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DO NOT DELAY. DATED MATERIAL

Summer Community Experimentation Strengthens Faith

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

During his address at Annual Conference this year, Bishop Schwerin urged churches to experiment with new ways of extending ministry to their neighbors. Churches across Northern Illinois are answering this call by finding fresh ways to approach Vacation Bible Schools and mission trips.

Whether it's rethinking the format, partnering with other churches or organizations, or blending service with creative faith experiences, congregations are discovering that trying something new can open unexpected doors for connection, learning, and spiritual growth.



Camper at Faith UMC in Freeport planting in the children's garden.

for time with vacation Bible school. Instead of planning for the usual weekday sessions, Pastor Javore recommended that VBS take place on two separate Sundays, allowing families to choose the date that worked best for them.

To make the program meaningful and adaptable, Rev. Javore wrote her own curriculum, in which she wove together stories from both the Hebrew and Greek testaments. While some children attended both

sessions, each gathering was designed to be self-contained. The flexible approach gave families more opportunities to participate and ensured that no one felt left behind if they could attend only one session.

Leaders at Cherry Valley UMC also experimented scheduling: they condensed VBS into

a weekend experience. The program kicked off on Friday evening, continued Saturday afternoon, and concluded during the Sunday worship service. That final gathering brought in an outstanding number of visiting parents, grandparents, and other family members, creating a joyful and multigenerational celebration of the children's learning.



Youth from Rockford's Workcamp serving their neighbors.

Accommodating Schedules

Rev. Dr. Barbara Javore, at North Shore United Methodist Church in Glencoe, sought to overcome the challenge of busy summer schedules, when family trips and sports often compete

Focusing Mission Locally

Christ United Methodist Church in Rockford recently hosted their annual local Workcamp. Youth and adults from Christ, Grace, and Centennial UMCs volunteered to work on projects across the Rockford area, such as painting, cleaning, organizing, and repairing decks for residents who might not be able to care for these tasks themselves, and engaging in community outreach. More than 100 volunteers, divided into six crews, completed 12 projects at nine worksites.

The Workcamp aims to serve neighbors and communities where the churches already have relationships. By partnering with other denominational churches and longstanding community contacts, volunteers were able to identify families and individuals in need who would benefit from help, thereby ensuring that their work would make a meaningful difference.

Planning began four or five months in advance, allowing time to gather volunteers, brainstorm projects, contact potential

Chicago Muslims and United Methodists Call for Justice in Gaza

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

Alaa Samman, who grew up in Gaza but now lives in the U.S., calls his father in Gaza regularly to see how he and the family are doing.

On a recent call, "He told me he had been walking through the rubble of the town, looking for food for the household," Samman said. "They hadn't eaten in two days."

Samman told his story during a press conference hosted on July 30 by the Council of Islamic Organizations in Chicago and the Northern Illinois-Wisconsin Episcopal Area of The United Methodist Church. Speakers and reporters gathered at First United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple.

This family's experience—which is not unique—brings into sharp focus the deprivation caused by the war between Israel and Hamas.

A small amount of food and medicine is entering Gaza, but from only four sites. Dr. Zaher Sahloul, president of MedGlobal (a medical nonprofit that serves people in poverty and crisis), said the region could use 400 sites.

About 70,000 children in Gaza suffer from malnutrition, and most will die, Sahloul said. Even those children who survive malnutrition will have medical conditions for the rest of their lives.

The few opportunities when people can visit a site for what they are told will be a food distribution are sometimes a trap—while stand-

continued on page 2: see Gaza

continued on page 4: see Experimentation

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From Your Bishop:

2026 Will Be a Year of Hope

by Bishop Dan Schwerin
This year I have appreciated the ways that the Northern Illinois and Winsconsin conferences have lived out a year of grace. Even before it is visible to us, we know that prevenient grace is at work. Thank you for your faithfulness, especially for the ways in which you have offered the peace and presence of Christ in tumultuous days.

You have been planning trainings to make clear how our mission is antithetical to Christian Nationalism. You have been organizing to provide sanctuary for people who have been harassed by the empire. You have been experimenting in ministry, some with mergers, some with reaching new people—and practice grace for the experiments as needed.

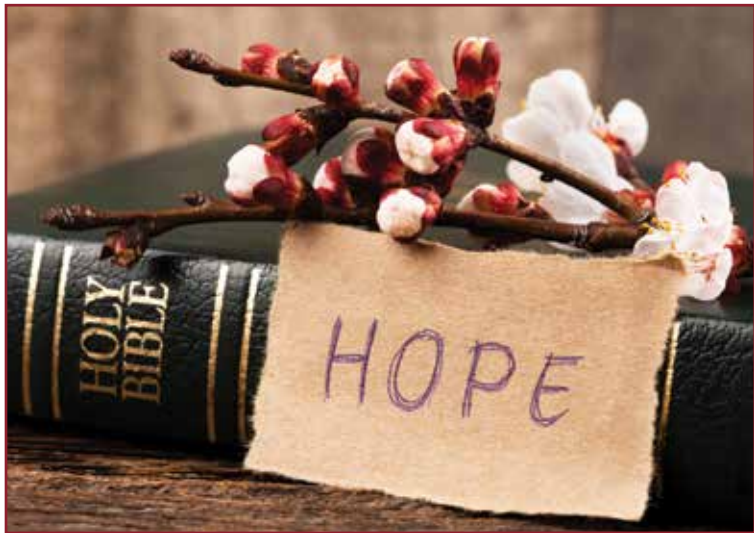
I also celebrate the increase in apportionment payments in both annual conferences. Your gift helps us advance vocations into service, develop programs and connections that a local church cannot do alone, and help us grant and coach congregational development so that we might innovate and bless our ministries in this space and time.

Let me now look ahead to 2026 by turning to scripture; specifically, Psalm 130:5: “I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word, I hope.”

I love the fact that God is working while it is still dark, when God’s ways are unseen to most of us.

What kind of spiritual focus is needed for our leadership in this moment? It is a time when many are dispirited for a variety of reasons. We have been divided by powerful monied

interests who want us to fear and distrust each other so that we can be administered by fear. Misinformation that takes us toward darkness has robbed us of our conviction that Christ is more than our opinions. There is always more God than meets the eye.



I believe that in this dark time we might be stronger if we practiced hope. I love the idea that we are not alone; we practice hope as a community of faith. We are practicing hope when we worship together and decide we will not isolate but bear witness with and to each other.

We can practice hope as we “resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves,” to quote our baptismal liturgy. What does it mean to do this? What brings hope for you?

I sense that the churches that are trying to decide their futures could make better de-

cisions if they were practicing hope as they discern what God may have for them in the future. Hope allows for newness. Hope allows that God will call us forward. Hope allows us to say yes to whatever call is placed on our lives.

I believe that as long as we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, we have a relationship with hope. John Wesley reminded us that we are not defined by our opinions or agreements, but by the image of God born in us and growing by grace in and through us.

I wonder if we might think about the end of this year as a time to ground ourselves in grace so that we approach Advent and the new year asking the question: How might hope grow in your life and lives of our churches and how might that bring hope to those God has given us to love?

Best of all, God is with us, and God is not finished with us yet.

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, I hope.” Thanks be to God.

Hope to you in the power and love we know as Christ.

Read more of Bishop Schwerin’s message at umcnic.org/news/what-shall-we-focus-on-in-2026.

Your giving to General Church apportionments supports the Episcopal Office.



Gaza (continued from page 1)

ing in line, some people have been shot and killed by Israel Defense Forces.

And when they do receive a small amount of flour or grain, it is almost worthless without water and firewood for cooking—two things that also can be impossible to find.

Rev. Jane Eesley, senior pastor of First UMC, recently returned from a two-year assignment with the Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem, a ministry supported by two Methodist denominations. She lived in the West Bank and spent time with Muslims and Christians who lived in Gaza.



Rev. Jane Eesley finds current relevance in Jesus’s teaching that “whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me.”

“When there is a conflict between ideology and people, the faithful must put people first,” she said.

The Northern Illinois–Wisconsin Episcopal Area of The United Methodist Church and the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago prepared a joint statement. Together, they call on the nation of Israel and U.S. elected officials to meet the following demands:

- an immediate and permanent ceasefire;
- the lifting of all bureaucratic and administrative restrictions on access to humanitarian aid;
- the opening of all land crossings to and from Gaza;
- access to everyone in Gaza;

- replacement of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation and rejection of military-controlled distribution models;
- restoration of a principled, UN-led humanitarian response; and
- continuation of funding principled and impartial humanitarian organizations.

Further, the organizations ask faith groups to support these demands in the following ways:

- select a day of fast and encourage congregants to join the fast in solidarity with the people of Gaza;
- on the day of fast, ask congregants to send letters to their local and national elected officials, reciting the joint statement’s demands; and
- make this fight to stop the starvation in Gaza the regular subject of worship services.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports interfaith relations.



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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.



Celebration, Service, Gratitude: Kids Above All Recognizes Partners

by Catherine Inserra,
Deaconess, KAA's Manager of
Faith & Community Relations

On August 6, Kids Above All welcomed more than 70 faith and community partners from across metropolitan Chicago and the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church to its Better Life Distribution Center in Des Plaines. This Day of Celebration and Service honored the organization's mission partners and gave attendees the opportunity to fill backpacks for children as part of its annual Back-to-School Drive.

"For more than 130 years, Kids Above All's partners have been essential to our mission of building better lives for kids and families," said Dan Kotowski, KAA's president and chief executive officer. "Because of you, children impacted by trauma have the hope, opportunities, and resources they need to realize their potential. We are truly grateful for your continued commitment to our mission."



Lucy Rider Meyer, founder of KAA's predecessor organization. Portrait by Celia Marie Petersen.

make a difference—quoting KAA's founder, Lucy Rider Meyer: "I do believe the world is swinging towards the light."

The gathering also incorporated a personal testimony from Wally Spitzer, a resident of the Lake Bluff Children's Home from 1957 to 1962. He shared fond memories of his time in Lake Bluff, saying that he, too, benefited from a connection with a therapy dog while he lived there; this one a German shepherd named Taffy.

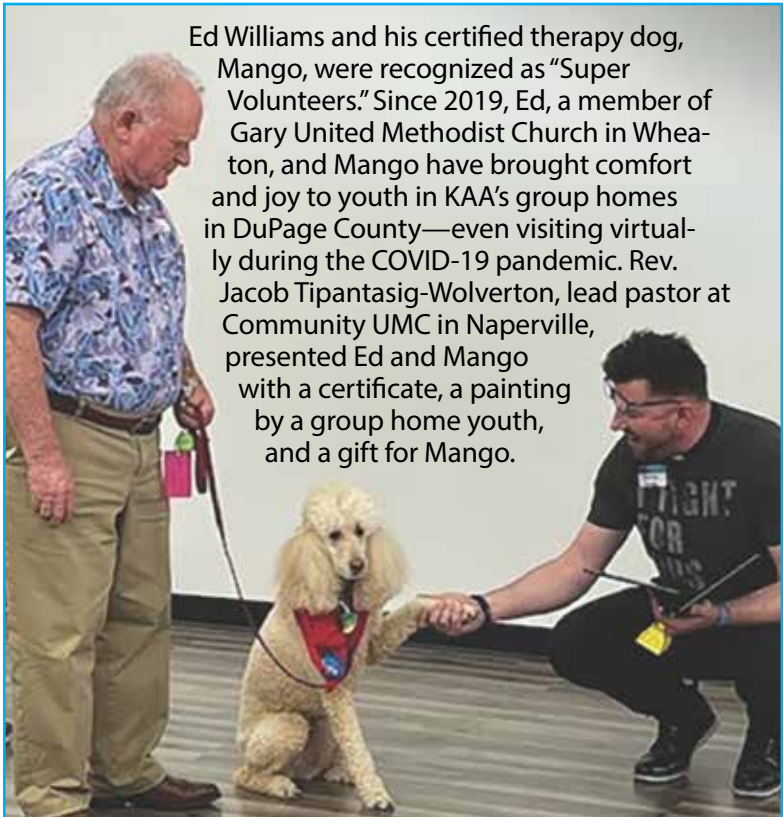
Next, Rev. Mori Siegel, lead pastor at Ravenswood Fellowship UMC, accepted the Mission Partner Award on behalf of her congregation. "This award is not just a plaque or certificate," said Rev. Siegel. "It is a reflection of our love in action."

Finally, to close the event, Deaconess Catherine Inserra, KAA's manager of faith and community relations, expressed her gratitude: "Our mission partners are super in so many ways—from our United Methodist churches and United Women in Faith to our interfaith partners and community groups. You embrace Kids Above All's mission because you care about children and genuinely want to make a difference."

KAA's nearly 131-year-old mission is to build better lives for children and families impacted by poverty, violence, and injustice. Since 1894, the organization has empowered more than 161,000 clients in under-resourced communities in Cook, DuPage, Kane, and Lake counties through early childhood education; safe, supportive housing; and trauma-informed counseling services.

To learn more about Kids Above All or to get involved, contact Deaconess Catherine Inserra at cinserra@kidsaboveall.org or visit kidsaboveall.org.

Your giving to Mission Links supports Kids Above All.



Ed Williams and his certified therapy dog, Mango, were recognized as "Super Volunteers." Since 2019, Ed, a member of Gary United Methodist Church in Wheaton, and Mango have brought comfort and joy to youth in KAA's group homes in DuPage County—even visiting virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rev. Jacob Tipantasig-Wolverton, lead pastor at Community UMC in Naperville, presented Ed and Mango with a certificate, a painting by a group home youth, and a gift for Mango.

Churches Are Faithfully Supporting the Shared Budget

by Kim Emery

Conference Council on Finance and Administration Chair

As the summer draws to a close, churches are preparing fall activities. Sunday school starts and church committees start meeting again, stewardship and finance committees enter their busiest season, and church charge conferences begin.

And as local churches wind down 2025, their finance committees are reviewing spreadsheets and forecasting what the financial balance will be at year's end. Northern Illinois Conference appreciates churches' efforts to pay their apportionments (and other obligations). As of July 2025, we have collected more than we had at this time last year. At the end of last year, NIC received 79 percent of the apportionment. We hope to receive 85 percent in 2025.

To help you plan for your church conference, on Aug. 7 NIC emailed out apportion-

ment, health, and pension figures for 2026. If you did not receive yours, please contact dquinn@umcnic.org.

If your local church has not yet planned for a stewardship campaign, visit the Stewardship and Generosity page on our website: umcnic.org/stewardship-and-generosity. (Sneak peek: We will have an NIC-produced stewardship resource ready in spring 2026 for use in fall 2026.)

The NIC Finance and Administration area is offering webinars, most of them recorded for review, to help church finance committees. See the sidebar for upcoming webinars.

Recordings of previous webinars can be found in the Finance and Administration Showcase on Vimeo at vimeo.com/showcase/11796289. Recordings include: Church Property Taxes, Prosper, Brick River, Human Resources and Finances and more.

Please remember as you prepare the 2026 church budget that the apportionment formula, clergy retirement plan contributions, and health insurance premiums have changed. Look for the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and Finance Committee webinar listing in the sidebar and plan to attend or view it later for assistance in these areas.

The Conference Committee on Finance and Administration appreciates how churches are faithfully stepping up to make sure the budget they passed over a year ago for shared ministry is being fully funded.

Upcoming Finance and Administration Trainings

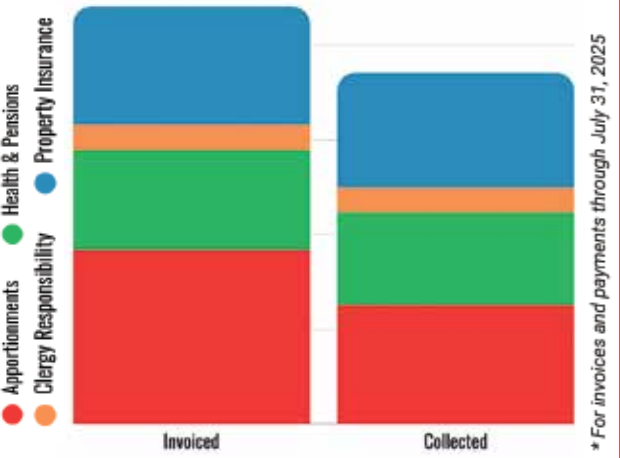
- Online via Zoom
- See the full calendar at umcnic.org/calendar
- **Budgeting 101** (building a church budget from scratch): Sept. 8
 - **Signs of Struggle in Your Church** (and What You Can Do About It): Sept. 16
 - **2026 Budget Information** (how churches can create their 2026 budget with the new apportionment formula and changes in clergy pension and healthcare): Sept. 23
 - **COMPASS Retirement Plan** (for clergy and church leaders): Sept. 30 or Oct. 21
 - **Local Church Board of Trustees 101**: Oct. 14
 - **Active Shooter Preparedness Training**: Nov. 15
 - **Statistical Reporting and the New Apportionment Formula**: Dec. 16

Connectional Giving Update

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

- Apportionments: 69%
- Health and Pension: 93%
- Clergy Responsibility: 96%
- Property Insurance: 97%

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.



VBS Adventures Inspire Faith and Community

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

This summer, churches across the conference brought vacation Bible school to life, each one putting its own unique spin on the beloved tradition. From creative scheduling and special projects to new formats and fresh themes, these diverse programs showed how innovation and faith can come together to engage kids and families in meaningful, fun ways.

“Road Trip,” the Cokesbury offering, was a favorite across the conference this year, and focused on exploring new places and experiences. Guided by the fearless Navigator and their adventurous pup, Scout, kids embarked on a thrilling journey discovering that God is always by their side (based on Joshua 1:9, “The LORD your God is with you wherever you go”). Together, they explored new places, made lasting friendships, and experienced God’s amazing goodness at every turn.

“True North VBS,” the Group Publishing program, was also widely used. It was designed to give kids a rock-solid foundation in faith and help them navigate life’s challenges with confidence. As the curriculum helped them explore the Alaskan wilderness, children learned how easy it is to lose sight of what’s true in today’s world and discovered that Jesus is their unshakable true north, a faithful friend they can always trust.

Many churches adjusted packaged programs to meet their needs or created their own curriculum. Faith UMC in Freeport continued their Wacky Wednesday five days of VBS throughout the summer. Creation and Creativity was Apple River UMC’s theme: kids explored nature and created nature sculptures and clothing from recycled items.

Journeying Together

Grace UMC of Chicago’s Logan Square neighborhood and nearby Humboldt Park UMC came together and offered a unique English/Spanish bilingual vacation Bible school, centered on the theme “journeys.” Through Bible stories, children explored both physical and personal journeys, learning how God



Smiles at the park celebrating journeys VBS.

faithfully accompanied people every step of their way through life. Adults shared their own stories of journeys, whether moving from another country or state or navigating deeply personal transitions like coming out, and reflected on how God’s presence sustained them.

The sessions culminated in a powerful joint worship service held in a neighborhood park, where the children led singing and scripture readings in English and Spanish.

Working with Annual Conference in Session

Our Redeemer’s and Our Saviour’s United Methodist churches in Schaumburg, already partners in hosting VBS, expanded their collaboration this year by wel-



St. John’s UMC in Oak Park’s campers conduct a science experiment.

coming children of Annual Conference attendees in need of child-care. This extension not only strengthened their shared ministry but also offered a meaningful child-care solution for parents attending Annual Conference.

Seventeen children took part in morning vacation Bible school at Our Redeemer’s. In the afternoon they enjoyed a variety of activities organized by Our Saviour’s. During the

Celebration of Ministry service—where ordinands and others are honored at Annual Conference—children gathered to watch a movie, allowing parents to fully engage in the worship experience without distraction. The program was such a hit that even after the conference ended, children were still asking to go back for more VBS fun.

Making an Impact

During VBS, participants didn’t just learn about God’s love; they put it into action through collections of



Parachute time at Channahon and Minooka UMCs’ VBS.

school supplies and food for local food pantries. Children in a combined VBS planned by Channahon and Minooka UMCs collected coins for the Children’s Advocacy Center in Crest Hill. The elementary-school kids at

Cherry Valley UMC assembled care kits for children in crisis at the Rockford Rescue Mission, turning their lessons into tangible acts of care and compassion.

At Grace UMC in Joliet, kids received a fun challenge: collect 100 food items for the local food pantry and earn the chance to dump a bucket of water over Pastor Laura Barkley’s head! Their enthusiasm overflowed and they brought in over 300 items. Two other brave volunteers also stepped up to succumb to the splash, making the celebration as memorable as the children’s generosity.

Across the conference, programs like these and many others brought children and congregations together for unforgettable



Assembling care kits at Cherry Valley UMC.

activities, meaningful spiritual growth, and stronger community connections. Explore more stories from the vibrant vacation Bible schools that gathered across our conference at umcnic.org/news/vbs-adventures-inspire-faith-and-community.

Experimentation (continued from page 1)

sites, and follow up to confirm needs. This thoughtful preparation also made it possible for part-time students and volunteers to participate according to their availability, ensuring an opportunity for everyone who wants to serve.

“A local Workcamp isn’t just convenient,” said Rev. TK Lee, associate pastor at Christ UMC. “It brings our church and community together, opens doors for wider participation, and creates lasting connections that glorify God.”

Web of Prayer

A meaningful twist enhanced VBS at Grace UMC in Naperville: each of the 92 participants was paired with a prayer partner. These behind-the-scenes supporters prayed daily for their assigned child or volunteer, creating an invisible yet powerful web of encouragement, hope, and intergenerational connection.

The children felt seen and valued, knowing someone was lifting them up in prayer, while

the volunteers felt supported in their ministry. The added layer of care and community extended far beyond the walls of VBS.

Monsters Help with Feelings

This year at Grace United Methodist Church in Dixon’s F.R.O.G. (Fully Rely on God) Camp, children received tools to understand and process their feelings in healthy, faith-filled ways. In addition to the lessons, each child received a handmade “monster” doll designed to remind them that feelings can sometimes feel like scary monsters when we don’t understand them. As campers learned to name and handle those feelings, the dolls became symbols of calm and comfort.

Across Northern Illinois, churches are discovering that trying new approaches—whether through flexible VBS formats or locally focused mission projects—can deepen faith, strengthen community, and create lasting connections. By meeting neighbors where they are and serving with creativity and care, congregations are living out Bishop Schwerin’s call to experiment with new ways of being the church.



Camper from Grace UMC in Dixon holds her “monster” doll.

Summer Mission Trips: Serving Near and Far

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

Mission trips aren't just about what we hope to gain, they're about showing up for what others truly need. They're opportunities to set aside our own agendas and open our hearts to serve, listen, and care in ways that make a real difference.

This summer, local churches across our conference answered the call to serve—both close to home and far beyond. Some congregations organized mission projects right in their own neighborhoods and partnered with local agencies to meet community needs. Others traveled to different states to work alongside ministries that are improving lives in their regions.

Building Lasting Love

Journey of Hope United Methodist Church in Elgin and Bartlett sent 14 people, ranging in age from 16 to 82, to the Spirit Lake Ministry Center on the Spirit Lake Native American Reservation in North Dakota. This has been an annual mission trip for the church for over 20 years.

The team planned a VBS program for over 16 kids and painted, cleaned, and gardened for homes on the reservation, and for one home built a wheelchair ramp. They also began rough-framing walls for a new bathhouse.

"We were able to witness singers and dancers, plus two ladies shared their talent of making frybread," said Andy Lindstrom, Journey of Hope mission team coordinator. "It was a fantastic trip where we were able to leave a lasting legacy of love to the people and to the ministry directors, Kim and Paulette Paulson."

Partnering with ASP

Several of our churches joined the Appalachian Service Project this summer, rolling

up their sleeves to repair and rebuild homes while forming heartfelt connections with the families they served. Based in Johnson City, Tenn., ASP welcomes volunteer groups to come and improve homes, by making them warmer, safer, and more accessible—repairing roofs, walls, floors, and foundations, and adding porches or ramps for those who need them.

The United Methodist Church of Geneva celebrated its 42nd year partnering with ASP, traveling to rural Knott County, Ky., to help rebuild lives by repairing floors, ceilings, siding, and more. First UMC of Belvidere journeyed to Kentucky to restore a home damaged by a tornado, while Minooka UMC offered their hands and hearts to ensure families had safe, dry, and welcoming places to live.

Local Mission Work

Often, people in our own towns or regions can use help. Hinckley UMC took part in a weekend mission trip, partnering with their local food pantry, serving neighbors and supporting vital community needs. Baker Memorial UMC in St. Charles cared for God's

creation through environmental clean-up, packed meal kits to help fight hunger, and tackled projects around the church.

Coming Together

Another trend this summer was churches' partnering together to take

mission trips. By combining their volunteers, these congregations could pool resources,



Members from Lanark UMC work on a shed for a homeowner in Henderson Settlement, Ky.

es, share skills, and support one another in service. Members of Grace UMC in Naperville partnered with UMC of Antioch to travel to Birmingham, Ala., to assist Side by Side Ministries there, which helps people locally, nationally, and internationally. Christ UMC in Rockford opened their local Workcamp to other Rockford churches, which grew their group to over 100 people and 6 crews.

"I believe in the power of unity—coming together as one body to serve," said Pastor TK Lee of Christ UMC in Rockford. "While working with other churches requires extra planning and communication, the fruit it bears is always worth it."

Along the way, volunteers are reminded that God's work is often as much about building relationships as it is about building walls, roofs, or ramps. Explore more stories from the hard work of mission trips at umcnic.org/news/summer-mission-trips-serving-near-and-far.



Packing meals for Midwest Mission at Baker Memorial UMC in St. Charles.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports local churches which in turn supports their VBS and Mission trip programs.



Building Faith, Friendships, and a Second Family at Camp

by Lisa Smith, NIC Communications Specialist

For many, J.O.Y. (Jesus, Others, You) Camp is more than just a summer camp; it has grown into a second family. One of Northern Illinois Conference's longest-running camps, it is a safe space that allows kids to learn about God and themselves while spending time in fellowship.

This year's focus was on the Y part of the name: You.

It aimed to remind the 64 campers that they are deeply loved by God and called to shine as God's light in the world by using their unique gifts to serve others. The theme song, "Light Inside You" by Allison Eide, reminded campers that despite insecurities and flaws, they are called to shine God's light in the world and use their gifts to serve others. A well-loved saying at camp, "God loves you and there's nothing you can do about it," was

adapted this year to a personal affirmation, "God loves me and there's nothing I can do about it." It underscored the limitless nature of God's grace.

Activities reinforced lessons of unity, reminding campers that we share more in common than we realize and that collaboration is stronger than division. Beyond faith lessons, campers enjoyed all the classic joys of church camp: Bible study, team-building games, crafts, archery, swimming, canoeing, talent shows, and evening campfires.

On Tuesday of that week, NIC clergy were invited to visit and learn more about J.O.Y. Camp, its mission, and impact on campers. Clergy guests toured the grounds, ate a meal with campers and staff, and learned how they can support J.O.Y. Camp and outdoor and retreat ministries for the future. Congregations can support J.O.Y. Camp in many ways, from providing meals or snacks to

sending mission teams for clean-up projects to offering scholarships so every child has the chance to attend.

Planning is underway for the third annual J.O.Y. Camp Winter Weekend, Jan. 2-4. Open to both returning and new campers, it promises children another opportunity to grow in faith and fellowship. Keep an eye on the eNews and conference calendar to learn when registration opens.

The life-changing ministry of J.O.Y. Camp would not be possible without the support of NIC congregations. To assist financially or through service projects, contact volunteer@joycamp.org. View more of what happens at camp in their recap video at youtube.com/watch?v=wip-CuyT1Ink.



Campers enjoying canoes.



Campers take aim.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports camp programs.



Stronger
Together
From the Pews
to the Street



by Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer,
NIC Director of Connectional Ministries
Once I heard it said that church isn't just a place we go, it's a place we belong, and it's a people God sends.

Every Sunday we gather to worship, learn, fellowship, and be renewed. And then, like the early disciples, we are sent "to the ends of the earth," beginning right where we live. Jesus' Great Commission calls us to "go and make disciples," and his Great Commandment calls us to love our neighbors. Both are lived most visibly outside our church walls.

It has been inspiring to read the stories and testimonies from churches in our Northern Illinois Conference: vacation Bible schools that welcomed neighborhood children, mission trips near and far, outdoor worship services in parks and parking lots, community picnics, and many other events beyond the building. Each story is a reminder that the church is present in the community. They inspire us to keep going out, to invite our neighbors, and to make room for new friends around the table.



Members from Journey of Hope in Elgin raising a wall of a new bathhouse at Spirit Lake Ministry Center.

We are the body of Christ, called to be his hands and feet: Hands that carry meals, write notes of hope, and lift burdens. Feet that show up on porches, in classrooms, at clinics, and in shelters, bringing the peace of Christ. Faith that never moves beyond the pew remains theory; faith that steps into the street becomes testimony.

Our mission together can take many forms, but it always means stepping beyond ourselves, praying for our neighbors, serving where there is need, and showing Christ's love in daily life.

Mission isn't about fixing people; it's about joining in what God is already doing. Despite the challenges in our society and nation, people need to be reminded that God's love is incarnated, made real and tangible, through the presence and actions of God's people.

Every congregation, no matter its size or location, has a mission field right outside its doors. Some churches are already living this out in bold and creative ways, while others may just be beginning to imagine what it could look like. Wherever you find yourselves, now is the time to step out, to look beyond the walls of the sanctuary, and to ask, "How can we be the presence of Christ in our community?"

From the pews to the street, we are called to make a difference, bringing the love of Jesus to our neighborhoods, our city, and the world. When we move outward in faith, we discover new relationships, fresh opportunities for witness, and the joy of serving together. We are in mission together!!

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



Hispanic/Latinx Caucus Strategizes to
Strengthen Leaders

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

At the beginning of August, Hispanic/Latinx United Methodists from across the U.S. and Puerto Rico gathered in Arlington Heights for the Annual Gathering of MARCHA (Metodistas Asociados Representando la Causa de los Hispano/Latino Americanos)—the national Hispanic/Latinx caucus of The United Methodist Church and an advocacy organization committed to justice, equity, and the empowerment of Hispanic/Latinx communities.

The theme of this year's gathering, "Now, Yes! With Faith and Courage, We Respond to Our Call to Act," set the tone for a weekend filled with worship, learning, and action. The Hispanic/Latinx Ministry of the Northern Illinois Conference extended hospitality and strong support as the host of this national event, which convenes annually.

Bishop Dan Schwerin welcomed the caucus and preached at the opening worship service. He called the community to live without fear. The bishop reminded those gathered that despite current challenges, "there are more of us than there are of them [those who would oppress Hispanic/Latinx people]," and "there is always more God than meets the eye." Several full cabinet members joined in the vibrant service, in solidarity with the Hispanic/Latinx church.

MARCHA Awards

Each year, MARCHA recognizes outstanding leadership, advocacy, and community impact through its annual awards.

This year's celebration was especially meaningful for the Northern Illinois Conference

as one of the awards was presented to Estefany Sanabria, a young adult from Humboldt Park UMC in Chicago. Estefany is a dedicated attorney who graduated from DePaul University College of Law with a certificate in public interest law and now serves at the National Immigrant Justice Center as a lawyer for the Asylum Project. A committed United Methodist, faithful MARCHA member, and tireless advocate, Estefany represents the emerging leadership and vital contributions of the emerging generation within our community.

The MARCHA gathering also provided an inspiring space for the Hispanic/Latinx community to reflect on current challenges, especially those related to immigration, and to discern a collective call to action. Participants shared ideas and built strategies around accompaniment, resilience and next steps. In the hallways and over meals, participants experienced what felt like a family reunion, renewing relationships, building new partnerships and strengthening the network of Hispanic/Latinx leaders across the connection.

As the gathering drew to a close, the theme became a shared pledge: we will not postpone our response to God's invitation; now, yes, we will go out with courage and hope, embodying Christ's love in our neighborhoods, across the connection, and throughout Puerto Rico and the U.S.

Your giving to General Church apportionments ethnic caucuses like MARCHA.



Estefany Sanabria poses with the Emerging Leadership award and other MARCHA members from Northern Illinois.

A Binding Truth Screenings

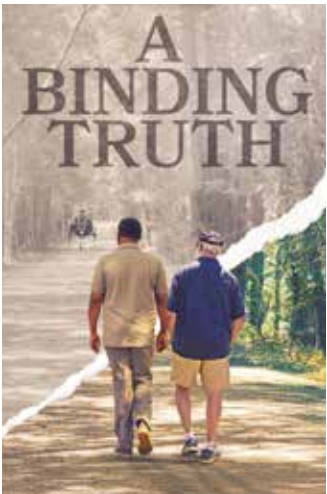


This September, communities across Northern Illinois will have a unique opportunity to experience *A Binding Truth*, a powerful new documentary exploring race, memory, and reconciliation.

Collective Action to Build Community (CA2BC), a partnership of more than 15 faith-based institutions, libraries, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, and community organizations, has planned free screenings of *A Binding Truth*, which will take place from Sept. 10-16 at multiple locations and times as well as online for registered individuals.

The showing this year is a continuation of group's 2024 Film Club, which showed *Origin* around the Chicago area, Ottawa, and Rockford to almost 600 people.

The 90-minute film tells the story of Jimmie, who in 1965 became the first Black football star at an affluent Charlotte, N.C., high school. His arrival on the team placed him at the center of one of North Carolina's most volatile



civil-rights battles. De, a fellow student at the time, observed those events closely and later reflected on them in a college essay. Decades later, an unexpected discovery in church records uncovered hidden connections between Jimmie and De, revealing long-buried truths about their families, their city, and the nation's history. *A Binding Truth* follows their journey of uncovering these intertwined stories, linking their personal experiences to America's broader legacy of slavery, racial division, and the difficult work of healing.

Northern Illinois audiences will have the privilege of seeing the premiere of this full-length version of the film before a shortened edit airs on PBS North Carolina on Oct. 1. To deepen engagement, CA2BC will also host a live Zoom interview on Sept. 28 at 3 p.m. with Jimmie, De, and filmmaker Louise Woehrle.

Registration for both in-person and online viewings is free at umcnic.org/CA2BC/ABindingtruth. Those choosing the online option will receive a secure link, available Sept. 10–16.

CA2BC invites the community to watch this film, reflect, and join in building a more just and connected future.

Jesus Loves the Little Children



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!

The school year has begun and we are extending prayers for a productive learning year where God's precious little ones will not experience violence, hunger, or trauma. Let us imagine and pray for a school year that does not include a single shooting and where our youth can concentrate on

being children and learning—about the history of all people, despite the many books that continue to be banned. Never was the time greater than now for us to understand that we are all in this together. How very helpful it would be to learn to appreciate (and try to understand) our cultural differ-



Children enjoying VBS at Scales Mound UMC.

ences. We absolutely have more in common than that which tends to separate us.

The greatest thing we have in common is the love and grace that Christ continues showers upon us. Our children and young adults are our future, so let us keep them in continuous prayer. Matt. 19:13-14 (NIV) says, "when the people brought the little children to Jesus to lay hands on and pray for them; the disciples rebuked them." But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Yes, Jesus loves the little children; all God's children of the world; red and yellow, black and white; they are all precious in his sight (song by Frick-Root and Woolston). Sending up prayers and spreading love on behalf of our precious little ones. May they go with Christ and be well, as we embrace our unique cultural differences.

Amen!

Shepherding Teams Learn Basic Intercultural Communication

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck, NIC Director of Communications

Cross-cultural relationships require intentional, invitational listening skills and honest personal statements. Annual Conference and District Shepherding team members learned at the meeting on Aug. 16 in Schaumburg.

Northern Illinois is a culturally and racially diverse conference. In a nation where racism and discrimination continue, NIC is in a special position to witness to healthy relationships across race and culture.

Facilitating the meeting was Julie Boleyn, executive director of the Kaleidoscope Institute, which trains leaders to create gracious space for courageous conversations and consulting to heal and transform organizations. Their focus is cross-cultural relationships.

Members learned a number of practices designed to help people listen carefully and with empathy, and to speak respectfully and honestly. These include RESPECT guidelines, Mutual Invitation conversation, the "Holy Currencies," Bible Sharing, Creating a "Grace Margin," and Gracious Invitations.

These also help well-meaning churches to prevent their ministry from becoming patronizing. Boleyn gave an example of a church that wanted to help youth. Their neighborhood had low graduation rates.

"First, they wanted to give the schools a monetary gift," Boleyn said. "But when they asked the school, the youth most wanted meaningful relationships with adults.

"Youth were not going to come to the church basement for youth group," Boleyn said.

Therefore, church people went to the school to learn ways to get to know the students and vice-versa. Students and church people discussed some given questions together.

"Youth started to come to the church for specific things," Boleyn explained. "They initiated reasons to come to the church, use certain resources for their plans to reach out to their neighbors.

"We can make the circle wider when we think we don't have enough," she said, underscoring the importance of relationships.

Sometimes people may not feel safe in a group where they feel different from most

others. This is where groups can create "a grace margin between a safe zone and a fear zone. This entails toning down things that may make some people feel small or afraid.

At the same time, if we become too comfortable we probably won't change.

The team members engaged in these practices and started to identify ways that the ACST and DSTs can offer healthy guidance to the conference and its churches. These included clarifying the purpose of the ACST even more and leading the habit of sabbath-taking as a spiritual discipline.



ASCT members energetically discussed proposals for ministries the team could lead.

Reimagining Church When Cleanliness Might be Godliness



by Rev. Christian Coon, NIC Director of
Congregational Development

I took the Red Line train into my office several weeks and got off at the Lake Street stop. As I was making my way up the stairs, I noticed a young man in front of me. He was walking pretty fast and was precariously carrying a McDonald's cup that I assumed had coffee in it.

In his hurry, however, he spilled a little of the beverage on the floor. I'm sure this is hard to believe, but the floors of train stations are . . . shall we say . . . cleanliness challenged. It's not unusual to see litter scattered here and there—and I really don't want to know what kinds of miscellaneous liquids are pooled about.

But, after spilling some of his coffee, this man stopped, got down on his knees, pulled out some napkins, and started to clean up after himself. I was tempted to stop and say to him,

"Buddy, you're wasting your time. Who knows what else is on this floor?" But

instead, I admired and was inspired by him.

I sometimes feel like I have to force myself to read the newspaper in the morning. What has happened in the last 24 hours that is going to anger or sadden me today? More

killings in Gaza? This administration dismissing fair-housing cases? Gerrymandering abuse? Our society's "floor"

feels pretty gross these days. But there are still those who get down on their knees and clean up, no matter what.

I think about God's dismay at the stubborn Israelites. Yet still God offers grace. I remember Jesus' lament over the state of Jerusalem. And he still heals. I re-read Paul's letters to early churches who keep tripping over themselves and their egos. And Paul still plants and preaches.

We may sometimes feel the same way about helping our churches. Years of decline wear on us and we wonder whether it's worth it to give the effort. But our faith compels us to hang in there even when we wonder if our little efforts do anything. It moves me to continue to serve and support our leaders through things like the Fresh Expressions event on Oct. 4 at Journey of Hope UMC in Elgin or the Tuesday Teaching webinars. I am committed to pulling out my napkins every day and chip in to make our world a more hopeful, more joyous place.

I'm grateful for this mystery McDonald's man for his small act. It moves me to pull out some napkins to join in.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the Annual Conference Shepherding Team.



Your giving to NIC apportionments supports Congregational Development.



Being Peacemakers While Calling for Peace and Unity

by Rev. Victoria Rebeck,
NIC Director of Communications

Korea was liberated from Japanese occupation in 1945, but it is not completely free.

Korean-American United Methodists across the nation observed the anniversary of this liberation with a combination of gratitude and sorrow. NIC Korean Americans and friends acknowledged the anniversary on Aug. 15 at First Korean UMC in Wheeling.

While from a military standpoint the divided Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea [North Korea] and the Republic of Korea [South Korea]) is experiencing peace, Rev. Hwa-Young Chong, superintendent of the Prairie North District, says it is a "pax Romana" rather than the peace Christ preached.



Two acolytes in traditional dress led the recessional from the closing worship service.

"When Christ told us to be peacemakers, it was during the reign of Augustus," she said in her sermon at the gathering. "This 'pax Augustus' was maintained by soldiers; it was an oppressive peace. The oppressed suffered the most under Roman rule."

This is like the "peace" in Korea now. The two sides are not at war, but are divided by a military-protected boundary. Many families remain separated by this boundary as travel for North Koreans is rarely permitted.

After World War II, when Korea was liberated from Japanese occupation, the allies proposed separating the nation into two: The northern part would be overseen by Russia and the southern by

the U.S. The intention that the two sections would be reunited as one self-governed nation has never been realized.

The two characters used to express peace in Korean mean something like "harmony" and "balanced," Rev. Chong explained. "It's like wholeness; for all of creation."

"While the world gives pax Romana, Jesus's peace gives justice, mercy, and the peace of Christ for the outcast and oppressed," Rev. Chong said.

She encouraged worshipers to adopt Henri Nouwen's practice: even though not all of us are revolutionaries, we can be peacemakers by doing small deeds of peace every day.



Worshipers committed themselves to be peacemakers by singing "Let There Be Peace on Earth" at the service's close.

"Peacemaking is a hard task," she said. "But by every small act, we are bringing peace."

"Let us act tonight; we are making peace together."

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports the organizations that sponsor this event.



This Life-Changing Journey With fall comes renewal



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

It seems as though it was just yesterday that summer was beginning and here we are turning the calendar page on September! In years gone by, the church recognized this change in time with rally days, church picnics, and homecoming celebrations. It was generally the last opportunity to have these outdoor meals and activities. School begins again. College students pack up their worldly belongings to travel to new places where "adulting" becomes a reality. Church activities start again and the leaves on the trees would create an awesome tapestry of color. What a beautiful change for the world to see and experience. It is called FALL!

Our lives follow this same change of season as well. What a glorious time to rediscover our commitment as a believer. A time to reflect on how we, too, might step up our commitment to be a faithful member of the family of God. We can find a renewed sense of involvement and participation in this change of season. There are numerous opportunities to be involved in a new and different way in your local community. Look out for them and take on the challenge.

As a member of our annual conference staff and specifically a representative of the bishop's office, I will be finding my way to your week-end worship experience to remind you of this renewed hope and the grace of God that we share in this new season of being the church. I am not there to judge, but to worship and share in an experience of renewed hope. So as not to be disruptive, feel free to acknowledge and introduce any member of the conference staff you may recognize at the end of the worship experience. We can always share a brief word of greeting, and if need to, can offer the benediction. This is our opportunity to experience this new season of renewed hope.

See you soon!

Conference Advocacy Partners Learn From IL Supreme Court Justice



The Advocacy Partners of the Northern Illinois Conference led a group of 11 United Methodists from four Northern Illinois Conference churches on July 25 to meet Illinois Supreme Court Justice P. Scott Neville. He explained that three courts make up the Judicial Branch: the Circuit Court, Appellate Court, and Supreme Court. The first African-American justice was not elected until 1990 and the first woman was elected

in 1992. Today, the Illinois Supreme Court is made up of five women and two men, and three are African American. Justice Neville shared a few examples of rulings that had a wide impact in the state of Illinois, one of those being the 2023 ruling that abolished cash bail.

Your giving to NIC apportionments supports CCORR Advocacy Partners.



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, 2025 (unless otherwise noted):

Heather Connor (Provisional Deacon from South Carolina Conference) to Geneva (Prairie Central). Effective June 15.
Alexander Dungan (Provisional Deacon) to Wesley: Naperville (½ time) (Prairie Central).
Steve Williams (Retired Elder) to Tinley Park (½ time) (Prairie South).
Christopher Pierson (Full Elder) to retirement, effective Oct. 1. to retirement, effective October 1. He was ordained a deacon (pre-1996) in 1992 and ordained and elected into full membership in 1994. During his ministry, he served Chicago: Julia Gay; Aurora: Wesley; Roselle; director of outreach and witness ministries, NIC staff; director of connectional ministries, NIC staff; and Wheaton: Gary.

Mary Zajac (Retired Elder) to Wheaton: Gary (Interim Senior Pastor), effective Oct. 1. Mary follows Chris Pierson, who is appointed to retirement.
Magloire Kawang Keneg (Elder ¶1346.1) to Roselle: Roselle, effective July 15. Magloire follows Hyo-Son Oh, who is appointed to Morris: First as Senior Pastor.
SeongHyun Choi (District Superintendent Supply) to Rockton: Rockton (Prairie North), effective July 15. SeongHyun follows Carolyn Lukasick, who is appointed to Poplar Grove: Poplar Grove (Prairie North).

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

