount by estimating the cost of insuring all the full-time clergy—who are all members of the annual conference and not congregations—and dividing it by the number of clergy participants. In this way, all the churches together share the costs of insuring clergy and their families; a congregation does not pay for “its own” clergy.

The board also chose a default medical plan for participating clergy and their families. This plan requires no premium contribution by the clergy person (and partner or family). For 2025, the default plan is H2500. Unlike the 2024 plan—H5000—the deductible is half of what it was in 2024. (For a participant, this reduces the deductible from \$5,000 to \$2,500. For a participant and a partner or family, it reduces the deductible from \$10,000 to \$5,000.) Participants can choose a health savings plan to which the plan contributes \$250 for one participant and \$500 for a participant and partner or family.

Clergy participants may choose a different plan; however, they would have to pay a “personal portion,” the difference in cost. A church could cover this portion or could deduct it from the pastor’s paycheck.

Opportunities to learn about the insurance plans began in September and continue through the open enrollment period, Oct. 30–Nov. 14. Participating clergy MUST choose a medical plan; one will NOT be automatically assigned.

The CBP understands that the increased clergy flat rate will be challenging for local churches. The board’s work requires it to balance the cost of benefits and providing health care to clergy. Because the conference does not have reserves to cover rate increases, congregations must pay them. Wespeth, the United Methodist agency that administers the health plan Health-Flex, determines these rates. Past years’ claims and other factors inform the rate amount.

It’s important that all clergy (and lay members) are active in maintaining their health. Very helpful toward this goal are Wespeth resources such as the Blueprint for Wellness, Virgin Pulse, and full coverage of preventive care visits. Mental health is also so important; Wespeth offers resources to help manage stress, among other mental-health matters.

Plan participants can use the online app ALEX to help them compare costs and determine the level of insurance that would best suit them. Visit myalex.com/healthflex/2025/northernillinois#intro and use your Wespeth log-in information.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the benefit programs.



Superintendents Hardin Hermann and Melad installed



by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

Northern Illinois Conference warmly welcomed its two newest new district superintendents this fall. At their installation services on Sept. 14 and 15, Revs. Wendy Hardin Hermann (Prairie Central District) and Victor Melad Jr. (Lake North District) spoke of what would guide their leadership in their roles.

Superintendent Hardin Hermann, who is now leading the Prairie Central District, told those gathered for her service at Barrington United Methodist Church on Sept. 14 that



getting to know the people of the district was a top priority for her.

She referred to John 10:14, where in Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. I know

my own, and my own know me.” This is the model of leadership she wishes to follow.

She urged churches in the district to ask themselves, If our church left the community, what would be missing from that community? Would anyone notice the absence of our church? These questions should lead churches to ask where God is calling them.

Superintendent Melad related to those attending his service at First United Methodist

Church in Evanston on Sept. 15 about the path that unpredictably led him to this ministry.

In his native Philippines, the oldest child is expected to support the family once the parents are no longer able to do so. Therefore, this child usually pursues a financially comfortable career. He studied engineering.



But before he finished all the required courses, he said, “I heard God’s call to ministry.”

Despite his mother’s initial concerns, he followed God’s call.

“Sufficient grace will be our theme,” he told those at the installation, alluding to 2 Cor. 12:9: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

The many well-wishers at these services indicated that they are ready to work alongside the superintendents to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Read more at: umcnic.org/news/superintendents-wendy-hardin-hermann-and-victor-melad-installed.

A ‘bridge-builder,’ Rev. Arlene Christopherson’s ministry touched many

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

Northern Illinois United Methodists gathered at First United Methodist Church in Downers Grove on Sept. 8 to thank Rev. Arlene Christopherson for her over 30 years of ministry in lay and clergy roles.

Arlene, who most recently served as the assistant to the bishop, began ministry in the UMC—at this congregation, in fact—soon after she graduated from college. The church hired her to oversee their confirmation program, which at the time included almost 100 students.

Tom Roose, who has been a member at Downers Grove since those days, recalls her ministry with appreciation. He noted that she included in the confirmation lessons trips to Rockford Urban Ministries and other missions sites.

“She was a champion for justice,” he said.

Having grown up in the Reformed Church, which did not ordain women, Arlene was not thinking about clergy ministry. However, as she continued to work for churches that encouraged her to use her gifts, she heard God’s call and eventually pursued ordination as a United Methodist elder.

Arlene served pastorates at Midlothian UMC, First UMC in Polo, First UMC in Downers Grove, and Sycamore UMC. She said she is grateful for what she learned from those churches and communities.

She was appointed to the Elgin District as superintendent and then to be the assistant to the bishop. Eventually, she served that role and as director of connectional ministries simultaneously. She enjoyed the mix of administration and working with people.

Bishop Dan Schwerin, who worked with

Arlene most recently while she served as assistant to the bishop, commended her pastoral concern for those who requested prayer from conference clergy, her administrative acumen, and her ethics and character.

“The office of the episcopacy is one of integrity,” he said. “Arlene helped to maintain this integrity.”

Rev. Shirley Pulgar-Hughes, who testified to Arlene’s warmth and

hospitality, reminded Arlene that her ministry leaves a legacy.

“Know that your work for the common good, all over the world, will continue long after you leave,” she said.

Arlene expressed her gratitude for those who shared good wishes, gifts, and memories. “The celebration on Sept. 8 was a wonderful reminder of how interconnected we are as God’s people of faith,” she said. “It was a joy to gather and remember.”

Read more at umcnic.org/news/rev-arlene-christophersons-ministry-celebrated.



Photo by David W. Quinn

NIC celebrates Indigenous voices at Starved Rock

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

On Indigenous Peoples' Day (Oct. 14), over 100 members of the Northern Illinois Conference and the surrounding community gathered at Starved Rock State Park to learn about native traditions and outlooks through word, sound, and food.

The NIC Anti-Racism Task Force chose the location because the park lies on the ancestral homelands of the Ho-Chunk, Kickapoo, Myaamia, Kaskaskia, Sauk, Fox, and Potawatomi tribes, among others.

Flute music by Bill Buchholtz, a highly respected Indian flute player, started the event. His music served as a backdrop to the event and enhanced other speakers' stories and talks.

"We pray for new relationships of neighborliness that seek a common good for the land and its people and its relations," stated Bishops Dan Schwerin and David Bard in a prayer they wrote that was read at the event. "Land is tied to our ancestors and our stories. Both must be honored as signs of reconciliation and peace."

The crowd was engaged by the stories of Blackhawk (Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak), a Sauk leader and warrior, as told by Brian "Fox" Ellis. Ellis's storytelling was interwoven with humor, singing, and drumming. Through the stories he also taught the listeners some native words and songs.

Taylor Thorton, a researcher with the University of Toronto, talked about her community-based research in the Nunavut Territory of Canada with the Inuinnait people.



Bill Buchholtz opened with a song while Gerald Savage waited to give a blessing.

Waita, or storytelling in the Ho-Chunk language, was provided by Gerald Savage (Ho-Chunk Ska Ga, as translated into White Winnebago). "I share who I am and why I am," he said of his relating traditional stories and

his family's connection to the land. His grandparents, Ruth Mallory "Stands-On-A-Cloud" Sine and Sampson C. "Chief Walks-With-The-Wind" Sine, homesteaded at Starved Rock in 1935.

Jody Roy, director of the St. Kateri Center in Chicago, described its "bridge of healing" for the natives living in urban areas. The center provides services and cultural healing in the Chicagoland area.

Children's activities included reading passages from the First Nations Version New Testament and walking the grounds of the park. Leaders Andrew Holland and Leah Ostwald gave the youngsters journals and encouraged them to create art while exploring the park. Some created landscapes, rubbed leaves, and even used berries and sand in their creations.

The ARTF helped participants prepare in advance through four expert-led learning sessions on history, kinship with the land, healing the urban erasure, and Indigenous sovereignty. (Watch recordings of these sessions at umcnic.org/IndigenousPeoplesDay2024.)

Participants enjoyed an indigenous meal of fry bread, soups, salad, and fruit. They also perused information and displays from native organizations and the LaSalle County Historical Society.

Your giving to NIC Apportionments supports the work of the Anti-Racism Task Force.



How NICUM property insurance provides the best coverage at the best price

by Jeff Ludwig, Chair of NICUM Insurance Board

Following are some questions and answers about the Northern Illinois Conference's property insurance program. They explain how this program is able to negotiate better rates than a church would be able to obtain on its own.

What is the NICUM Property Insurance Program?

The Northern Illinois Conference established the NICUM Insurance Program for all member churches. In 2016, annual conference session members passed the requirement that NIC churches join the Northern Illinois Conference-wide property and liability by July 1, 2017. A seven-member NICUM Insurance and Risk Management Board, comprising three NICUM trustees and four laypeople, oversees the program. They represent diverse experience in ministry, insurance, and finance. The board designs and administers insurance and risk management programs for the protection of all member churches. This includes purchasing the right insurance coverage at the most cost-efficient rates: it must have affordable coverage limits, be available in the market, and reflect the unique exposures and financial risk we face as a religious and ministry-based organization.

How is the NICUM program different from a church's buying their own policy directly from an insurance company?

The NICUM Insurance Program is a shared-risk program. Each member church shares in both the collective risk of all participating churches and the net premium advantages that generally come with a large, dispersed risk. At its core, it reflects our fundamental belief and commitment to communal responsibility.

Can churches find policies with lower premiums than NICUM's?

Premiums for a church that obtains insurance independently are not sufficient to cover the long-term risk. This is why so many churches of all denominations find that their insurer won't renew their policy or cannot find insurance at another company at any cost. One church acting alone represents a greater level of risk to an insurance company than a group of churches

that consolidate their risk. The rates an individual church pays for independent coverage will almost always be higher than the rates charged to the collection of churches (assuming the same exposures, insurance coverages, and limits).

NICUM enjoys buying power that an individual church does not possess. Insurance companies favor entities that possess a "spread of risk," which the NICUM group has because of the large number and geographic range of our churches.

Why have church insurance premiums increased over the last several years to levels higher than expected?

Several market factors have caused that. First, increasingly fewer insurance companies are willing to provide insurance to religious entities because the losses may exceed premium payments. As the availability of insurance declines, prices rise. Other factors include the trend of higher settlements on litigation, political unrest both domestically and internationally, and an increase in the number of severe weather events.

Because many insurance companies are losing money on their religious clients, fewer are offering coverage. They are more selective in who they will insure and charge more to those clients they keep.

Take comfort in these two facts. The NICUM Insurance Program has been able to deliver better renewal results than the market in general over the last several years. And it's a sustainable and reliable solution for the long term for ALL our churches, not just those that are considered favorable risks. We are less subject to the volatile ups and downs of the insurance market and less likely to be denied insurance when we have claims.

Have more questions? Contact Dwayne Jackson, director of risk management and ministry protection, at djackson@umcnic.org.

Meet Ariel Alonso, NIC's new events coordinator

Northern Illinois Conference members and groups will enjoy the assistance of Ariel Alonso through her work as Northern Illinois Conference's new events coordinator/administrative assistant.

Ariel will work closely with Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer, director of connectional ministries, and Rev. Christian Coon, director of congregational development. She will help with the coordination of all conference and district-level events, including annual conference sessions.

A lifelong United Methodist, Ariel grew up in Indiana and has lived in the Chicago area for almost 25 years. She worked for the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women for several years; more recently, she served on the staff of First United Methodist Church in Evanston.

"I'm excited about the opportunity to expand my knowledge and connect with a diverse range of individuals within the Conference," she said.



Your giving to NIC Apportionments supports the conference staff and event support.



Your giving to NIC Apportionments supports the collaborative work of the NICUM Insurance Board



Who Are We as the Northern Illinois Conference?

Our Mission

The purpose of the annual conference is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by equipping its local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church, all to the glory of God" (United Methodist Book of Discipline, para. 601).

Our Vision

Making and supporting vital Christians in vital congregations that engage with their communities and the world for peace, justice and mercy.

Our Values

- Focus on mission
- Evaluation, accountability, and support for growth
- Experimentation and risk-taking (with room for failure) for the purpose of learning
- Transparency, honesty, and graciousness with each other
- Safe spaces for sharing
- Building relationships
- Provision of resources/services closer to the local church
- Fostering and celebrating diversity (as a conference, in our community, and in our world)

Our Goals

- To grow and reach new disciples of Jesus Christ
- To live out the conviction that racism is incompatible with Christian teachings
- To increase the number of vital congregations

Our Priorities

1. Equip both Leaders and Churches:
 - With strategies to reach new members.
 - To help members grow as disciples.
 - To be more effective in community outreach.
2. Resource struggling churches.
3. Rethink how to be vital churches.
4. Cultivate trust within the conference

Stronger Together



by Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer,
NIC Director of Connectional Ministries
United Methodists are beginning a new quadrennium, the four-year period that follows each General Conference and marks the beginning of a fresh chapter in the life of the denomination and our Northern Illinois Conference.

The start of a new quadrennium presents new opportunities to examine emerging needs within the church and community. The world is constantly changing, and so are people's needs. The church must be willing to step into new opportunities to meet the spiritual and physical needs of our communities. Whether through embracing digital ministry, addressing social justice, creating hospitality ministries, or cultivating spaces for healing, we are called to engage in ways that resonate with today's world.

The next four years will undoubtedly bring new challenges and possibilities. We are called to be innovative and creative, to reach people where they are, and to serve with compassion in a world that desperately needs Christ's love. New beginnings symbolize not just a passage of time but a divinely appointed

New quadrennium, new beginnings, new opportunities

moment to build, grow, and serve in new ways. It is an opportunity to reflect on the past, celebrate the present, and look forward to the future with hope and expectation.

As we enter this season of new beginnings and seek the Spirit's leading, we are reminded of God's ongoing renewal of and through His people.

Leaders of conference committees gathered in October for an orientation. There we took time to refocus on our mission, vision, priorities, values, and goals, and reflected on who we are. Knowing who we are is essential because it shapes our identity and ensures that we act authentically in alignment with our values and calling.

Every new beginning is an invitation to trust in God's plan, step into the unknown with faith, and embrace His call to serve in fresh and dynamic ways. God is always at work, and we are called to step out in faith, take risks for the sake of the Gospel, and trust that God will provide the resources, wisdom, and courage needed for every new venture. Let us do so with a spirit of unity, purpose, and unwavering faith.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports Connectional Ministries.



We give to sustain God's love in the world

by Cate Whitcomb Member First UMC in Evanston

As I look back over my 30 years of membership at First United Methodist Church of Evanston, I see many themes that have guided my husband and me as we decided on the amount of our pledge for the following year. Among these are faithful living, faithful giving; transformative faith—living out Jesus's courageous love; and collaboration, connection, and care. The themes remind us of how our lives will change when we give with heartfelt, prayerful purpose and how the lives of those touched by the work of the church in Jesus's name will also change.

We have given as generously as we could over the decades for several reasons. First, our church is our home and the friends we have there

are our "church family." Just as each family member does the chores and work required to make a family happy and safe, the church family needs to share in supporting the life of the church and the staff who make it all possible.

We have rejoiced when as a congregation we have been able to support our church staff with incomes that will allow them to live with comfort and safety. Being led in worship and joining in and enjoying beautiful music that praises God reminds us of our Christian heritage. Not only does the music ministry need support but the organ and piano must be maintained. Watching the children learn to be members of a choir and to raise their voices in praise is a blessing.

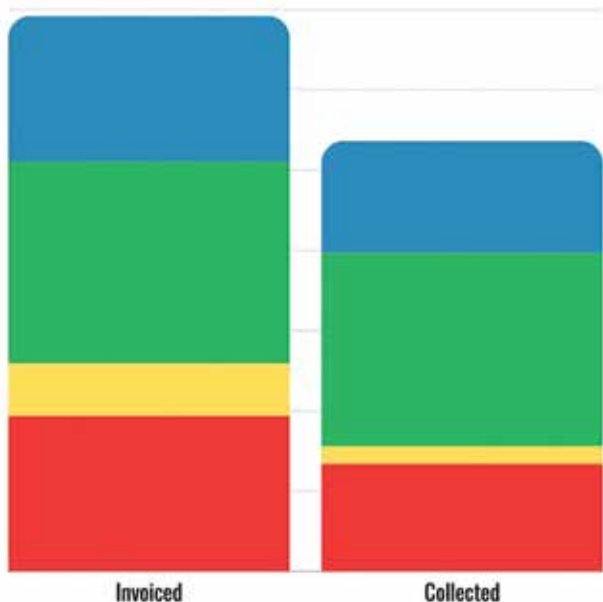


are our "church family." Just as each family member does the chores and work required to make a family happy and safe, the church family needs to share in supporting the life of the church and the staff who make it all possible.

We see mission work—making disciples for Jesus—as the church's primary work. All the various programs and opportunities that our church provides for all ages to serve the community and show and share Jesus's love have enriched our lives again and again. We have traveled all over the U.S. and to Ghana and India to work and serve. Although we have paid the cost of the travel, the staff has done the planning and determined how we will carry out the mission.

We give because it is our joyful privilege to be part of the great family that is our church. We believe in the call to make disciples and to live by example. In our far-from-perfect world, where money is used in so many controversial ways to promote causes that are hurtful to others, we believe that supporting our church is the best way to encourage and sustain goodness and God's love in the world.

Connectional Giving Update



Currently, as of the end of September 2024, our collection rates are as follows:

- NIC Apportionments - 69%
- General Church Apportionments - 33%
- Health and Pension - 96%
- Property Insurance - 77%

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

■ NIC Apportionments ■ General Church Apportionments
■ Health & Pensions ■ Property Insurance

* For invoices and payments through Sept. 30, 2024

NIC award advocates of our communities

United Voices for Children granted its three annual awards in September to people who have modeled outstanding active concern for children and their well-being. Following are this year's honorees.



and federal resources to end gun violence, supporting reproductive justice, hospitable immigration laws, among other concerns. She also serves as executive director Rockford Urban Ministries.

The Bishop Jesse R. DeWitt Child Advocate Award



Rev. Robert Biekman, pastor of Gorham United Methodist Church in Chicago, led church members to help children and youth improve their reading skills and to provide safe passages and havens for children after their school day.



Dr. Nancy Hunter Grim, a Christian educator, mission advocate, and child advocate, led children's ministry at St. John's United Methodist Church in Oak Park, where she developed Christian education programs and served as a resource for those leading camping and youth programs, including the church's annual Christmas youth gathering.

The Katherine B. Greene Child Worker Award



Rev. Violet Johnicker, pastor of Brooke Road United Methodist Church in Rockford, advocates for restorative justice and reducing incarceration, using local

The Rev. Margaret Ann Williams Service Award



Gloria Baker, a member of Gorham United Methodist Church for over 40 years, serves children through her leadership at the church and as a teacher for the Chicago Public Schools. She is dedicated to "keeping up with the times in order to stay in touch with the youth."



Katelyn Bowers, a member of Disciples of Christ United Methodist Church of Mount Morris, assisted HOPE of Ogle County (which aids victims and survivors of domestic abuse) as her sociology project for college. Katelyn solicited donations of items for families living in emergency shelters.

United Voices for Children is a coalition of congregations, agencies, groups, and individuals in the Northern Illinois Conference that speaks and acts on behalf of children, youth, and families in need. Its affiliated organizations are Methodist Youth Services, Inc.; Kids Above All; and Rosecrance. Children's Advocates for Change is partner agency.

Your giving to Mission Links supports UVC.



An easy step to reduce carbon emissions—and save money

by Richard Alton, member, Net Zero Task Force

A group of United Methodist agencies pledged to achieve net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050 across ministries, facilities, operation, and investments. One of the low-hanging fruits that would allow a congregation to join in this proper stewarding God's earth is through lowering its energy use.

This past September, Broadway United Methodist in Chicago, working with Verde Energy Efficiency Experts, replaced 123 of the church's light fixtures with LED (light-emitting diode) lights and installed new motion sensors and exit signs. A Commonwealth Edison incentive program covered the \$13,000 cost of the project. The church expects that the new lighting will save almost \$1,500 year.

Though ComEd did not cover the cost of replacing the sanctuary screw-in lighting, Verde agreed to do this for the church for \$1,329.

"I am very happy with their work and their style of work," said Rev. Alka Lyall, Broadway's pastor. "They replaced front and back entrance lights and the photo sensors for the parking lot—so the parking lot lights will not stay on 24 hours a day anymore."

Verde is a contractor in ComEd's energy efficiency program, which provides funding for LED and other energy efficient upgrades. The opportunity is on a brief hiatus as ComEd prepares for the 2025 program year, but churches can request an assessment now and plan ahead. ComEd customers already pay into the program (see the line item "Energy Efficiency Programs" on your invoices), so why not make use of it?

Switching to LED lighting is a great way to take advantage of the program. Not only do LEDs reduce energy use and cost, thanks to their wattage reduction, but they also create brighter, safer spaces. LED tubes are made of plastic, which means they are unlikely to shatter when dropped. Thanks to their long lifespans, the tubes need not be replaced often, which cuts back on the time folks need to be on ladders to change burned-out tubes and bad ballasts. These bulbs don't buzz or flicker, making rooms more comfortable to spend time in, especially for those who are sensitive to light and sound.

For more information, contact Verde's Sumner Feary (sumner@verde.expert).

KIDS ABOVE ALL 2024 HOLIDAY GIFT DRIVE

DECEMBER 2 - DECEMBER 18

CONTACT: CINSERRA@KIDSABOVEALL.ORG OR (847) 224-2870



Korean clergy kick off Soccer Together

by Rev. Dave Yim

When you live in a new country and work at a stressful vocation, friends and recreation can be lifesavers. The Northern Illinois Conference Korean Caucus found an activity that provides both: Soccer Together.

As the name suggests, we—clergy, spouses, and children—have begun playing soccer together. We believe this benefits our physical and spiritual health and that of our families.

Living in the U.S. as part of a minority group while doing God's ministry in a second language can create significant pressure, stress, and anxiety for pastors, spouses, and their children. Strong support from one another is vital.

Physical and mental well-being is crucial for clergy and our families. Their support allows

us to concentrate fully on our calling. Pastors' kids especially benefit from building relationships with other PKs. They can provide each other with meaningful support because they share the unique experience and challenges of growing up in clergy families.

We first met for recreation on Sept. 22 at Central Galilee Korean United Methodist Church. Due to rain, we gathered in the gym and enjoyed futsal, badminton, and basketball. Seven pastors, four

spouses, and nine children joined us, and we had a wonderful time together. Afterward, we shared a meal at Joongboo Market, enjoying Korean food and fellowship.

We look forward to more opportunities for fellowship, connection, and mutual support. Our hope is that through activities like Soccer Together, we can cultivate a sense of community that nurtures both the physical and spiritual well-being of Korean clergy and their families, strengthening the foundation of our ministries and relationships.



Leading the Laity



What would it be like . . .

by Eugene Williams,
Conference Co-Lay Leader

On behalf of the laity of the Northern Illinois Conference, I greet you in the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ! Briefly, I want to share with you the best thing I've heard recently.

Some of you may already know "The Rabbi's Gift," a story by Father Francis Dorff, O. Praem. I heard Rev. Dr. Norval Brown share it during a devotion he lead. He told the version that M. Scott Peck included in his book *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*.

I encourage you to do a web search and read Peck's and other versions (one location: piumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/1-9-2022-The-Rabbis-Gift.pdf). Ponder them as we move forward in this season of expectation, experimentation, and transformation.

Sisters and brothers, Jesus teaches us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

What would it be like to treat others as if they were the Messiah? What would it be like



to be treated by others as if you were the Messiah? What would it be like to treat yourself as if you were the Messiah? What would the church be like if we treated each other as if we were the Messiah?

Highly respectful cultures treat every person with courtesy and interest, conveying the belief that every member of the community is valued. When treating every person with the utmost respect, we develop a culture in which everyone wants to give their best to others and expects to receive the best from others in return. It is up to us to make it happen.

As we look forward to Thanksgiving and Advent, consider what it would be like to extend radical grace. Whatever the outcome of the election and whatever lies ahead, let not your hearts be troubled, just put your faith and hope in Christ who has never failed us. Amen!



Feb. 8

Laity Convocation



"A Renewed Hope, Episode MMXXV: May God's Grace Be with You"

9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

New Lenox UMC

339 W Haven Ave., New Lenox

For further details as they become available visit umcnic.org/calendar/2025-laity-convocation.



Reimagining Church

by Rev. Christian Coon, NIC Director of
Congregational Development

I experienced the memory of a lifetime on Sept. 29 when my daughter Caroline and I ran the Berlin Marathon. It was her first marathon and my sixth (though my last marathon was in 2011, so in many ways, I felt like I was going through it for the first time myself).

One thing I forgot was just how much of a boost it is to hear people cheering along the route. The course at Berlin is set up well for spectators so Caroline and I saw our own little cheering squad (my wife, son, and niece) four times along the way. But the support of thousands of strangers was also a huge help with people clapping, yelling and holding up signs, the vast majority of which were encouraging...but not all of them. Two stuck out.

The first one wasn't terribly positive and I'm not exactly sure what the motivation of the sign creator was, but about halfway through the race, a person held up a sign that said, "You're Not Even Close to Being Done." It was such a disheartening thing to read and it was the last thing we needed when we, in fact, knew



that we weren't close to being done. But just a couple miles later, another sign-holder came along and it was exactly the inspiration we needed. The sign read: "Your Feet Hurt Because You're Kicking So Much A**!" Maybe it was exhaustion, but I'm not exaggerating when I say I got choked up a bit when I read that sign. It was what we needed to keep going!

Every day, we are surrounded by signs of both despair and hope. It is easy to latch onto the signs that sap and discourage us. In the church, we can't escape the barrage of articles that trumpet the decline of organized religion.

None of us should be oblivious to the numerous challenges we face as the church,

Your church has a cheering section

both in our wider culture and in our own communities. In my role as director of congregational development, I am determined to, on a daily basis, do all I can to convey messages of hope and encouragement. My commitment is to do this by:

- supporting leaders with resources that help their churches and wider communities flourish
- helping churches discern whether there are new ways for them to come together with other UMCs through strategic mergers, adoptions, and cooperative parishes
- inviting other leaders to share ideas on a wide variety of topics through biweekly webinars
- creating strategies to start new churches and ministries
- encouraging leaders to think about new ways to connect with those not interested in traditional church, through Fresh Expressions

These are just a few of the ways I want to support the work of our churches. I am doing

my best to build strong foundations that enable our leaders to create and continue vital ministries in their communities so that they can share the

good, good news of the gospel.

As a life-long runner, I of course hold Hebrews 12:1 as a favorite verse: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us . . ."

Running the race is tiring and hard work! But be assured that I will cheer and hold up signs of encouragement for all of our pastors and lay leaders, no matter where they are along the way.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports Congregational Development.



January

3-5 Joy Camp Winter weekend

For further details visit umcnic.org/calendar/joy-camp-winter-weekend

19 NIC MLK Celebration



3 p.m.

For further details visit umcnic.org/calendar/nic-mlk-celebration-2025



Lake South: Sat., January 18

Prairie Central: Sat., January 18

Prairie North: Sat., January 27

Lake North: Sat., February 1

Prairie South: Sat., March 22

Each district will host a combination of worship and workshop sessions on different topics. For further details and registration visit the calendar at umcnic.org/calendar and click on the individual events.

See the full calendar at umcnic.org/calendar to learn more about our current and upcoming events.



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

My, have the last few months been a whirlwind! I've been working through all of the transitions of moving and learning new software and electronics while also tending to a myriad of personal issues and renewing old friendships.

Change happens; it's a part of life. We encounter twists and turns, but they are all a part of the journey. The journey of faith is filled with excitement and joy, but also challenge and pain. I invite you to journey with me through my new role of assistant to the bishop (or as we United Methodists, who like to abbreviate things, say, the A2B.)

So how did I get here? some may ask. A number of congregations taught me lessons on this journey—some good and some challenging. I am grateful for the countless number of people who gathered week in and week out for prayer, study, and worship. And for those who tried to maintain challenging as well as promising church properties and strategize on how to reach their neighbors or make sure that basic expenses were met. You made the journey what it is: faith-filled.

Many laypeople who have since joined the Church Triumphant taught me that there is so much more to the world called The United Methodist Church—people like Jack Ryder, Rod Osbourne, Jack McCabe, and Liz Okaya-

ma. Others taught me to stand for who I am, including Lillian Lane, Lillie Childs, and Vivian Matthews. And countless others opened doors and encouraged me learn what it meant to be a part of the world-wide UMC.

Thank you to the clergywomen who look over the balconies of heaven and taught me the joy of serving. Rev. Margaret Ann Williams, your words are eternal! You broke the glass ceiling for me. Rev. Tallulah Fisher Williams and Rev. Barbara McEwing, I stand here on your shoulders.

We are just at a new fork in the road of this journey! So, come and join me. The journey is long but we take it together.

Anniversaries *(continued from page 1)*

As they pondered which denomination might best serve the community, they considered starting a union church or inviting the Methodist Episcopal Church to plant a congregation. They believed that the Methodists would bring a better crowd for the dedication, so they asked the Methodists. (With a founder named Wesley Steward, one wonders if there was really a need for discussion.) The building was constructed in five months for \$5,000. Prof. Miner Raymond of Garrett Biblical Institute preached at the Sept. 6, 1874, dedication service.

—Karen Bonel, lay leader

First Korean United Methodist Church, Wheeling, 101 years:

Anticipating this anniversary, which the church thought of as its first birthday after a century of existence, members began to rethink the purpose of the church and direction of its mission and ministry. To observe this day, the church decided to “worship while scattered.”

Rev. Sun Hyung Jo, lead pastor, suggested to the congregation that the church be empty on Sept. 8, the anniversary day. Instead, members attended worship at one of the other 10 Korean United Methodist congregations in the conference. Because some of these churches struggled over the past few years over questions of disaffiliation, FKUMC—as the mother Korean UMC in the Chicago area—wanted to serve them.

When describing this plan in a sermon, Rev. Jo preached that sin entered this world when Adam began to place himself in the position of God. The church needs to be careful and vigilant about letting their long history,

habitual ceremony, or size of the church take center stage, he said, and avoid distancing itself from loving neighbors.

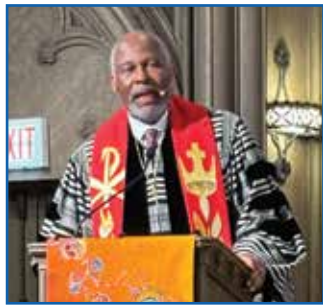
“Worshiping While Scattered Sunday” was one of the ways that church members acted on their faith, claiming their identity that “we are a church that gathers not to be larger but to scatter to share love. We will be a church not to build our own city and tower, but to be unnamed materials and a bridge for establishing God’s kingdom.”

Even though the seats in the sanctuary on their 101st anniversary were empty, church members rejoiced that they took a leap of faith and look forward more bold obedience in years to come.

—Rev. Juyeon Jeon, associate pastor

Chicago Temple Building, 100 years:

Home to First United Methodist Church, the Chicago Temple was dedicated on Sept. 28, 1924, and remains an architectural highlight of the city. At its dedication, it was the tallest building in town. It houses the highest chapel (and possibly the highest parsonage) in the world. Over the past century, the church has reached out to downtown and beyond with God’s love.



Rev. Dr. Myron McCoy preached at the anniversary celebration.

The anniversary celebrations included an architectural symposium, a brassband and organ concert, and a worship service on Sept. 29 that included David

Worthington, global ambassador of Methodist Heritage Sites for the UMC Commission on Archives and History.

First UMC is taking the anniversary as an opportunity to highlight the restoration of

its Opus 414 pipe organ. Time, water leaks, and normal use have taken their toll on the instrument, causing problems like notes that don’t play, notes that play when they shouldn’t, and airflow variations that cause the organ to play out of tune. The restored organ is expected to debut at the Christmas 2026 worship service.

—from Chicago Temple resources

2024 Church Milestone Anniversaries

- **Rochelle UMC:** 180 years
 - **Trinity UMC, Wilmette:** 150 years
 - **First UMC, Elgin (building):** 100 years
 - **First UMC, Elmhurst:** 100 years
 - **Ingalls Park, Joliet:** 100 years
 - **Grace United Protestant, Park Forest:** 70 years
 - **Our Redeemer’s UMC, Schaumburg:** 60 years
 - **Woodridge UMC:** 60 years (in 2023; observation held this year)
 - **Friendship UMC, Bolingbrook:** 50 years
 - **Woori UMC** (formerly Naperville Korean): 50 years
 - **Poplar Grove UMC:** 25 years
- Is your church missing from this list? Is your church observing a milestone anniversary next year? Let us know by sending a message to communications@umcnic.org.



Anniversary celebration at Our Redeemer’s UMC

Clergy Appointments and Retirements

Bishop Dan Schwerin announces the following clergy appointments and retirements for the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church, effective July 1, 2024 (unless otherwise noted):

Cesar Pichardo (District Superintendent Supply) to Chicago: Amor de Dios (1/4 time) (Lake South). He follows Lino Aragon, who served as interim pastor.

Estela Velasquez (District Superintendent Supply) as interim to Joliet: Cristo El Camino NFC. She follows Cesar Pichardo. Effective July 7.

Clifford Oliver (¶ 346.2) to Maywood: Neighborhood (1/2 time). He follows Beverly Dukes, who is appointed to Chicago: Morgan Park and Alsip:

Christ (Lake South District). Effective July 15.

James Fu (Full Elder) to Lombard: First as Associate Pastor (1/4 time), a new position created with the merger of Lombard: First and Villa Park: Calvary, while continuing to serve Elmhurst: Christ UMC. Effective Sept. 1, 2024.

David Poust (Full Elder) to Red Oak (1/4 time), while continuing to serve Walnut (3/4). Effective Oct. 1.



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