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DO NOT DELAY. DATED MATERIAL

First Korean Marks 102 Years By Hosting Refugees

by Rev. Thomas E. Kim,
director of Korean and Asian news at
United Methodist Communications
First Korean United Methodist Church in Wheeling
marked its 102nd anniversary by opening its doors wide to welcome some of the city's newest and most vulnerable neighbors: refugees.

The Sept. 13 event, titled "First Love for God, Best Love for Neighbors: Great Feast for Refugees and Neighbors," gathered about 120 refugees and more than 170 volunteers for a day of worship, music, food, fellowship and practical support.

For the congregation—long a spiritual home and cultural anchor for Korean immigrants—the anniversary was less about looking back and more about living into its calling for the next 100 years.

"From its earliest days, this church has carried both the gospel of Jesus Christ and the heartbeat of a people yearning for freedom," said the Rev. Sunh Hyung Jo, senior



Families visit booths set up outside Chicago First Korean United Methodist Church during its Sept. 13 celebration.

Photo courtesy of First Korean UMC

lot, carrying families from refugee centers across Chicago.

Many had fled violence or persecution in other nations and were now navigating life with limited resources in an unfamiliar city.

Despite rainy skies, volunteers lined the sidewalks to greet

pastor. "That dual identity — faithful discipleship and service to community — remains in our DNA."

On the morning of Sept. 13, three yellow school buses rolled into the church parking

them with cheers and open arms. Inside, the sanctuary filled with music, testimonies, and the mingling of languages.

The program featured:

- Music and testimony by the Moody Theological Seminary Choir, led by Yongmin Kim, who noted that many of the singers were immigrants themselves.
- A violin performance by In-Hong Cha of Wright State University, blending artistry with a personal testimony of faith.
- A gospel magic show by the Rev. Taek Hwan Lee of Christ United Methodist Church in Rockford, Illinois, delighting children and adults alike with messages of joy and hope.
- Performances by the church's Hallelujah Choir, uniting voices across generations.

Practical support also was central. Community organizations—including the HANA Center and KAN-WIN, a women's advocacy and

*continued on page 2,
see Hosting Refugees*

"That dual identity... remains in our DNA."

What It Means to Be a Reconciling Church

by Rev. Dr. Tércio B. Junker,

Senior Pastor, Bolingbrook: Friendship UMC

For those of us here at Friendship United Methodist Church in Bolingbrook, being a reconciling community means making a public promise: that the grace we share at the table and font will be reflected in how we behave in the pews and on the sidewalk.

At Friendship United Methodist Church, this promise is a core part of who we are. We became a Reconciling Congregation in March 2020, and our published welcome affirms that people of every age, race, ethnicity, culture, language, ability, neurodiversity, family structure, economic circumstance, citizenship status, and

every sexual orientation and gender identity are not only included but fully celebrated as vital members of Christ's body.

Being a Reconciling church influences how we function. Each week, visitors can observe small yet meaningful differences, such as in the tone of our prayers, how we welcome newcomers, and the types of ministries we

support over time. Friendship's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) gathering meets regularly to help us grow as beloved community through learning, prayer, and action; our 24/7 Micro Food Pantry operates on the simple ethic "take what you need, leave what you can"; a neighbor-to-neighbor act of care launched in 2020; and the monthly

PFLAG meeting brings together LGBTQ+ individuals with families, friends, and allies for conversation, support, and hope. These actions reflect how we understand discipleship in our neighborhood.

Friendship UMC is also part of the global Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN), a movement that helps United Methodists embrace

continued on page 5, see Reconciling



Members of Friendship protesting racism.

Photo courtesy of Friendship UMC



From Your Bishop:

Pay Attention to Your Neighbor

by Bishop Dan Schwerin

One Saturday evening, I was watching a football game with four-year-old eyes and my brother with his two-year-old eyes. We took a little football into the dining room and in the back and forth, I laid a very fine tackle on him. Blood came bursting from the corner of his eye, so furiously we couldn't even see his eye. My mother phoned our neighbor Mrs. Conrad, and she came running from across the street. My dad wrapped my brother in a towel, flung him over his shoulder, and ran two blocks to the hospital with my mother. I was scared.

That's when Mrs. Conrad filled the room. She was grace dressed in a blue, pearl-buttoned sweater. She cleaned things up, got down on the floor with me, and paid attention to what I was thinking and feeling. Simone Weil said, "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity"—and she never even knew Mrs. Conrad!

I write to challenge you to pay attention to and love your neighbor in three concrete ways.

Pray and give to the Emergency Solidarity Fund

I know many are hurting in the church and the world God so loves. Today I am prayerful and mindful of immigrant communities. In this moment, immigrant communities in particular are suffering. Immigrants may be afraid to go to work, visit food pantries, or take their kids to school. Imagine how hard it will be for those who miss work but must pay the rent, buy medicine, cover winter heating and fuel, and make ends meet.

Please pay attention with your prayer life. I ask you to pray and consider a gift to our Emergency Solidarity Fund. It will help primarily

Hispanic/Latinx people (and other immigrants) who are increasingly vulnerable.

To donate and learn more, use the link on umcnic.org/SolidarityFund.

Churches will request funds for people in their area. Requests will be reviewed by a small group that includes clergy within immigrant contexts, laypeople, and conference staff.

Get out of your bubble

I asked a renowned congregational development expert, What is the top thing United Methodists can do to increase a church's vitality? She said, "Make authentic relationships outside of your church. Care for the people around you. Invite someone to your next cookout; take an interest. Check in on others. Give someone a ride. Divide your hostas and share. Get out of your social media bubble and into relationships, which are always more complex and difficult than being fed by an electronic algorithm."

Reflect on this theologically: how might I be the hands and feet of Jesus in this moment? How might our church pray for what God can do through a new partnership with another church or neighborhood organization?

Finish strong in apportionment giving

Apportionments come from our covenant life together as United Methodists. The cove-

nants of the UMC are based on one value: we share for the good of the whole mission. We share pastors. We share resources. We share our buildings.

This is not a tax or an add-on; apportionments embody the essence of our connection. Your apportionments are helping to support Hispanic clergy as they navigate how to lead their congregations, extend the gospel in hurting communities, and live well.

We are engaging our anti-racism goal with gatherings and partnerships. We are enjoying a laser-like focus on paragraph

601 in The Book of Discipline, which

asserts that the role of the annual conference is to support local church vitality and to make connections that churches cannot make on their own. Those connections include things such as credentialing clergy, starting new churches, and creating clergy cohorts for networking, experiments, and innovative learning.

We are training laypeople. We enjoy gifted United Methodist Men and United Women in Faith networks, United Methodist Committee on Relief, disaster response . . . the list goes on. Please love your neighbor by finishing strong in your apportionments.

My brother didn't lose his eye. Mrs. Conrad made other visits to expand my view of neighborliness. Jesus taught me how to be changed by neighborliness.

Your giving to General Church apportionments support the Episcopal Office.



Hosting Refugees (continued from page 1)

safety network —hosted booths offering information on legal rights, housing and social services. Guest could get free haircuts and children enjoyed interactive games with prize vouchers redeemable for household goods.

Tangible help

Every refugee guest received a \$20 emergency gift card. In one of the day's



Visitors were welcomed into the church with smiles and cheering.

Photo courtesy of First Korean UMC

most poignant moments, the church's scholarship committee, in partnership with the Immigrant Justice Church Network, awarded four refugee children \$400 scholarships each. "This scholarship is more than

financial aid," Rev. Jo said. "It is a sign that we see them, that we walk with them, and that we trust their future matters to God and to us."

The 102nd anniversary observation was more than a milestone. The church that once sheltered exiles and students in the 1920s now welcomed today's refugees with the same faith and hospitality.

"Our freedom is not for our own privilege, but for love," Rev. Jo said.

Read full story at <https://www.umcnic.org/news/first-korean-marks-102-years-by-hosting-refugees>.

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Submissions

Deadlines for submissions 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.



Lead Us Not Into Temptation

by Bishop Dan Schwerin

I feel called to compel us to return more often to the Lord's Prayer these days, and more deeply. Pray it slowly. Consider the tenets of the prayer, the moral vision of Jesus calling us to pray, "bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it's done in heaven" (Matt. 6:10, CEB).

Years ago, I read *The Greatest Prayer*, by John Dominic Crossan. I was reminded that Jesus taught his disciples to pray in a world of Roman occupation, which offers some context for the petition, "lead us not into temptation." Crossan suggests that perhaps it's Jesus's view that we should pray that we do not fall into the temptation of violence as a solution to the problems that vex us. The Lord's Prayer affirms there can be bread enough, forgiveness enough, and God enough to order life between us with compassion, abundance, and neighborliness.

We live in a moment when we are being divided by misinformation and fear. Be reminded there are not blue places or red places; a map is not the people, people are more than words that reduce them to a color. May we pray that Jesus would lead us not into this temptation of supporting division and unnecessary violence.

May we not politicize the police or armed forces by using persons who serve in uniform for political ends. O God, lead us not into the temptation of making enemies of neighbors who serve. Or enemies based on where they live or their community's voting majority in the last election.

In the face of Roman occupation, Jesus chose neither violent revolt nor passive withdrawal, but the way of nonviolent resistance. Let's practice a closer walk with Jesus by means of the Lord's Prayer lifted more often and lived more deeply, especially when events increase the rhetoric of violence.

I would remind us also to prayerfully consider Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s six principles of nonviolence:

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.
2. The beloved community is the framework for the future.
3. Attack forces of evil, not persons doing evil.
4. Accept suffering without retaliation for the sake of the cause to achieve the goal.
5. Avoid internal violence of the spirit as well as external physical violence.
6. The universe is on the side of justice.

Consider how we may allow the Lord's Prayer to increase the power and love we know as Christ in our life together.



Rev. Abby Holcombe breaks bread at a protest.

Your giving to NIC apportionments support our ability to respond and help.



With Warm Faith, Pastors Seek to Counter ICE

by Heather Hahn, UMNNews

Beneath the shadow of the Immigration and Custom Enforcement Broadview Processing Center, about 40 Chicago-area clergy set out Oct. 10 to bring the light of Christ's presence by leading the communion liturgy.

But as the Rev. Abby Holcombe, site pastor of Urban Village Church's west campus, prepared to welcome protesters and others present that day to partake in communion, she turned around and saw ICE with gas masks.

"I thought, 'What do you think I'm going to do here?'" said Rev. Holcombe.

United Methodists have stepped up to protect their neighbors, comfort the distressed, and bear witness to ICE detentions.

They see standing up for immigrants as part of following Jesus's command to love their neighbors and living their baptismal vow to "resist evil, injustice and oppression." These churchgoers — sometimes at personal risk — are bringing the warmth of their faith.

After the communion service, Holcombe and three other clergy approached an Illinois State Police officer standing watch outside to ask if they could bring communion to the people detained in the facility. The officer had to relay that ICE had denied the request.



Illinois State Police Lt. Col. Jason Bradley (left) speaks with the Rev. Hannah Kardon, who was asking to bring communion to detainees in ICE's Broadview Processing Facility.

Photo by Rev. Britt Cox

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security launched what it's calling Operation Midway Blitz on Sept. 8. The campaign already has taken one man's life. On Sept. 12, ICE agents shot and killed Silverio Villegas Gonzalez in a traffic stop in Franklin Park. Video footage disputes ICE's claim that the shooting was

in self-defense. The Movement in the City/Franklin Park United Methodist Church, located just a few blocks away, held a memorial service for Gonzalez.

Throughout the Chicago area, many have taken to carrying whistles to sound warnings whenever ICE agents are nearby. People are bringing groceries to immigrant neighbors,

watching for ICE agents outside houses of worship, and walking children to school so their parents aren't in danger.

The Rev. Lindsey Joyce, who coordinates the Northern Illinois Conference's rapid response, says that the kindness and support she sees in the city's diverse neighborhoods gives her hope.

"Chicago is more united than I've ever witnessed, and people have been organizing around immigration in Chicago for decades," said Rev. Joyce, who also is the pastor of Grace Church Logan Square in Chicago.

Read full story at umcnic.org/news/with-warm-faith-pastors-seek-to-counter-ice.

The Connectionalism of Rapid Response

by Rev. Lindsey Joyce, Chicagoland United Methodist Rapid Response Leader



On Oct. 5, I was alerted that Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents were tossing tear gas canisters out of windows in Logan Square, the northwest Chicago neighborhood where my church is located. They were aiming at rapid response coordinators who were trying to warn neighbors about ICE's presence. In a brazen disregard for public safety, ICE agents tossed the chemical munitions out of their car next to a busy elementary school and a nearby stroller.

Though horrified, my church members were quickly able to mobilize folks to go to the scene to help those injured as well as share information about how to treat chemical munition injuries that we had learned from other rapid responders. We had built our rapid response and trained for this moment.

A month ago, the first time that President Donald Trump threatened to send the National Guard to Chicago, United Methodists began preparing for how we would resist and keep each other safe. In coordination with Bishop Schwerin and Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer, we started by building a Chicagoland United Methodist Rapid Response communication channel where we could share

information, needs, events, and skill-building and training opportunities.

The goals of this group are to live into our connectionalism, which in this instance means if someone come for one United Methodist, you come for us all; to use our denominational structure as a centralized place to build out rapid response capacity in churches; and to set a model for others on how we can use denominational infrastructure to respond to moments like this.

Now we are seeing United Methodists show up, according to their conscience and capacity, all over the area to provide prophetic witness, disrupt the empire, and care for our immigrant neighbors. This is the heart of Wesleyan theology after

all: that we are people so haunted by God's grace in our lives that we cannot help but be grace in our communities. To live and be disciplined in a way where, to paraphrase Rev. Martin Luther King Jr, we are less concerned with what will happen to us if we stand up than what will happen to our neighbor if we don't. It may feel hopeless, but there are so many of us, eyes stinging from tear gas and bodies sore from rubber bullets, standing resolutely on what we know to be true: that immigrants are made in the image of God and our city is not our city without them.



Photo by Rev. Britt Cox

Hope Reigns Eternal



by Eugene Williams,
Conference Co-Lay Leader
On behalf of the laity of
the Northern Illinois Con-
ference, I greet you in the
name of our Risen Lord and
Savior, Jesus the Christ.
We've got a testimony. Yes,

as we look back over
our time as United
Methodists, we can
truly say that we
have been blessed.
Indeed, we have a
testimony. And that
testimony is to the
goodness and the
grace of the Lord
and how he has
brought us through
time and again.

In all of our lives, a
little rain will fall now
and then. But Jesus is
the light of the world
that overcomes all
darkness. After the
storm, the sun will
shine again; the ICE
will melt and the rainbow will appear. Joy
will return. Yes, sisters and brothers, the sun
will always shine again and bring us joy, be-
cause hope reigns eternal! Yes, the storms of
racism, hatred, fear, intimidation, and cruelty
are raging all about us, but it's not like we
haven't seen similar videos throughout our
history. And yet still, hope reigns eternal!

The Bible is replete with examples of the
significance of hope. For example, the story

of Joseph's unjust imprisonment and his
subsequent rise to power in Egypt (Gen.
37-50). And there's the Prodigal Son's return
home after squandering his inheritance
(Luke 15:11-32). And if there was ever hope,
it was clearly evidenced by the thief on
the cross who asked Jesus to remember

him when he comes into
his kingdom. And Jesus
promised the thief that
he would be with him in
paradise (Luke 23:39-43).
But the ultimate and most
definitive act that personi-
fies hope is demonstrated
in God's power over death
and the promise of eternal
life by raising Jesus from
the dead (Luke 24). Hope
reigns eternal!

We will always have
hope. We are the salt of the
Earth and we know that
salt melts ICE. So never let
anyone or anything dimin-
ish your hope, faith and
joy. Siblings, our hope is
built on nothing less than

Jesus's blood and righteousness and that
hope reigns eternal! How dare we question
or doubt the transforming blood of Christ.
The conference Board of Laity is sending you
our prayers and spreading love because hope
reigns eternal. Go with God and be well.



Photo by Rev. Britt Cox

Your giving to NIC apportionments
supports the Board of Laity.



Neighbors and Conference Friends Mourn ICE Victim

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications
About 120 people gathered at First United

Methodist Church in
Franklin Park/Move-
ment in the City on
Sept. 19 to mourn
the death of Silverio
Villegas Gonzalez.
Gonzalez was shot
and killed just a few
blocks from the church by an Immigration and
Naturalization Enforcement agent during a
traffic stop on Sept. 12.

"Silverio's life will not be forgotten," said Rev.
Roberto Moreno.

"The system tells you that you are no good.
But grace tells you that you are ready to go do
the work" of advocating for those oppressed
by the powerful.

To the many supportive United Methodist
clergy and lay in the pews, he admonished,
"Use your privilege to stand firm for those
who cannot stand. Grace is not passive."

Ultimately, he said, "the last word is life and
justice in all nations."

Bishop Dan Schwerin of the Northern Illi-
nois-Wisconsin Area told mourners that Unit-
ed Methodists stand in solidarity with those
who are suffering.

"We claim our solidarity in the one God," he said.
"God calls us to action every day of our lives."

After the music-filled service and an oppor-
tunity for others to speak, the group left the
church in a candlelit walk to Emerson Street
and Grand Avenue, where Villegas Gonzalez
had been killed. A shrine with flowers and
candles, and a sign reading "Silverio was a
dad, too!" marked the location.



'Facing the Future' Revives Clergy in Cross-Cultural/Cross-Racial Appointments



Rejoicing in God's presence and in the joy
of ministry, recentering the soul and calling,
and reviving with strength and clarity for
the journey ahead captured the attention of
more than 180 clergy and ministry leaders
who attended a recent gathering hosted by
the United Methodist General Commission on
Religion and Race.

Facing the Future 2025: Rejoice, Recenter,
Revive, a national gathering for clergy serving
in cross-racial and cross-cultural appoint-
ments, took place Oct. 7-9 in Los Angeles.

Attending were eleven members of North-
ern Illinois Conference, which is blessed to
have one of the highest numbers of clergy
of color and clergy serving in cross-cultural
and cross-racial appointments. Four served
in leadership roles: Felicia Patton, in worship
leadership; Rev. Alka Lyall, an event leader;
Rev. Dr. Tércio Junker, panel participant; and
Rev. Grace Imathiu, speaker at closing worship.

"Events like this are vital opportunities to
build community, nurture relationships, and
share experiences in ministry," said Rev. Fabi-
ola Grandon-Mayer, NIC's director of connec-
tional ministries. "They create sacred spaces
where clergy can find encouragement, wis-

dom, and strength for the journey, reminding
them that they are not alone in the chal-
lenges and joys of serving in cross-cultural/
cross-racial congregations."

Participants shared that the experience was
both deeply spiritu-
al and empowering.
Rev. Hung Su Lim of
the Virginia Annual
Conference said that
"as an ethnic
minority pastor,
that experience
reaffirmed my
identity and calling
... How often do I
get to worship with
a Korean song or
prayer in my current
setting? None. How
many Spanish songs or prayers do we lift up?
None. Isn't it beautiful to do so, even if we may
not fully understand the words? That, to me, is a
glimpse of the Kingdom of God!

"We are called to embrace diversity within
the unity of Christ, because Christ is one, and
we are many parts of one body in Christ."

Workshops during the event provided par-
ticipants with opportunities for learning and
growth in areas such as Leading Courageously
Across Cultures, Navigating Communication
Styles, Strengthening Intercultural Competen-

cy in Congrega-
tions, Strategies
for Navigating
Microaggres-
sions and
Systemic Bias
in Ministry, and
Mental Health:
Tools for En-
gagement and
Sustainability.

Through
powerful
testimonies,
intercultural

worship, and honest dialogue about the
joys and challenges of cross-racial and
cross-cultural ministry, Facing the Future
2025 reaffirmed GCORR's ongoing commit-
ment to build a more equitable, inclusive,
and beloved community in The United
Methodist Church.



A portion of the NIC Clergy pause for a selfie between lead-
ing and participating.

Photo courtesy of Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer

Stronger Together Living in Connection in Times of Challenges



by Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer,
NIC Director of Connectional Ministries
We are living in times of
significant
challenges,
difficulties,
and divi-
sion. Across

our nation, many people, especially the most vulnerable, are living in fear, facing hostility, discrimination, and economic hardship. Families struggle to keep their homes, put food on the table, and find stability. At the same time, a culture of individualism tempts us to retreat into silence rather than risk standing in solidarity with those who suffer.

Jesus calls us to live in deep connection with God and with one another, to move beyond fear and isolation and to step courageously into community. To live in connection with God means to trust that God’s justice, mercy, and love are stronger than the hatred and division that surround us. To live in connection means rejecting the false belief that our lives are separate or that someone else’s



Photo by Rev. Britt Cox

suffering does not concern us. When one member of the body of Christ is hurting, we are all called to feel that pain, respond with

compassion and stand together in hope.

Living in connection does not erase the challenges we face, but it transforms how we face them. When we listen to the stories of immigrant siblings, we make space

for compassion to grow stronger than prejudice. When we pray together, break bread together, and walk alongside each other, we declare that no one is alone and that God’s love is greater than all forces of division.

Our DNA as Methodists is connectionalism, so we must take this call seriously. It is not enough to pray within our walls; we must act together beyond them. Congregations live in connection by joining in worship, sharing meals, and praying side by side. Churches with more financial stability can walk along-

side those with fewer resources, offering direct support for immigrant families or partnering to share food pantries and organize public vigils against injustice. These concrete acts proclaim that Christ’s body is not divided.

On an individual level, people of faith can live in connection by visiting a struggling neighbor, standing with a coworker who feels threatened, or simply listening with compassion to those who carry heavy burdens. Each small act of courage pushes back against the culture of indifference and builds a network of hope.

Connection between churches is not optional; it is the witness the world desperately needs. Now is the time to reject individualism and choose community. Now is the time to speak up, to stand with our neighbors in need, and to embody God’s justice and mercy in public. Connection is not just a comfort; it is the way of the cross and the way of resurrection hope.

“Connection between churches is not optional.”

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



Reconciling

(continued from page 1)

LGBTQ+ inclusion locally and advocate for justice throughout the church.

Because reconciliation is both spiritual and practical, we guide neighbors to trusted resources. One clear example is Partners in Pride® (Bolingbrook and Ottawa), whose founder, Jameson Pagano, and Ann Natale, counseling intern and administrative coordinator, are active members of our congregation. Partners in Pride® provides outpatient mental health counseling, support groups, and community resources for LGBTQ+ adults and youth (including telehealth).

When someone feels safe and seen, healing can begin—and the church is at its best when we help make that happen. What emerges from all of this is a different kind of unity—one that creates space for critical conscience, consciousness raising, and context, without neglecting the Gospel’s call to love.

The promise is simple, and we mean it: as a community of faith, transformed by love and grace, we aim to move from saying “all are welcome” to living “all are home.”

Read more at umcnic.org/news/what-it-means-to-be-a-reconciling-church.



Coffee and Conversation, an interactive group time for community reflection and real-life application, meets under the Reconciling Ministries sign reminding them of their promise.

Photo courtesy of Friendship UMC

Paying Our Blessings Forward

by Thomas Newby, CCFA lay member

It’s November: a busy time of year for individuals, families, churches, and the Northern Illinois Conference. During the busyness and upcoming celebrations, we are called to pause and to take stock of the many blessing that we have received. And for many, particularly those living on the margins, it is also a time of increasing hardship and uncertainty. It is a challenging time in our faith for each of us in many and different ways.

My blessings include being lay leader at First United Methodist Church in Princeton, a voting member of the Annual Conference, and a member of the Conference Council on Finance and Administration. I have learned much about the ministries that this Conference offers to serve those in need. I have met some great leaders in the process. Financial stewardship is one way I can support leaders and ministries at both the local church and conference level. It is my first step to give thanks for the blessings in my life.

For me, the verses that best reconcile the concepts of faith and works are James 2:21-22 (NIV): “Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.”

I also believe that when the final judgment comes for each of us and we stand before God and God refers to “the least of these my children,” we will see real people there that we have known or encountered in our lives. I pray that they will thank each of us for what we have done on their behalf.

Sacrificial giving is a big ask, yet I am asking us to consider giving sacrificially this year. It is a step of faith into something we may not have

done before in a time like we have never experienced. But then Jesus knows all about big asks, and he promises to be with us and sustain us.

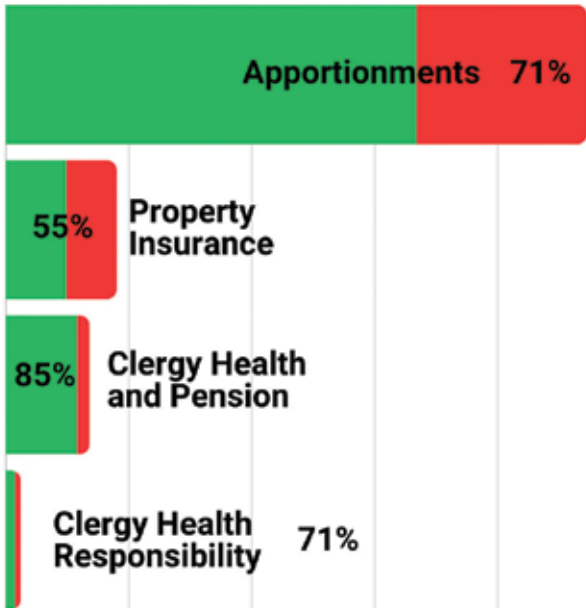
May God raise up our dry bones of faith, complete them with the flesh of faithful and sacrificial works of mercy and justice, and fill us with the breath of the Holy Spirit to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously.

I thank you in advance for your faithful stewardship and wish you a joyous holiday season.

Learn more about apportionments at umcnic.org/apportionments.

Connectional Giving Update

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



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



Reimagining Church Are Our Church Doors Always Open?



by Rev. Christian Coon, NIC Director of Congregational Development
I'm grateful for the many worship services that I've attended in my almost 18 months as director of congregational development. The diversity of our worship experiences is an asset of our conference! I've also learned something that probably should have been obvious to me: Our church buildings have a lot of doors.

On the one hand, this can be a wonderful metaphor for the numerous ways that a person can enter a life of faith, but to a first-time visitor, it can be a little intimidating. More than once, I haven't been sure exactly which door to enter, making me wonder that when Jesus says, "I stand at the door and knock," in Revelation 3, it may have been because the door was locked!

It can be intimidating for a visitor to attend worship, especially since more and more people have no past worship experiences.

I attended a service in a church in Chicago in September and overheard a person say, "This is my first time and I have no idea what to do." The holiday season is a good time to take a fresh look at your practices of hospitality. A few things to think about:

- **Does your web site or Facebook page state clearly what time your worship is?** I've been a little surprised at how often I have to search around a church's web site to find this information.
- **Do you have signage outside your church that makes it clear where people should enter?** Better yet, are your greeters outside so visitors see welcoming faces? Even better yet, does the pastor do this from time to time?
- **Do you have a designated person on the lookout for visitors to give them a welcome and warm hello?** Asking one or two people to be roving welcomers is important.

Along with several leaders from our conference, I recently attended the Leadership Institute of Resurrection—a United Methodist Church. Pastor Adam Hamilton still to this day hustles out to the parking lot in order to greet new people after he gives the benediction. Even though he pastors a church of thousands, he knows the importance of connecting with individuals, especially those who have the courage to attend worship for the first time.

We should do all we can to make sure there are multiple entryways for a person to establish a relationship with Jesus. But we also need to make sure those doors are always open and easy to find.



Your giving to NIC apportionments supports Congregational Development.



Retreat Shows Youth How to Practice Sabbath

by Rev. Daniel Lee, Director of Youth Ministries,
Gary United Methodist Church in Wheaton

Youth groups from six United Methodist churches joined for "In Rhythm," a weekend retreat of worship, fellowship, and sabbath at Lutherdale Camp and Conference Center in Elkhorn, Wis., Sept. 26-28.

First UMC of Arlington Heights, Resurrection UMC, Good Samaritan UMC, Gary UMC in Wheaton, Woodridge UMC, and First UMC of Glen Ellyn sent youth to the gathering.

The young people explored how the Sabbath

is an essential part of being in rhythm with Jesus. Uli Widmaier, the guest speaker from

Congregation Etz Chaim in Lombard, taught that the Sabbath is a gift from God. It's like a cake God makes for us that we should enjoy.

The youth also learned that Sabbath is engaging with God, and this can mean expressing our joys, sadness, and even anger towards God. Uli

also taught that when we spend time with God, we are transformed and called to change the world through social justice. This retreat was an opportunity to not just learn about the Sabbath but to experience it through times of corporate worship, solitude, and fellowship.

Each worship started with ice breakers. The worship team led us in songs and Uli Widmaier shared his wisdom about Sabbath. After worship, youth met in small groups.

During free time, the youth tried the low-ropes course and played kickball, volleyball, and gaga ball.

All of this helped build new relationships and strengthened bonds in Christ's love.



A glimpse of the fun, fellowship, and faith shared during the Fall Retreat. Photo courtesy of Rev. Daniel Lee

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Council on Young People Ministries.



Cultivating Healthy Congregations

by Prairie Central District Shepherding Team

Culture, not programs, budgets, or buildings, determines whether a church thrives or merely survives.

A healthy church culture looks outward: welcoming new people, serving the community, and trusting God's abundance. An unhealthy one turns inward: guarding turf, resisting change, and prioritizing comfort over mission. That invisible climate of what people expect, value, and celebrate shapes everything a church does.

That's why the Prairie Central District Shepherding Team is bringing Rev. Jim Ozier back to Northern Illinois for Culture Shift: Cultivating Healthy Congregations, a one-day experience focused on helping pastors and lay leaders assess, shift, and shape their church culture toward vitality and growth.



The event is open to church leaders from any district.

Drawing from his widely used book *Church Culture: How to Assess It, Shift It,*

and Shape It, Ozier will offer participants practical tools that can empower ministry and cultivate a Spirit-led, outward-focused culture where people love to serve, grow, and belong.

This is an event all the leaders of your church will benefit from attending. When culture shifts, everything shifts: worship, generosity, mission, and morale. Save the date to join us at Grace UMC, Naperville, on Jan. 31, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Registration is currently open. Space is limited.

Healthy congregations start with a culture that looks outward in love.

Save the Date

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP TRAININGS 2026

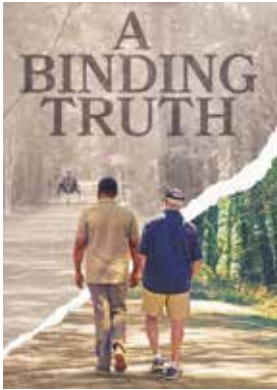
- **Lake South:** January 24
- **Prairie North:** January 24
- **Lake North:** February 7
- **Prairie South:** March (date pending)

Clergy and lay members are encouraged to take part in upcoming leadership trainings offered throughout the Northern Illinois Conference. These sessions, hosted across various districts, cover a wide range of topics designed to equip and inspire leaders in all areas of ministry. You are welcome to attend a training in any district, regardless of where your church is located. Visit umcnic.org/calendar for dates, locations, and registration details.

A Binding Truth Inspires Reflection and Dialogue

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

Throughout September, communities across and beyond Northern Illinois came together for a powerful journey of truth, healing, and reflection through screenings of the film *A Binding Truth* and a special post-film interview. *A Binding Truth* follows De and Jimmie Kirkpatrick in their journey of uncovering intertwined stories, linking their personal experiences to America's broader legacy of slavery, racial division, and the difficult work of healing. Organized by Collective Action to Build Community, the film was screened at 16 locations with the support of 21 sponsors and several community partners.



The response was overwhelming: over 1,000 people viewed *A Binding Truth* in person or online and over 80 more joined a special interview. Many attendees expressed how deeply it resonated and how important its message is in today's world as communities continue to confront the realities of racial injustice and seek paths toward healing.

To deepen the conversation, CA2BC hosted a special interview featuring Jimmie and De Kirkpatrick, who courageously shared their experiences and reflections on the story behind the film. The conversation was led by Christian Harris of Reparation Generation, with filmmaker Louise Woehrle offering behind-the-scenes insights. The dialogue provided a powerful opportunity to explore the film's themes of truth, reconciliation, and hope.

Over 100 participants in Florida joined through Illinois-based sponsors, while more than 75 participants from the UMC of Whitefish Bay, Wis., also took part. A 55-minute version of movie is available for streaming on PBS through March 31, 2026.

This year's screenings built on the success of last year's film event featuring the film *Origin*, which drew over 600 participants across 13 locations and included a special interview with scholar Dr. Suraj Yengde. Earlier in August, CA2BC also hosted screenings of *A Blueprint for Racial Healing* at four locations. The film shared a similar theme, telling the story of a Black and white family coming together to confront and tell the true history of racism, continuing CA2BC's mission to foster dialogue, understanding, and healing through powerful storytelling.

CA2BC is a collaboration of secular and faith-based community groups and institutions working toward a more inclusive society. "Whether you are descendants of the enslaved or the enslaver, there is inner work to be done," reflected NIC Project Manager Amania Drane. "I choose truth and love in spite of the pain."

Together, these efforts reflect CA2BC's ongoing commitment to fostering understanding, building relationships, and inspiring action toward racial healing and community transformation.

Learn more and watch the special interview at umcnic.org/CA2BC/ABindingTruth.

United Voices for Children Recognize NIC Child Advocates

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

Six Northern Illinois United Methodists received awards for their outstanding ministry with children and youth. They were recognized by United Voices for Children at their 2025 Focus: Youth Mental Health, on Sept. 18.

Child-serving agencies that are affiliated with UVC (and the Northern Illinois Conference) are Kids Above All, which serves families in need; MYSI, which provides shelter care, temporary housing, and community-based case management support for at-risk youth, adults, and families; and Rosecrance, which provides behavioral-health assistance to adolescents and adults.



wide range of behavioral health challenges, including trauma and complex emotional needs, modeling respect in helping to bridge the gap between English-speaking children and Spanish-speaking parents. Dr. Ramos is a member of Our Redeemer's United Methodist Church, Schaumburg



Jennifer Crick, a developmental therapist. Through early intervention she worked with children from birth to age three. She is the president of the Illinois Developmental Therapy Association, guiding other developmental therapists in their work and advocacy, especially helping babies and toddlers to meet their milestones. She works with other early intervention groups and organizations throughout the state of Illinois to help ensure equity and access for these families.

The Bishop Jesse R. DeWitt Child Advocate Award Recipients



U.S. Congresswoman Delia Catalina Ramirez, the first Latina United Methodist and first Latina from the Midwest elected to Congress. She is a dedicated advocate for children, youth, and families facing social and economic challenges. Rep. Ramirez provided a videotaped expression of gratitude for the award.



Lisa Rogers, First United Methodist Church in Elmhurst's youth director for over 18 years. Through her leadership with the Northern Illinois Conference Commission on Religion and Race, Lisa has been a bold and faithful voice, raising awareness of the very real harm caused by current racial and immigration policies.

The Katherine B. Greene Child Worker Award Recipients



Dr. Maricruz Ramos, previously a therapist at Kids Above All. She dedicates her life's work to healing, empowerment, and hope. She has provided individual and family therapy to children and adolescents facing a

The Rev. Margaret Ann Williams Service Award Recipients



Michelle Curiel, a school social worker in Oswego and a member of Wesley United Methodist Church in Aurora. At Wesley, she recruited older adults to cook dinner for the Wednesday Night Gatherings and Summer Art and Soul Camps for six years. Michelle provided activities at the park on Thursdays when the Northern Illinois Food Bank handed out free lunches.



Joanne Rae, who has worked for nearly a decade with kids at the Allendale Association. This agency in Lake Villa provides residential treatment for youth who have experienced severe trauma. As a registered nurse since 1995 in Scotland and the US, she works with people with developmental disabilities. Her involvement in youth ministry and LGBTQI ministries at Antioch United Methodist Church has been called outstanding.

Learn more about UVC at unitedvoicesforchildren.org.

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

These last couple of months I have been learning to live with a new reality and I'm not real sure that I like it. As many of you know, one of

my younger sisters died a few months ago. She was the one who I talked to and texted all day, every day. She kept me awake when I was driving home from a late night meeting or the one I talked to in the mornings on the way to some unknown part of the conference, talking about the day's activities or how beautiful the landscape was in front of me. For me, this is a new reality that I did not see coming!

For many of our churches, we are facing a new reality. COVID and disaffiliations have decimated our churches. A "new breed" of Christianity has risen its ugly head with its radical but half-baked arrogance and exclusiveness, while the faithful

Our Remnant Reality

remnant look on in anguish. We wonder what God is/has done to our churches and our families. We who are left behind to pick up the pieces of what's left are the remnant left with a new reality.

I would propose that as the "remnant reality," we need to find a way to look at our future in a different way. The things we used to do . . . you know the story. Week in and week out we hear the story of those left to make different choices for their lives because of their new reality. The question of how we live in this new space looms before us and becomes more and more serious each day of our lives. Will we allow it to overtake our thinking and keep us in a constant state of "can't, won't, and shouldn't," or will

we rise to the occasion and say "we can because of love, hope and grace"? Each step forward that we take is a reminder of the promise of the One who guides the remnant across waters, deserts, and wildernesses into new realities of opportunity and promise.

We are the remnant who have the opportunity to make this current reality different and hopeful. And as the late Benjamin Elijah Mays said, "I have only just a minute, only sixty seconds in it. Forced upon me, can't refuse it. Didn't seek it, didn't choose it. But it's up to me to use it. I must suffer if I lose it. Give account if I abuse it. Just a tiny little minute, but eternity is in it." Don't waste your minute!

"We can because of love, hope, and grace."

'Pilgrim People Under God's Grace' Gather for the Hispanic/Latine Celebration

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

The Hispanic/Latinx community of the Northern Illinois Conference has gathered annually for years to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, a time of joy marked by worship, communion, music, inspiring presentations, and, of course, delicious food.

It has always been a cherished occasion to honor faith, culture, and community.

Given the unpredictability of Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity, this year's gathering on Oct. 18 took place virtually to protect the safety of the participants. They missed the hugs, shared meals, and in-person fellowship, yet a sense of community and inspiration emanated through the computer screens. The Spirit of God moved among the group, uniting hearts even from a distance. The joy of being together—even virtually—reminded everyone that faith and connection are not bound by physical space.

Elaborating on the event theme, "Pilgrim People Under God's Grace," Bishop Dan

Schwerin drew on Psalm 133 to talk about pilgrimage and home. "Psalm 133 is for a pilgrim people under God's grace, because this song was sung in exile when God's people were far from home, and it points us to home," he said.

Calling the community to continue walking together in faith, he said, "We will be home when we live in ways that wed moral good and blessing. We will be home when my well-being is your well-being and your well-being is my well-being. We will be home when no one lives in fear. How good and pleasant it will be."



Claudia Marchan

Claudia Marchan, executive director of Justice For Our Neighbors, in her presentation shared her personal story as an immigrant and offered valuable insights into the current realities facing immigrant communities. She encouraged participants to con-



tinue resisting injustice through care, solidarity, and organization.

A moving part of the program was a tribute to Rev. Fernando Siaba, a member of the Northern Illinois Conference who recently died. His faithful advocacy and unwavering support for the Hispanic/Latinx community left a lasting legacy of love and justice.

Participants also took time to share their joys and concerns, lifting one another in heartfelt prayer.

Though this year's celebration was virtual, the experience was powerful and full of hope. The gathering reminded everyone that, even across physical distance, the Hispanic/Latinx community remains united in faith, resilience, and God's grace.

GETS Moves to New Buildings in 2027

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary plans to relocate to new buildings on the Northwestern University campus in Evanston, Illinois. The school says that the move will expand access to theological education and accelerate innovation in global leadership formation.

The campus relocation, planned for Fall 2027, will enable Garrett to serve a growing and increasingly global student body through flexible learning pathways and improve residential education, all while remaining rooted in the Evanston community it has called home for more than 170 years.

"Our strategic campus relocation will decrease barriers to educational access, let us invest more fully in our faculty and their research, and help us equip our students to become courageous leaders by meeting them where they are geographically, vocationally,

and spiritually," said Rev. Dr. Javier A. Viera, GETS president.

GETS will move to two newly renovated buildings on Hinman Avenue and Sheridan Road, at the south end of campus. These will feature more accessible facilities and state-of-the-art remote learning technologies for distance learners. Northwestern will provide the Garrett community with regular access to its chapels and Garrett's Styberg Library will be housed within Northwestern's collection.

Since 2021, almost one-quarter of Garrett students are international. The UMC-affiliated school has seen a 30 percent increase in online students over the past two years and will continue to expand hybrid and online offerings to meet the needs of students worldwide, broadening the seminary's reach.



Clergy Appointments and Retirements

Bishop Dan Schwerin announces the following clergy appointments and retirements for the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church:

Dean Wright (District Superintendent Supply) to Argo Fay, Mount Carroll, and Thomson UMCs (Prairie North). Effective Nov. 1. Dean follows Lambert Habonimana, whose appointment ended.

Eddie Eddy's (Licensed Local Pastor) appointment to Freeport: Harmony (Prairie North) ended Oct. 30.

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

