

Document: 400.01

Cabinet of the Northern Illinois Conference Historical Report

Brian Gilbert, Dean of the Cabinet

“Persons would lead a most happy life if from their vocabulary they removed two words: mine and yours.” - Aelced of Rievaulx

The twelfth century was a time of great change for Europe, particularly for England. There was so much change that historians often refer to this period of English history as “The Anarchy.” It was a time when the structured and familiar feudal systems of medieval England broke apart and never fully reformed. This change continued until the Renaissance began. It was in this era of change that Aelced, a Cistercian monk, lived and wrote theological works that stressed the importance to serving others for the common good, rather than protecting one’s own self interests.

We too are living in a time of great change within our Churches and within the world. Be it in helping align churches and pastors with the reality of a post Christendom society or resourcing congregations and clergy in figuring out what the “new way” of doing ministry is for a reality that isn’t yet fully realized, the Northern Illinois Annual Conference Cabinet has been working diligently to navigate these changes. The Cabinet is doing all of this while also trying to hold onto the Church’s witness for justice and inclusion at a time where White Christian Nationalism seeks to dominate and control what churches can and cannot do in Christ’s name.

If I am honest, my cynicism tempts me to name this particular time “The Anarchy” as well. And yet, Aelced’s words for happy living still ring true. We must remove “mine and yours” from our vocabulary and focus on “our and God.” Our connectional nature as a church is one that keeps the good of the whole at the heart of our decision making and acts as a guard rail to keep us from wandering into territorialism or tribalism. It is truly an honor to serve on a Cabinet where the conversation isn’t focused on “My churches, my pastors, or my district.” But rather, discuss openly and passionately how we can create greater health for the whole of the Annual Conference. All of this is possible because of leadership modeled by Bishop Schwerin and the incredible talents of the women and men serving around the Cabinet’s table.

As old structures and familiar ways of “doing church” continue to change, will the challenges ahead of us be easy to solve? No, but I trust that the God that created us and united us through grace will guide us as we discover, together, new ways to serve God and one another. The NIC Cabinet is dedicated to working alongside our clergy and laity in order to find new ways to build a beloved community that seeks, not personal gain, but health for all of God’s creation.

Document: 400.02

Connectional Ministries Historical Report

Fabiola Grandon-Mayer, Director of Connectional Ministries

We have begun a new quadrennium (2024-2028), and the Office of Connectional Ministries remains committed to aligning the ministries of our Annual Conference with our shared mission: making and supporting vital Christians in vital congregations that engage with their communities and the world for peace, justice, and mercy.

The Director of Connectional Ministries' role is to ensure that our conference's vision is reflected in all areas of our work. This includes providing support for program ministries, collaborating with the administrative team, and strengthening connections among various ministries within the conference. It is also essential to maintain strong relationships with the broader United Methodist Church by remaining connected to its general boards, agencies, commissions, and committees.

As we began a new quadrennium, one of my primary areas of focus has been working closely with our Nominations Committee. This work has been especially important in identifying and nominating new leaders to serve across our conference boards, commissions, and committees. We approached this process with prayer and intention, seeking to reflect on the diversity, gifts, and experiences present within our conference, engaging leaders from various generations, cultures, and ministry settings.

Recognizing the importance of equipping leaders for their roles, I partnered with the Annual Conference Shepherding Team (ACST) to hold a Quadrennial Training in October 2024. This training provided a strong foundation for new and returning leaders, focusing on the spiritual grounding of leadership, clarifying expectations, and encouraging collaboration across teams. It was a meaningful and energizing opportunity to build a shared vision and prepare for the work ahead.

Leaders from our Conference were invited to attend the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) Quadrennial Training in February 2025. This gathering offered valuable insights and resources related to conference administration, stewardship, and leadership support. It was also an opportunity to connect with peers from across the connection and return with renewed clarity for our conference's organizational life.

As many of our conference committees welcomed new chairs and members at the start of the quadrennium, I dedicated the months of fall to convening, building relationships, and beginning our shared work together. It has been a joy and an honor to collaborate with so many dedicated leaders in bringing events and initiatives to life.

We are blessed to continue to have Amania Drave serve as our Project Manager/Consultant. Over the years, Amania has been an invaluable asset to our program ministries, and in this new season, her role has evolved. She is now focusing her efforts on supporting the work of four committees: the Committee on Discipleship and Spiritual Formation, the Commission on Religion and Race, the Council on Young People's Ministry, and the Commission on the Status and Role of Women. Her deep knowledge, organizational skills, and commitment to our mission continue to have a profound impact as she helps guide these committees toward greater collaboration and effectiveness. I'm grateful for her continued service and the significant contributions she makes to our conference's work.

After five years of dedication, collaboration, and hard work, our two task forces (Anti-Racism and Discipleship) have officially transitioned into a standing committee. This milestone reflects the collective effort and commitment of everyone involved. We've worked tirelessly to build the foundation for this

transition, and now, they are ready to continue their important work with even more focus and long-term stability. The Anti-Racism work has been embraced by the Commission on Religion and Race, and the Discipleship Task Force's work is embraced by the Committee on Discipleship and Spiritual Formation.

A significant part of my role continues to be overseeing the production and execution of the Annual Conference session. I've worked closely with the Annual Conference planning committee to coordinate all aspects of this vital gathering, including site logistics, agenda development, budget planning, and communications. I am grateful for the deep commitment of the team, whose collaboration and experience were instrumental in ensuring a meaningful, Spirit-led, and organized conference.

In September 2024, I was pleased to welcome Ariel Alonso as our new Event Coordinator/Administrative Assistant. Ariel has taken on a key role in managing most of our events at the conference and district levels, including the Annual Conference session. Her strong organizational skills and attention to detail have been a great help in making sure our events run smoothly.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to our Communication team, Rev. Victoria Rebeck and Lisa Smith, for their incredible dedication and hard work in communicating and promoting the life and mission of our conference. Their thoughtful planning, creativity, and attention to detail have been essential in ensuring that our messages reach the right people with clarity and impact.

As I look ahead, I remain focused on fostering deep connections across our conference, among boards and committees, and among churches, nurturing vibrant lay and clergy leadership, and ensuring that all ministries across the conference are supported and aligned with our core values.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve in this role and for the many ministry partners who lead with integrity, faith, and vision. Together, we continue to live into the calling of being a connectional church.

Document: 400.03
Communications Ministry Area Historical Report
Victoria Rebeck, Director of Communications

2024 was a United Methodist quadrennial year. It added two additional conferences to our already-full schedules: General Conference, April 23 to May 3 in Charlotte, N.C., and North Central Jurisdictional Conference, July 10-13, in Sioux Falls, S.D. This is the seventh consecutive General Conference that I, your conference director of communications, have attended (in 2008, I was a delegate representing Minnesota Conference) and the seventh consecutive North Central Jurisdictional Conference. I have quite a bit of experience!

It is always the case that more happens at General Conference than could possibly be reported. For communicators, the challenge is to identify which items have the most significance and which are of particular interest to one's annual conference. This requires a lot of concentration, because some legislation is acted upon quickly, especially when it is grouped with others in consent calendar. I posted stories regularly so that Northern Illinois United Methodists could stay apprised of major decisions.

This jurisdictional conference (Northern Illinois is in North Central Jurisdiction) is where bishops are assigned to episcopal areas for the coming four years. An episcopal area is the conference or group of conferences to which one bishop is assigned. Northern Illinois Conference and Wisconsin Conference are in the same episcopal area. The communications office was involved in helping to consider the questions that needed to be addressed before Wisconsin and Northern Illinois began sharing a bishop in September. I also interpreted to our conference what it means to be part of an episcopal area but remain an annual conference that governs itself.

This year, our communications specialist, Lisa Smith, accompanied me to both General and Jurisdictional conferences. It was a value experience for her to see up close how the denomination makes decisions. This gives her more context for her work in the annual conference. It also helped her meet more conference communicators from around the connection.

Last year the conference regretfully took an unresolvable conflict with a breakaway faction of Naperville Korean United Methodist Church to court. There was a difference of opinion among the members about whether the congregation should seek disaffiliation from the denomination. The group who sought separation would not follow the denomination's rules for disaffiliation, which included either purchasing the church property or relinquishing it to the conference. The judge ruled that the property rightly reverts to the conference. This attracted a lot of media attention and I interpreted the situation and United Methodist polity to reporters.

We continue to publish the Northern Illinois Reporter newspaper for those who still prefer that medium. The main—and most timely—repository for conference information is the conference website (umcnic.org).

We continue to publish the weekly eNewsletter as well as district eNewsletters about twice a month. These newsletters beat industry (religious organizations) averages for percentages of opens and link click-throughs. They provide the most up-to-date conference and denominational news.

Document: 400.04

Congregational Development and Redevelopment Historical Report

Christian Coon, Director of Congregational Development

One of the most challenging things when building a new home or church is the waiting. We may see exciting plans that show us a wonderful new structure, but we also know it will take time for the end result to be completed. The infrastructure has to be built first and most of that either isn't seen or usually as beautiful as what the finished product will look like, but the infrastructure, of course, is necessary!

As I complete my first year as Director of Congregational Development, I find myself praying for patience and doing the less glamorous work of building infrastructures. I spent a lot of my time the first few months just listening to leaders of the Northern Illinois Conference, listening to their desires, hopes, frustrations, and fears. It is tempting, of course, to produce a magic program or formula that will reverse the decline that a church might be facing. But, not surprisingly, those programs usually don't exist. It takes time to build a healthy church culture and we are doing our best to build processes and systems to both help our existing churches with revitalization processes that help churches assess their current situation, strongly encourage intentional discernment so churches can listen and watch where God might be leading, explore next steps (like a particular revitalization process or a "coming together" of different churches), and then move forward in faith. We are looking forward to introducing these processes in the coming appointment year.

In addition, we are building processes for planting new churches, as well. Steps in this process include identifying locations in the conference where new faith communities might flourish, assessing potential individuals (lay and clergy) who have innovative and entrepreneurial spirits, and then matching leaders with locations and move forward with financial and spiritual support. We also look forward to encouraging new expressions of ministry in all shapes and sizes, including smaller communities that meet outside traditional church buildings, a la the Fresh Expressions movement. We are excited about Violet Johnicker and her vision for a new community of faith for Rockford, a growing city with a need for, as she wrote in her proposal, "a faith community to match the energy and inclusivity of Illinois' 5th largest city." Violet is the first pastor we have had go through a new assessment process to make sure we are appointing pastors who have the unique gifts and graces of starting a new thing. We hired the consulting group Intersect to do the assessment of Violet and they noted, "Violet is a gifted, driven, passionate Christian and strong leader who is hard-wired for serving God...and has great potential for church planting. This is a 'run, don't walk' situation." We look forward to having others go through our new process!

Not all of the work has been behind the scenes. We have continued the Academy of Pastoral Excellence where 20 clergy meet monthly to learn more about all aspects of church leadership. We launched Teaching Tuesdays in January, regular webinars from guest speakers that share insights on topics like doing Lenten outreach in your community, the One Board governance model, and how to be a leader in a church that has different political and/or theological leanings, aka a "Purple Church." We have also begun a burgeoning relationship with Church of the Resurrection to develop another cohort for some of our pastoral leaders.

I'm grateful for the support of the Committee on Congregational Development and Redevelopment for their help in identifying focus areas.

Document: 400.05

Outdoor & Retreat Ministries Historical Report

Jeff Casey, Director of Outdoor & Retreat Ministries

Outdoor & Retreat Ministries (ORM), hosted 15,150 camper days.

Wesley Woods (*WW*), grew by more than \$100,000 gross income, served **85 unique guest groups, 1,873 unique guests**, for a total of **10,928 camper days**. *WW* had guests physically in-camp 7-days-a-week, June 3 through September 12.

The Board of Trustees (*BOT*), approved a one-time distribution of \$60,000 of Seager Endowment Funds to replace the *WW* Dining Hall roof—the leaks had grown so severe that they were risk management threats to guests (three slip-and-falls), and utilities (electrical shorts).

Reynoldswood (*RW*), continued to await the *BOT*'s, release of Insurance proceeds to repair the April 2023 tree-fall damage to Manor House, limiting 2024 use to the same **ten (10), guest groups** that could be housed without Manor Right in 2023—**926 unique guests**, for a total of **4,222 camper days**.

RW stopped the Summer Day Camp partnership with the Dixon YMCA because we could no longer justify subsidizing it, especially in light of the lost revenues caused by the inability to use Manor Right in 2023 and 2024.

In December 2024, the *BOT* did reach agreement and execute a contract to make the Manor House repairs in 2025—hopefully, in time for the summer season.

RW staff and volunteers restored trails, grounds and water sources to pre-COVID levels and locations, eradicated many of the poison ivy patches that were threatening trails and campfire areas, and replaced a Tree House deck and stairs via donated work party labor—only costing *RW* \$6,000 in materials.

The *WW* site is again financially self-sufficient.

RW hopes to stop cannibalizing *WW*'s income and staff within 12 months of completing the Manor House repairs.

Mission

While Conference leadership has directed ORM to keep both sites open and to minimize financial losses for the past 12 years, it was refreshing to finally meet with the Annual Conference Shepherding Team (*ACST*), in November 2024 to actually discuss the role of *ORM* in achieving the Conference's mission.

The *ORM* Board (*BORM*), added an opening clause to its mission statement to emphasize its *raison d'être*:

*ORM partners with local congregations to
transform and nurture guests and neighbors into
principled and passionate Christian disciples.*

Vision

ORM envisions itself serving as a self-sufficient, self-sustaining catalyst of transformation and growth for local congregations, conference ministries, and ecumenical partners.

ORM Strategic Priorities are to

- ! *strengthen local congregations*
- ! *Welcome, Engage, Facilitate, and Challenge all guests*
- ! *convey God's Abundance, not scarcity to all guests*

! be *actionable* because Vision without execution is *Hallucination*.

While reviewing master plans and minutes back to 1976 , *BORM* learned that Conference leadership's historical intent was to reduce the total number of physical sites from five sites (resulting from the 1968 merger of the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren churches), to one premier, sustainable site that would serve more diverse Conference purposes and needs.

BORM is revisiting that concept with the *ACST*, *CCFA*, and *BOT* to determine the best path forward to achieve the *Conference's Mission*, and ORM's self-sufficient, self-sustaining vision.

Document: 400.06
Annual Conference Shepherdling Team Historical Report
Mark Manzi and Anna KyungHae Shin, Co-Chairs

The Annual Conference Shepherdling Team (ACST) and its counterpart organizations at the district level, the District Shepherdling Teams (DSTs), were created to advance the mission of the Northern Illinois Conference (NIC). Their purpose is to ensure the proper use and alignment of resources in achieving this mission. The ACST serves as a place for consultation, advice, and decision-making, providing vital connections between Conference administrative and ministry areas, the Cabinet, District Shepherdling Teams, and local churches. Through this work, ACST fosters trust, collaboration, and accountability as we live out our shared calling.

In 2024-2025, ACST actively engaged in several key areas to enhance the work of the Northern Illinois Conference:

- **Consultation and Guidance:** ACST played a pivotal role in convening various groups—including Outdoor Ministries, the Council on Finance and Administration (CCFA), and Ethnic Caucuses—to provide insight and guidance on important issues. Some of these matters remain in discussion as we seek the best path forward.
- **Integration of Task Forces:** In early 2025, after successfully implementing the three priorities set by ACST in 2019, the Discipleship Task Force and Anti-Racism Task Force transitioned into the conference's existing structures. The Discipleship Task Force merged with the Discipleship Committee, while the Anti-Racism Task Force became part of the Commission on Religion and Race, ensuring continued focus on these vital areas within the conferences' established committees.
- **Strengthening Collaboration with DSTs:** Recognizing the importance of district-level leadership, ACST hosted a learning retreat in August to deepen collaboration with District Shepherdling Teams and District Superintendents. This gathering focused on strengthening our connection, equipping local churches with tools and resources, and ensuring that local needs, challenges, and shared ministry opportunities are effectively communicated for coordinated support.
- **Refining the Budgeting Process:** ACST strengthened its collaboration with CCFA to enhance the conference budgeting process. This partnership improved communication, with CCFA leadership providing regular updates at ACST meetings. We streamlined the budgeting process by introducing a preliminary discussion in November, followed by a final budget review in mid-February. This timeline allows CCFA to submit the finalized budget to NIC by April 1 for adoption at the Annual Conference in June, ensuring it aligns with the missional goals of the NIC.
- **Supporting Ethnic Caucuses:** ACST continues to provide a vital connection for our ethnic caucuses—Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR), the Fellowship of Asian Americans, and Hispanic Latinx Ministry. We receive regular updates on their work and explore ways to offer needed support.
- **Commitment to Adaptive Leadership:** As an adaptive learning organization, ACST dedicates one meeting each year to deepening our understanding of adaptive processes that advance the mission of the NIC. We will continue this learning through another retreat in August 2025.

At Annual Conference, ACST will facilitate small group conversations to strengthen engagement and foster deeper connections in our shared mission.

As we move forward, ACST remains committed to fostering collaboration and connection, resourcing local churches, and ensuring that conference structures support the vitality of our congregations. Our focus will continue to be on strengthening relationships between ACST, DSTs, and CCFA, deepening our adaptive leadership capacity, and providing guidance for emerging needs within the conference.

Document: 400.07

Professional Administrators of The United Methodist Connectional Structure (PAUMCS) NIC

Chapter Historical Report

Debbie Rogers

What Happens in the Church Office matters to the life of the Church.

National PAUMCS

The Professional Administrators of The United Methodist Connectional Structure (PAUMCS, <https://paumcs.org>) is a national United Methodist organization that focuses on the unique ministry of those who work in a United Methodist church office, be it in the local church, district, conference, episcopal or general agency. The mission of the PAUMCS is to provide administrative professionals a supportive base for unity and fellowship and to promote individual growth, professional development, continuing education, and spiritual enrichment. PAUMCS members provide essential administrative support that brings organization and continuity to their ministry. United Methodist church administrators are the critical support throughout the denomination and are the vital link for the connection.

Under the authority & guidance of the General Council of Finance and Administration (GCFA), PAUMCS provides outstanding advanced professional training and enrichment for United Methodist church administrators around the denomination through the PAUMCS Certification Institute and National PAUMCS Annual Conferences. (§807.19 UM Discipline 2016)

Our Northern Illinois Conference Chapter includes 19 National PAUMCS members, 12 of whom are Certified as a Professional United Methodist Administrator, 5 of whom have completed the Advanced Certification program, and one who serves as an Officer in the National PAUMCS leadership. The 42nd National PAUMCS Conference “Be Still and Know” took place at the Wesley Center in Woodworth, LA from April 3-5, 2025 which featured an emphasis on spiritual renewal to enhance ministry. The mission emphasis supported the Louisiana United Methodist Children and Family Services. (www.lumcfs.org)

Northern Illinois Conference Chapter of PAUMCS

The membership of the Northern Illinois Conference Chapter of PAUMCS (NIC PAUMCS) consists of all secretaries, administrative assistants and staff, paid and unpaid, who serve in a Northern Illinois Conference church, district office, conference office, episcopal office or general agency. The program and budget are administered by the NIC PAUMCS Steering Team, who are chapter members. There are no chapter dues; programs are provided through event registration fees and donations.

The NIC PAUMCS meets regularly together for an hour via Zoom every month to receive training and to share our insights around topics that are relevant to our work & ministry in the church office. Meeting once a month via zoom has been an instrumental way for us to consistently meet our mission of providing “a supportive base for unity and fellowship and to promote individual growth, professional development, continuing education, and spiritual enrichment.”

Chat and online topics covered during this Annual Conference year were “Getting Ready for Church Conferences,” “What About Safe Sanctuaries?,” “Self-Care Preparedness for the Church Office,” “New

People Portal & Statistical Reports Training,” “Sharing National PAUMCS opportunities,” “Be Still and Know- Conference Participants Share,” and “Let’s Talk Tech: sharing our favorite tech systems.”

Our National PAUMCS networks also allowed our NIC Chapter membership to attend the Georgia Chapter’s Lunch N Learn “Canva Tools & Tips” and the National PAUMCS Quarterly Training “Show Me the Money” on fundraising ideas.

NIC PAUMCS Steering Team

Deb Evans (Wheaton: Gary)

Kathy Cizerle (Roscoe)

Diane McGarel (Crete)

Wendy Miller (New Lenox)

Ronda Rathje (Savanna: First)

Debbie Rogers (NIC)

Doris Tropp (Roscoe)

Document: 400.08

Conference Council on Finance and Administration (CCFA) Historical Report

Kim Emery, Chair

In 2024, NIC collected 79% of Annual conference apportionment, \$4,110,820. NIC collected 46% of General Church apportionment, \$814,994.

NIC has collected a higher percentage for Annual Conference and General Church apportionment compared to last several years. The collection rate for Annual Conference apportionment was 77% in 2023 and 75% in 2022. The last time we had 79% was in 2021. The collection rate for General Church was 34% in 2021, 38% in 2022 and 2023.

More churches are giving more to the NIC Conference Apportionment in 2024:

- 56% of churches (176) paid 100+% - an increase of 2% from 2023 (171 churches)
- 9% of churches (27) paid 75%+ - stayed the same from 2023 (27 churches)
- 12% of churches (37) paid 50-75% - an increase of 2% from 2023 (27 churches)
- 23% of churches (72) paid under 50% - decreased by 5% since 2023 (87 churches)

More churches are also giving more to the General Church Apportionment in 2024.

- 36% of churches (111) paid 100%+ - an increase of 7% from 2023 (91 churches)
- 6% of churches (20) paid 75%+ - an increase of 2% from 2023 (13 churches)
- 6% of churches (19) paid 50-75% - an increase of 2% from 2023 (12 churches)
- 52% of churches (162) paid below 50% - a decrease of 11% from 2023 (196 churches)

Repair the Harm – As part of the Boys Scouts of America settlement related to sexual abuse of children, NIC paid our portion, \$742,429, in April 2024 to the General Council on Finance and Administration, as part of the \$30 million from the United Methodist Church. As of December 2024, NIC has collected \$568,858 from churches and individuals. NIC has until December 31, 2025, to collect the remaining amount, \$173,571. **If your church has not given yet, we ask that you donate to Repair the Harm.**

Red Door – NIC created Red Door ministry to provide loans to local churches. Since Covid, several churches had some challenges paying their mortgages. After working with some churches, most churches are back on track with making their monthly payments in full. Two churches are selling their property to fulfill their mortgage obligations. Currently, the total amount outstanding from 17 churches is over \$11 million.

NICUM – NIC's insurance ministry's mission is to provide a long-term, sustainable insurance program for all participating churches in the conference. In 2024, NIC billed \$3,681,219 in premiums to local churches and collected \$3,201,782, 86%. **We encourage all churches to pay their insurance premiums in full.**

Board of Pension and Health Benefits – In 2024, NIC paid approximately \$7million in pension and health care benefits expenses for active and retired clergy and laity. The clergy flat rate is \$1,850 per month, \$22,200 per year. Almost all the invoices, 98%, were paid by churches. BPHB ended the year with a balance of \$338,620. The new retirement plan, Compass, was approved by General Conference April 2024 and will start January 2026.

Document: 400.09
Board of Trustees Historical Report
Nancy E. Blade, President

This has been a year of discovery and new collaborations. Our two new Conference employees, Ms. Elaine Moy and Rev. Christian Coon, had a lot of questions for the Trustee Board. With their collaboration and Cabinet's direction we have been able to stabilize the work of the Trustees, the physical assets manager of the Annual Conference.

At the direction of the Annual Conference and the Cabinet, the Trustee Board was given the following new responsibilities:

- Closed Churches to sell: Franklin Grove UMC and Mandell. We are working on listing these properties and continue to manage "on the market" properties from previous years: Afolkey, Chemung, Sterling: Trinity, and Malden. Assigned Trustees visit the properties, help with the cleaning out of boxes for the archives, and report to the Board.
- Closed Churches to fix for missional purposes: From 2024 – Chicago: New Gresham, Freedom and Faith, Homewood: St. Andrew, Blue Island: Grace, and Thornton. The Lake South District Building and Locations Committee is to be commended for their vision and work. It was not possible to fix all six churches and realize sources of sustainable revenue in one year. Our Trustee report to the Cabinet recommended selling two of the six and repairing the others as we extend the goal of finding sustainable ministry partners for another year.

Properties sold in 2024 – 2025: North Aurora Parsonage, Flossmoor Parsonage, and the Chicago Area Episcopal Condominium at 6 Laflin Ave., Chicago.

Properties purchased in 2024 – 2025: Fur Court Hoffman Estates for the Prairie Central District Superintendent, and Primrose Lane Schaumburg for the Director of Connectional Ministries. We did not purchase a new home for Bishop Schwerin. He will be using a housing allowance.

Current legal negotiations:

1. foreclosure on the 2013 buyer for Rockford: Bethany UMC, and
2. re-writing the mortgage agreement with the 2010 buyer for Lindenhurst UMC.

Completed Legal cases:

1. Naperville Korean break-away group. Case closed with the "Trust Clause" upheld.
2. Payments to Chicago: First UMC/Temple Building Management ended August 31, 2024.
Reason for payments: penalty for breaking the lease.

The current Trustee Board manages six District/Conference parsonages, four leases, eight closed churches on the market, five closed churches being re-fitted for mission, five closed church parsonages, two camps, two vacant properties, and one campus ministry/dorm. We are limited by the Book of Discipline and Conference Journal to 12 persons, at least two from each district and a balance of clergy/lay, not including Conference Staff or ex-officio members. We get our work done by staying in touch with each other through the month and not missing a zoom call if we can avoid it.

The Trustee Board also has legal responsibility for the properties of three new faith communities: Oswego: Wellspring, Naperville: Woori and Itasca/Woodridge: The Center. New Faith Communities manage the property and pay all expenses, but ownership rests solely with the Annual Conference. A chartered church, in general, owns their property and pays the bills, but must ensure that the Book of Discipline is being followed (the Trust Clause).

The Trustee Board manages the Annual Conference trust accounts at Midwest Methodist Foundation: three Conference Reserve Funds (Pooled, Millennial and Program), the Keagy Fund for rural churches and the Camp Seager Fund for Outdoor Retreat Ministries. Each of these distributes annually to Conference ministries an amount agreed upon by the rules for the account, CFA, the Cabinet, the Treasurer and the full Board.

The Trustee Board collaborates with many across the Conference connection. The Board's work with the Cabinet, the Shepherding Team and the District Building and Location Committees/District Shepherding Teams ensure that there are safe spaces and enough resources for the mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The Insurance Board and Red Door Mortgage Board, who collaborate on property issues, were created through the Trustee Board. Assigned Trustees attend their meetings and report back to the full Board. When the status of a building changes or a bound property needs to be sold, the relationships we have made in the connection help with timely decision making.

Please consider what you could do as a Conference Trustee and offer your nomination to this important work. My work on the board has now concluded after eight years with a three-year term as president. May we always find connectional work rewarding and our relationships growing in love.

Trustees: Grant Bailey (vice president), Pastor Jeff Brace, Jim Loeppert, Dan Saavedra, Karen Doty, Rev. Sarah Hong, George Wentworth, Bob Wood, Mark Dunham, Jim Miller.

Document: 400.10
Committee on Personnel Historical Report
Rachel Birkhahn-Rommelfanger, Chair

Committee on Personnel was relaunched in the Northern Illinois Conference in 2024. Our team is made up of clergy and laity who have professional human resource management, business leadership and legal experience. During our first year of service, all the job description were updated, a review was done of compensation and salary grade, and performance evaluation process was put in place for staff. Much of our time has been focused on reviewing and refining the Personnel Policies Manual for Conference staff, which had not been updated since 2013. We collaborated with the General Council on Finance and Administration, who provided guidance on necessary additions and updates based on current legal requirements. We are near completion of reviewing this document.

Once that work is concluded, we will be turning our attention to supporting local churches. In January, in partnership with the Conference Council on Finance and Administration (CCFA), we hosted a webinar addressing basic financial and human resource matters for congregations. Looking ahead to 2025, we plan to offer a sample Personnel Manual for local churches as we continue exploring how best to help our congregations and staff thrive.

Document: 400.11
Board of Pensions and Health Benefits Historical Report
Beth Swanick, Chair

The Board of Pensions began the year transitioning to the new NIC Benefits Officer and Treasurer. Both have proven invaluable to the Board for their knowledge and expertise.

Decisions through the year have included

- Establishing Vice-chair and Secretary offices by vote of the Board, filled by Luis Reyes and Matthew Smith, respectively
- Changing the clergy default healthcare plan from the high-deductible H-5000 to the H-2500 plan, effective January 1, 2025. While the H-2500 is slightly more expensive, it offers a lower deductible, and therefore encourages participants to seek medical care before the health issue has a chance to become more serious.
- Changing the clergy flat rate, the amount churches pay to provide medical coverage for eligible clergy from \$1730 to \$1850. This change is in response to higher healthcare costs, the NIC experience rate for healthcare costs, and the inability of the Board to assume those additional costs.
- The decision to sunset the Pilot Program, started some years ago, to encourage pastors to enroll in healthcare coverage elsewhere if eligible (i.e., a spouse's employer's plan). Historically, only seven clergy members have taken advantage of this program, therefore it is administratively prohibitive to continue the Pilot Program for so few participants. The seven clergy who do participate will be allowed to continue, but the Board will not accept any future enrollees.
- Noted that the Annual Conference is collecting only 89% of clergy healthcare payments, and this is not sustainable. Decision was made to partner with Wespeth to enforce Wespeth's Required Contributions policy, with the authority to end coverage for participants/churches who are in arrears on premium payments to NIC.
- Partnered with the Board of the Clergy Fund to increase the Health Reimbursement Account contributions to \$125/month per year of service, and are recommending a change to the NIC Standing Rules to recognize service outside of the geographic boundaries of the NIC, if appointed by the NIC Bishop to another conference or extension ministry, throughout the Connection.
- Voted to extend Clergy Protection Program coverage to $\frac{3}{4}$ -time elders and LLPs
- Working closely with Wespeth Client Relationship Manager, Lois Long, to better understand the change to COMPASS and determine the Board's role in communicating enrollment and participation rules to NIC clergy
- Established Healthcare and Pension/Compass sub-committees for better efficiency of meetings and decision-making.

Document 400.12
Red Door Fund Historical Report 2024
Doug Roselieb, Chair

Started in 2013, Red Door Fund, separately incorporated, is a ministry of the Northern Illinois Conference to offer loans to local churches. Wintrust Bank along with Northern Illinois Conference provided the needed liquidity to create the Red Door Fund and allow local churches to benefit from the efficiency of size and improved credit as well as be relieved of the uncertainty surrounding the lending market.

The Board responsibilities include approving loans, monitoring payments of local churches towards the obligations, assures compliance with lending agreements with funders, and protects the conference's interest in avoiding payments against loan guarantees.

In 2018 Red Door refinanced our debt with Wintrust Bank. Three loans totaling \$17.5 million and a maturity date of May 18, 2028 were initiated. The repayment structure of these loans was requested to provide flexibility due to the fluctuating incoming cash flow streams from the churches and interest rate volatility.

In December 2024, Red Door paid off one of the loans with Wintrust ahead of schedule. The amount currently owed to Wintrust is approximately \$9.5 million and by the maturity date of May 18, 2028, we will owe Wintrust approximately \$7.5 million assuming no additional lump sum payments to them. Currently, Red Door is assuming refinancing this balance in 2028, but alternatives are also being considered.

Additionally, there were three original covenants with Wintrust Bank that remained in effect with our refinancing in 2018. Because of our ability to dramatically reduce our principal balance with Wintrust, Red Door requested the Minimum Debt Service Coverage Ratio covenant be removed and was granted by Wintrust. This allows Red Door flexibility when collecting additional funds over and above the regularly scheduled principal and interest payments from our local churches allowing us to build additional reserves when churches pay off their notes with Red Door ahead of schedule.

In 2025, Red Door also made a request to Wintrust Bank to consider lowering their collateral requirement because of the amount of principal reduction that Red Door has been able to achieve since 2018. Wintrust agreed to lower the amount to \$15 million giving Northern Illinois Conference more flexibility on previously collateralized assets.

In January 2024, there were 19 churches in the program, with a loan balance (asset of Red Door) of \$13,085,802. During the year, 2 churches paid off their loan ahead of schedule. As of December 2024, there were 17 churches with a loan balance of \$11,931,696.

The Red Door Fund remains in good standing, with overall steady performance, and most churches making timely principal and interest payments.

The few churches that have been challenged with making timely payments have been addressed and plans are in place to sell properties to not only payoff their debt to Red Door but also provide them additional funds to continue their ministries in different locations.

Document: 400.13
Midwest Methodist Foundation Historical Report
Chris Walters, President & CEO

Organized in 1949, the Foundation functions as an independent 501(c)(3) public charity with the mission of “encouraging lifelong generosity with God’s abundance.” The Foundation carries out its mission by partnering with many individuals, churches, and organizations to provide several services:

- Investment Management
- Endowment Genesis and Growth
- Trustee & Custodial Services
- Planned Giving Programs
- Donor Consultation
- Stewardship Development
- Financial Best Practices
- Ministry Grants & Scholarships

According to the Foundation’s bylaws, “All corporate powers shall be exercised by, or under authority of, and the business and affairs of the Foundation shall be managed by, the Board of Directors.” Directors serve three three-year terms. As of December 31, 2024, the Board of Directors with full voice and vote were the following 15 individuals:

Lisa Butler, Morgan Park UMC, Chicago
Ergeline Calimlim, First UMC of Chicago Temple
Rev. Avani Christian, New Hope UMC, West Chicago & Hope UMC, Naperville
Brad Colby, First UMC of La Grange, La Grange
Rev. Kimberly Lewis-Davis, Chaplain
Sach Diwan, Holy Covenant UMC, Chicago
Gill George, Barrington UMC, Barrington
George Groves, Community UMC, Naperville
Denny Hackett, First UMC of Morris, Morris
Naida Langdon, Morgan Park UMC, Chicago
Rev. Grace Oh, Englewood-Rust UMC & Thornton UMC
Marta Rodriguez, Humboldt Park UMC, Chicago
Jim Stoddard, Sycamore UMC, Sycamore
Tom Sumner, St. Mark UMC, Chicago
Eugene Williams, South Shore UMC, Chicago

According to the bylaws, there are three *ex officio* Board members (voice but not vote): the Foundation’s president, the resident bishop, and the conference treasurer.

The officers of the Foundation are:

Board Chair: Marta Rodriguez
Vice Chair & Secretary: Lisa Butler
Treasurer: Sach Diwan

President: Rev. Chris Walters

The full-time staff members of the Foundation are Rev. Chris Walters, President, and Demetra Kidd, Client Relations Associate.

The Foundation offers three funds for long-term investment: Conservative, Moderate, and Aggressive (and three corresponding “Climate Solutions” funds that divest from public companies that own fossil fuel reserves). All portfolios are broadly diversified among major asset classes and all sectors of the economy but in different proportions to reflect each fund’s objectives. The Foundation retains SouthCol Advisors, LLC as its investment consultant. The investment opportunities available through the Foundation offer churches and UMC-related organizations professionally managed, well-diversified accounts, invested according to the guidelines for socially responsible investing outlined in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*. In addition to screening out objectionable companies, the Foundation also screens in companies that rate more highly than their peers in the areas of Environmental, Social, and Governance, always optimizing asset allocation and performance.

The investment policies of the Foundation provide for a disciplined approach and to meet a variety of investment objectives. Net of all fees, the returns of the three fund models are (up to the most recent reportable month, as of this historical report, February 28, 2025):

As of 2/28/2025	Year-to- Date 2025	Last 1 Year [†]	Last 3 Years [†]	Last 5 Years [†]	Last 10 Years [†]
Aggressive Fund	3.39%	13.59%	8.47%	11.96%	8.87%
Agg. Climate	2.21%	14.96%	8.59%	n/a	n/a
benchmark*	2.85%	14.54%	8.95%	12.02%	8.88%
Moderate Fund	2.80%	11.12%	6.34%	8.60%	6.64%
Mod. Climate	2.09%	12.34%	6.86%	8.00%	n/a
benchmark*	2.40%	11.87%	6.82%	8.77%	6.97%
Conservative Fund	2.31%	8.43%	4.18%	5.01%	4.24%
Con. Climate	1.87%	8.95%	4.27%	n/a	n/a
benchmark*	2.12%	9.04%	4.46%	5.17%	4.79%

[†]The rates of return in these columns are annualized, net fees.

As of February 28, 2025, the Foundation had approximately \$105 million under management through nearly 700 accounts, owned by 123 local churches and several agencies and organizations. More than 200 of the accounts benefit several dozens of annuitants, trust income beneficiaries, and the charitable interests of donor advised funds.

Since 1999 the Foundation has provided several grants each year, totaling more than \$1.1 million.

The Foundation continues to participate in Dollars for Scholars (DFS), operated by the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation. DFS matches support from a student’s church, UMHEF, participating United Methodist-related schools, and participating Conference Foundations. By participating in this

scholarship program, the Foundation completes the matching of some local church scholarships to magnify \$1000 into \$4000.

The Foundation annually sponsors a field education cohort of five Garrett-Evangelical students to receive \$4500 each. Field education is a critical component of the students' seminary degree requirements. These field education students seek placement beyond the traditional church setting.

The Foundation is in its fourth year of granting the Uplifting Young Methodists Scholarship to assist minority United Methodist students to attend a trade school, community college, college, or university, granting three \$2500 scholarships to undergraduates in the fall and \$3500 to one Carolyn J. Cook Scholar.

The Foundation is currently sponsoring five NIC clergy and their local churches in a three-year intensive "Cultivating a Culture of Renewal" journey with leaders across the country.

The Foundation is currently sponsoring one local church and their NIC clergy who was selected to participate in Church of the Resurrection's "Emerging Leaders Program."

The Foundation and Horizons Stewardship partner to provide on-demand generosity coaching to Northern Illinois Methodist churches at no cost and no obligation to churches through the "Generosity Hotline."

In February 2025, the Foundation hosted with our counterparts in Wisconsin "Reaching Out, Welcoming In: Strategies for a Connected Church in the Digital Age" with 78 participants from 60 churches online and in-person at Christ UMC of Rockford.

In October 2024, the Foundation celebrated 75 years of ministry with 120 attendees and Julian Davis Reid and his band Circle of Trust at the DoubleTree in Downers Grove.

In August 2024, the Foundation hosted the "Imagining Good Futures Summit" with 80 participants from 42 churches with Rev. Mark Elsdon from RootedGood at Christ UMC of Rockford.

Document: 400.14
Retired Clergy Association Historical Document
Darneather Murph-Heath, Chair

The Retired Clergy Association is honored to continue to recognize newly retired clergy during our Annual Conference each year with our Luncheon held on site. Formerly retired clergy and newly retired clergy gather at a meal hosted by the officers of the Retired Clergy Association and the Board of Pensions.

Current officers of the **RCA** are Rev. Darneather Murph-Heath-**Chair**, Rev. Dwight Stewart-**Vice Chair**, and Rev. Charlette Hoffmann-**Secretary**. We want to recognize our past **Chair, Rev. Deborah Fisher**, for her awesome leadership.

We thank our Bishop Dan Schwerin for being present to offer words of greetings, and the General Board of Pensions for their partnership with us.

Programs:

June 17, 2024-We followed the theme of YIELD for this time of food, fellowship, and celebration.

October 8, 2024-Our Fall Program was led by the Rev. Daniel Cochran bringing us “The Healing Touch: Celebrating Transformative Ministries,” which looked at how Art and Scripture can work together to enhance our ministries.

Each year we present these two fellowship opportunities for our Retired Clergy and guests.

We look forward to continuing to make sure that Retired Clergy do not feel neglected and have opportunities to gather.

Document: 400.15
United Methodist Clergy Fund Historical Report
Michael Mann, President

The United Methodist Clergy Fund (the Fund) is an independent, Illinois, not-for-profit, corporation. It is organized to "procure, invest, and manage money and property, the income from which shall go toward the support of superannuated ministers, and the widows and dependent children of deceased members." The fund is related to the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church (NIC) because its bylaws limit its contributions to this Conference.

Founded on October 27, 1885, the Fund was one of the first endowments in the United States to provide assistance to retirees, making it a forerunner to the concept of pension funds. In existence for nearly 140 years, the Fund intends to continue providing significant levels of support for retirees of the NIC.

On December 31, 2024 the Fund resources totaled **\$ 36,050,620**. The Fund works with Wespath to inform its investment strategy.

The Fund averages the year-end value over the past three years to determine a yearly payout. This payout is made to the NIC to fund Health Reimbursement Accounts (HRAs) for clergy retirees and their spouses through a company called ViaBenefits. Currently, a clergy member and their spouse each receive \$100 for every year the clergy member served (up to \$4,000 per year). In 2024, 389 clergy members (not including spouses) received benefits. The Fund partially pays a life insurance benefit through UNUM. It paid \$73,088 in 2024.

In 2024, it was discovered that not all funds from prior years had been disbursed by the NIC. Therefore, the Fund only contributed \$1,125,000 this past year instead of a planned distribution of \$1,500,000, allowing those previously retained payments to make up the difference. The NIC paid \$1,233,439 to ViaBenefits.

In 2024, nearly thirty percent of retirees exhausted their benefits by October 1st. The Fund has worked with the NIC Board of Pensions and Health Benefits to increase by twenty-five percent the amount given towards the HRAs starting in 2026.

The Fund allows the NIC to be one of the few conferences, if not the only conference, to continue providing health benefits to its retirees.

The Clergy Fund Board of Directors is comprised of lay members and clergy members. These persons are nominated and elected by the current board of directors. They serve for terms of four years. Retired honorary Directors, the Chair of the Conference Board of Pensions, and the Conference Treasurer, and the Conference Benefits Manager are regularly invited to attend the quarterly meetings of the Board.

The Fund is a 501(c) (3) registered charitable organization, and welcomes contributions and bequests. The Conference office can provide information for making a contribution to the Fund and joining in our mission.

- Rev. Michael Mann, President
- Robert Martin, Vice-President
- Edward Andersen, Treasurer
- Dr. Kwang P. Chung
- Jim Leoppert

- Rev. Dr. Chris Pierson
- Jocelyn R. Vinluan
- Rev. Jamie Geiger, ex officio, secretary
- Rev. Tom Harmon, ex officio
- Steve Nailor, ex officio

Document: 400.16
Conference Board of Laity Historical Report
Connie Augsburg and Eugene Williams, Co-Lay Leaders

The Board of Laity supports the Annual Conference's vision of making and supporting Christians in vital congregations. The Board is comprised of the Conference Co-Lay Leaders, District Lay Leaders and Members-at-Large from (UMM, UWFaith, Lay Servant Ministries, Scouting, Director of Connectional Ministries and Clergy Representative). We meet throughout the year to discuss conference programming that aims to educate and empower our lay members to not only live the mission of our faith, but also to communicate it to the communities in which we live and work.

Nevertheless, we remained focused on the planning for our 2025 Laity Convocation which was a huge success. Our 2025 Laity Convocation was a face-to-face; in-person format. We were blessed by the generosity of our host, Reverend Wesley Dickson and the New Lenox community of faith. Our theme was, "A Renewed Hope – 2025: May God's Grace be With You." Attendees included Bishop Dan Schwerin, Laity, Clergy, District Superintendents, and Annual Conference Staff.

We were honored with opening remarks by Bishop Schwerin and were then served communion by Bishop Schwerin and Reverend Char Hoffman. Our keynote speaker was Mrs. Micheal Pope who hails from the Cal-Nevada Annual Conference. Micheal has served at the District, Conference, Jurisdictional and Global United Methodist Church level. She currently serves as the President of the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders. We then enjoyed a special presentation by Mrs. Elaine Moy; the NIC's Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer; who discussed the financial status of the NIC and what to expect going forward. We then moved into several break-out rooms to consider and discuss the messages from Bishop Schwerin, Micheal and Elaine (Videos and written materials for Laity Convocation 2025, as well as for previous years can be found on our webpage: www.umc.nic.org/laity. Go to the NIC website under the Congregational Life sub-heading.)

Your Conference Co-Lay Leaders also attended and represented laity at the following events (a partial list): Disaster Response Training by UMCOR; Wisconsin Annual Conference; Imagining Good Futures Conference; School of Congregational Development; NIC/WISC Joint Cabinet Meeting; NCJ Futuring Ministry; NCJ College's Fall Gathering; Quadrennial Leadership Orientation and the Methodist Muslim Dinner.

The Northern Illinois Conference is currently served by Co-Lay Leaders: Connie Augsburg and Eugene Williams. Connie is a member of Disciples UMC in Mount Morris, Il., where she has served in several capacities. She also serves on the Extended Cabinet, the Annual Conference Shepherding Team and the Shared Bishop's Task Force.

Eugene is a member of Chicago South Shore UMC. He serves on the Extended Cabinet, Board of Ordained Ministry, the Area Episcopacy Committee; the Midwest Methodist Foundation, the Annual Conference Shepherding Team, Annual Conference Committee and the Nominations Committee. Eugene is also Chair of the LSD Committee on Ordained Ministry and Treasurer for the NIC UMM. Eugene serves on the Executive Board of the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders. In July 2024, Eugene was elected to the North Central Jurisdiction's "Administrative Review Committee."

Connie and Eugene embrace the honor to serving the Northern Illinois Annual Conference and the opportunity to partner with our Siblings from the Wisconsin Conference, in the Northern Illinois-Wisconsin Episcopal Area.

Document: 400.17

Conference Committee on Lay Servant Ministries Historical Report

Peggy Hansen, Conference Director of Lay Servant Ministries

Lay Servant Ministries is committed to serve and lead in the Northern Illinois Conference! Lay Servant Ministries' mission is comprised of three words: "Caring, Leading, and Communication." Members of the laity that are educated and well-read contribute to the vitality of their local congregations. It is through the coordinated work of the Conference Committee on Lay Servant Ministries and the District Committees on Lay Servant Ministries that all laity can receive education, development for leadership and faith development. The Conference and District committees offer education through semi-annual lay academies and oversee the process of certification of Lay Servants, Lay Speakers, and Lay Ministers.

It is important that the process of bringing new members of the laity into lay servant ministries continues so the Basic course is frequently offered. Additionally, members of the laity can move along their faith journey because districts continue to offer courses that follow the Certified Lay Servant and Certified Lay Speaker curriculum. Additional advanced courses are offered to address the areas of individual devotional life, leadership development, stewardship, and elements from the social principles. We are working to offer courses in Spanish so more laity can participate in Lay Academies and become better leaders in their local congregations. While we currently only have one course text available in Korean, we hope to expand offerings in the future.

We are pleased to offer new courses in our districts that have been developed through Discipleship Ministries and the Training Committee of the Annual Conference Directors of Lay Servant Ministries. New courses offered in 2024 included: *"Loving People and Planet in God's Name"*, *"Exploring a Culture of Care for a Caring Congregation"*, *"Mission Possible 3: Lay Servants Leading and Governing Congregations with Simplified Accountable Structure"*, and *"Sacraments: Means of Grace"*. We are looking forward to additional new courses being offered such as *"Fresh Expressions of Faith"* and *"The Millennial Narrative: Sharing a Good Life with the Next Generation"* so members of our laity can proceed with the continuous learning advocated by John Wesley.

Northern Illinois Conference, know that Lay Servant Ministries will continue to hear God's call for the laity to be in ministry, as knowledgeable leaders in their local churches, communities and across the conference. We urge all laity to become engaged in the process and network of Lay Servant Ministries, this is the way that each of our congregations will become more vibrant!

Blessings and safety to each of you!

Celebrating 137 Years of Love, Justice & Service

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FuhxgfZc3U>

Our movement

The earliest known usage of the term deaconess comes from Paul's letter to the Romans, when he wrote: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well" (Romans 16:1-2). The Methodist deaconess movement in the United States began when Lucy Rider Meyer and her husband started the first deaconess training school in Chicago in 1885. In 1888, the Office of Deaconess was officially recognized by the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the office has remained active ever since. Methodist deaconesses in the late 19th and early 20th centuries are credited with starting schools and hospitals in communities where they did not previously exist, and the need for such ministries was great. Deaconesses often worked under harsh conditions and in cutting-edge ministries of social service on behalf of women, children and youth. They were courageous and set the path for many institutions in social service around the country today. Deaconesses and Home Missioners continue this legacy of serving in cutting edge ministries of love, justice and service today. We serve in a variety of ministry settings including health/wellness, law, education, advocacy and social service.

At the General Conference in 1988, when the category of home missionary was eliminated in The United Methodist Church, there was no place for laity who identify as men to live out a recognized calling to lifetime service. This led to the establishment of the home missionary category of service, the equivalent to deaconesses, at the 2004 General Conference. Legislation was passed at General Conference 2016 to make the Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner an official order within The United Methodist Church. The Order of Deaconess and Home Missioner is one of three orders of ministry in The United Methodist Church serving alongside the orders of Elder and Deacon and is the only order for laity. Deaconesses and Home Missioners feel called by God to a full-time vocation in service with those who are marginalized and in need in the world today.

Deaconesses and Home Missioners are laywomen and laymen who are called by God to be in a lifetime relationship in The United Methodist Church for engagement with a full-time vocation in ministries of love, justice, and service. Together we form a covenant community that is rooted in Scripture, informed by history, driven by mission, ecumenical in scope, and global in outreach.

The Deaconess and Home Missioner call to ministries of love, justice, and service is defined in Paragraph 1913.1 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline, which states:

- a) Alleviate suffering
- b) Eradicate causes of injustice and all that robs life of dignity and worth
- c) Facilitate the development of full human potential
- d) Share in the building global community through the church universal."

Our Ministries Vary. Our Call to Service Binds Us.

The Northern Illinois Conference has 7 active Deaconess/Home Missioners serving under appointment and 2 Deaconess/Home Missioners in retired relationship. We serve in a variety of ministry settings including health/wellness, law, education, advocacy and social service. Our ministries vary but our call to love, justice and service binds us as a covenant community.

Deaconess Joy Hayag

Director, Children's and Family Ministries, CUMC, Rockford, Prairie North District

"My name is Joy Hayag, a deaconess from the Philippines. I transferred my relationship in 2010 and have been appointed at Christ UMC. For almost 10 years, I've been recognized and commissioned as a deaconess. Currently, I serve on the vision team of CUMC, helping connect and promote the church within our community. A key focus of my ministry is working with children at church and school, mentoring them with my team. I also serve in the episcopacy committee, representing diversity and certifying church members for Safe Sanctuaries under Rev. Fabiola, while being part of the discipleship shepherding team our conference. Motto : "Never unprepared"

Deaconess Catherine Inserra

Manager of Faith & Community Relations, Kids Above All, Lake North District

"In my sixth year as manager of Faith and community relations for Kids Above All a Methodist- affiliated child-serving agency in the Northern Illinois Conference, I continue to build mission partnerships for a variety of resources and support with UM churches, United Women in Faith, houses of worship, community organizations and groups, and individuals across Chicagoland. Highlights of my ministry include preaching and speaking for United Women in Faith special Sundays and Days of Prayer, preaching in the local church, networking in all five districts, leading chapel for WesPath, and serving on the United Voices for Children's board UVC). UVC received the Bishop's Appeal during the 185th Annual Conference. I was the project manager for this appeal and for a follow up training event that brought together the three child-serving agencies' practitioners for a panel to address youth mental health. Kids Above All is serving 4,540 clients throughout Kane, Cook, Lake, and DuPage counties."

Deaconess Martha Lundgren

Aperion Wesley Place and Chicago Methodist Senior Services, Lake North District

Deaconess Martha Lundgren leads weekly prayer services and practices the ministry of presence with residents with dementia at Aperion Wesley Place and Chicago Methodist Senior Services Hartwell Place. She is also on the steering committee of Widows Supporting Widows, a Chicago area organization serving widows seeking to understand their experience and focus on growth. In 2025 she facilitated the merger between Irving Park UMC and Berry Memorial UMC that resulted in the formation of Renewed Hope UMC. Her plan for 2026 is to complete a unit of CPE toward gaining endorsement as a chaplain. Martha also serves on the board of Church Properties Reimagined.

Deaconess Joann Melad

Activity Director – Belmont Village Nursing Home, Lake North District

In 2024, Joann C. Melad navigated personal challenges when her father was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, prompting her to transition from full-time to part-time work at Belmont Village Senior Living. She also briefly served as Director of Children, Youth, and Family Ministries at The First UMC in Park Ridge, which was a fulfilling experience despite health struggles. After a period of rest, she returned to work in December. Joann participated in NIC-FAUM's Simbang Gabi, raising funds for youth ministries. In 2025, she looks forward to contributing to an end-of-life program at Belmont Village and new initiatives at NIC-FAUM.

Deaconess Amy Reimer

Trinity UMC Office Manager, Finance, Lake North District

"I began my 13th year as Financial Secretary/Office Manager at Trinity UMC: Wilmette on Sept. 4, 2024. The past year has been a time of growth in my role at the church and my journey as a Deaconess. I worked closely with the Treasurer and Finance Chair to upgrade the church accounting system. This process has led to increased efficiency and the ability to more accurately track the financial health of all the church's ministries.

I continue to serve as a volunteer with the Christian Education program at Trinity UMC and have greatly enjoyed giving Children's Messages during worship. After discerning a call to further education, I am now taking courses at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. I am enrolled in the Master of Arts in Pastoral Care and Counseling Program. I look forward to seeing what God has in store for me in the year ahead!"

Deaconess Barbara Sutton

Christopher D. Redding Youth Astha Foundation, Lake North District

"I am member of Maple Park United Methodist Church in Chicago, Illinois. Consecrated as a Deaconess in April 2024 at the General Conference in Charlotte, NC, I was commissioned in May 2024 at the Northern Illinois Annual Conference. I currently serve as Chairman of the Church Council and Finance Committee, and on the Staff Parish Relations Committee, United Women of Faith, and the Committee on Nominations and Development. I also co-chair Vacation Bible School and serve as Fundraising Chair and Treasurer for the Christopher D. Redding Youth Asthma Foundation, which has provided \$116,000 in asthma-related scholarships since 2015."

Deaconess Geraldine Mencias

Music Director St John UMC/Christian Education Director, Lake North District

Geraldine Mencias has served as the Music Director at St. John's UMC in Oak Park, IL, since 2001, where she leads the adult and children's choirs as well as the adult and youth praise bands, ensuring they are prepared for weekly worship services. She also ministers to the sick and elderly, uplifting their spirits through song. As the Christian Education Director, Geraldine trains Sunday School teachers and organizes key programs like Vacation Bible School, Bible studies, and confirmation classes. Additionally, she volunteers as a Dental Patient Educator, offering oral health education and affordable dental care guidance to Filipino American communities in Chicago.

The United Methodist Deaconess movement is a founding member of the worldwide ecumenical diaconal movement called DIAKONIA. DIAKONIA offers an international and ecumenical community of diaconal friendship, connecting us in diversity and commonality. DIAKONIA broadens our worldview and deepens our sense of diaconal vocation. DIAKONIA reminds the church of God's call to service, justice, compassion, and peace for creation, and assists us in living out our ministries in the world with vision and hope. Diaconia is organized into three regions. In the summer of 2023, the ecumenical diaconate gathered in Minneapolis for our quadrennial regional gathering of the Diaconia of the Americas and the Caribbean (DOTAC). This July, DIAKONIA World Federation will be gathering for world-wide assembly in Tanzania.

In November of 2024 about 100 members of our community gathered as an order through our association (The National Association of Deaconesses, Home Missioners and Home Missionaries - NADHM) at the historic Scarritt Bennett Center in Nashville to learn, dream, worship and advocate in community under the spiritual leadership of Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth. **1d 4 in-person and 7 virtual discernment events, facilitated intersectional justice education training events, met for advent and lenten studies and consecrated 27 new Deaconesses and Home Missioners while recognizing 4 transferring Deaconesses from the Philippines.**

The order of Deaconess and Home Missioners meets virtually weekly for spiritual support.

Is this the Call for you?

Is this a Call for you? If so, there is an opportunity to be a part of a supportive community in relationship with The United Methodist Church as a deaconess or home missionary. Discernment Events are held at various times throughout the year. The Deaconess/Home Missioner Discernment event is an opportunity to explore God's call to vocational ministry. **If this calling is for you or someone you know, we want to hear from you!**

Website: <https://uwfaith.org/what-we-do/deaconess-and-home-missioner/> (Feel free to add this to our Northern Illinois Website, we will appreciate it! Email: deaconess@uwfaith.org , Call: 1-332-240-3898

Document: 400.19

**Conference Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry (CBHECM) Historical Report
Daniel Cochran, Chair**

CBHECM has had an eventful and productive year, evaluating and supporting the five campus ministries that rely upon the Northern Illinois Conference for funding support: North Central College (NCC), Hyde Park UMC Campus Ministry, University Christian Ministry (UCM) at Northwestern University, and the Inclusive Collective (IC) at the University of Illinois-Chicago and Northern Illinois University. For the last two years, we have been working closely with NCC to increase the College's financial support of the chaplaincy position. When the previous chaplain departed at the start of the 2024-2025 academic year, our board worked with the new college president and alongside the Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer, Director of Connectional Ministries, to revise the chaplaincy job description and initiate a nationwide search for a new chaplain with the General Council on Finance and Administration. We are optimistic that NCC will have a new chaplain in place for the start of the 2025-2026 academic year.

Our other significant project involved re-imagining campus ministry at Northern Illinois University. Discerning the need for a new direction, we partnered with the Inclusive Collective at UIC to launch a new initiative. Under the leadership of the Rev. Larry J. Morris III, IC will evaluate the social landscape, hire a new campus pastor, and provide the support and accountability necessary for vibrant campus ministry. CBHECM will be involved in this process with two seats on the IC Board of Directors and through a strong working relationship between IC and First UMC in DeKalb. This arrangement also consolidates two separate NIC block grants into one funding stream, allowing us to slightly reduce our overall financial commitment while, at the same time, providing more funding to support the compelling vision and intentional implementation of the Inclusive Collective.

The new arrangement with IC at UIC and NIU allowed our Board to increase our financial support of UCM at Northwestern University for the first time in many years, all while still reducing our annual budget. Under the direction of the Rev. Julie Windsor Mitchell, UCM consistently offers a vibrant student ministry that provides an inclusive and transformative place for students to explore their faith. Our additional funds will help provide much-needed equipment for worship and mission work in the community.

We also maintained our Conference support for Hyde Park UMC Campus ministry, under the leadership of the Rev. Woo Min Lee. Members of our board were pleased to participate in a recent alumni celebration, witnessing the fruit of many years of effective ministry.

Each campus pastor extends their heartfelt gratitude for the valuable funding support provided by the Northern Illinois Conference. With these funds, they consistently create meaningful worship experiences, impactful group studies, and transformative mission opportunities. As a Board, we look forward to continuing to evaluate, support, and advocate for these campus ministries, recognizing their crucial role in the formation of disciples for the transformation of the world.

Document: 400.20

**Committee on Discipleship and Spiritual Formation (CDSF) Historical Report
Seamus Enright, Chair**

The Committee Members: Diana Davis, Ellen Feliciano, Katherine Howell, Rev. G. Morris Jarkloh (Discipleship Task Force transition to 12/31/24), Rev. Heewon Kim, Rev. Sharon Rice (Discipleship Task Force transition to 12/31/24), Pr. Tina Shelton, Rev. Seamus Enright (Chair); By Virtue of Office: Amania Drane (Project Manager, Strategic Goals), Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer (Director of Connectional Ministries), Yvette Harris-Black (United Women in Faith Representative), Joy Hayag (Discipleship Work Area, ACST).

The Annual Conference Committee on Discipleship and Spiritual Formation is committed to taking on the mission of supporting clergy and congregations in Northern Illinois for the sake of the Church's mission to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" and especially the strategic goal of making and forming new disciples.

We celebrate the work of the Discipleship Task Force as we navigate the transition to a standing committee and coordination with other committees and the Shepherding Teams.

We celebrate the work of those who participated in the Fall study, promoted by the Task Force and offered through the General Commission on Archives and History, *Radicle Methodism*.

We celebrate all the clergy who participated in the cohort on Leading Change in Congregations, which conducted its final sessions in July and August of 2024.

We offer gratitude to God for our Bishop Schwerin for the invitation to make 2025 a Year of Grace, for our DCM, Rev. Grandon-Mayer, and her work with the Committee, and for Amania Drane, who continues to support and encourage this work through the challenges of transition.

Most of all, we celebrate all the congregations and clergy in our Northern Illinois Conference who continue to do the work of inviting people to follow Jesus, equipping them with the knowledge of what that looks like, and engaging the practices that form our spirits and our lives in the likeness of Christ. Whether through methods that are tried and true or through innovative and creative experiments, your faithfulness and perseverance is a witness to God's enduring and unfolding grace.

Document: 400.21

Council on Young People's Ministries (CYPM) Historical Report

Sharon Rice, Chair

Inspired by the example and work of the Wesley brother's Holy Club, the Council on Young People's Ministry in the Northern Illinois Conference is dedicated to serving the many wonderful ministries that empower the young people of our conference, as well as equip and strengthen the leaders who are called to serve and guide them on the road of discipleship.

We're just getting started, but already we are seeing the Holy Spirit at work. From sponsoring educational seminars and workshops like last April's *Becoming the Beloved Community*, in which youth leaders from around our conference came together to learn skills on helping young people stand against racism, to advocating for programs that help young people grow in faith and community. Examples of this include JOY Camp at Camp Reynoldswood, which has been serving young disciples for over 30 years! And going strong for three years now, our NIC Fall Youth Retreat saw over a hundred youth from every district gather to connect in faith and fellowship. And we recognize the need for family support at Annual Conference, and are happy to help in coordinating child care services with local churches for this summer during our Annual Conference session.

The Council on Young People's Ministries is working hard to help young disciples and those that serve them, grow and lead the Body of Christ forward. Regardless of church size or the number of young people present, we believe all faith communities can be activated for these ministries. With God's help, we pray all will join us in our work, support the programs we sponsor, and share them with others, both within and beyond the Church.

Document: 400.22

United Women in Faith Historical Report

Barb Farley, President

I write this report in March 2025 as we are celebrating 156 years of connecting and nurturing women through Christian spiritual formation, leadership development, creative fellowship and education which inspire, influence and impact local and global communities! Our vision: “turning **faith, hope and love** into action on behalf of women, children and youth.

Redesigning our Mission u format had a major impact this past year furthering our ability to educate and inspire women. Winter Mission u offered both day and evening courses via Zoom. Summer Mission u was held at two different locations on different weekends which enabled many more women throughout our Northern Illinois Conference to participate, learn and connect with others. Winter studies were: *Living the Kingdom* and *Who Can We Be together?* The summer study was: *Welcome Home*, which explored how we can know God as an intimate friend who welcomes us.

UWFaith NIC is an active member of the World Federation of Methodists and Uniting Church Women. We hosted the 2024 annual meeting event in February at Chicago: Wesley. This was an excellent opportunity to work with women from AME, AME Zion and CME churches! We shared ideas and collaborated on similar mission work within our communities and globally. This interaction distinctly represents our new name, United Women in Faith, as we look to bring women from all faiths into action to further our common hopes and dreams for climate and racial justice.

UWFaith NIC members traveled to Springfield in April to speak personally with some of our representatives to put “faces” with our concerns for our state and local communities.

We are working diligently to bring women together and expand concepts of mission. In 2024 we have seen more collaboration and sharing within our districts regarding spiritual, educational and mission opportunities. We have seen new UWFaith units formed using Zoom, as commuting long distances is not an option for many. We plan to rigorously continue connecting and sharing with new and established units UWFaith within our conference. 2024 began our shared outreach and work with our Korean United Methodist sisters as we look to learn from each other and establish new bonds.

Faith is our foundation and developing a faith-driven future that includes women leaders is our goal. UWFaith NIC was very well represented at the North Central Jurisdiction Quadrennial Event in Indianapolis, IN. Moving forward, we will be more closely interacting with our sisters from the UWFaith Wisconsin Conference and the UWFaith Indiana Conference.

Our 2024 Annual Celebration, held in October at Arlington Heights: First UMC, featured our keynote speaker, Gloria Carter, United Women in Faith Wisconsin Conference President. This event was offered in person and live-stream. “Bind Us Together in Love” was our theme. Marilyn Steenwyk, past UWFaith NIC President, led the installation of our 2025 Leadership Team. Moving forward, we will be more closely interacting with our sisters from the UWFaith Wisconsin Conference.

We have many distinct challenges as we move into 2025 and beyond. However, United Women in Faith is committed to deepening faith and spiritual awareness so as to empower women to work together to transform communities, raise awareness and pursue more just systems. We know that **Love** is our superpower and together, we will work to understand how to be in right relationship with each other, our communities and the earth itself.

Document: 400.23
United Methodist Men (NICUMM) Historical Report
Craig McGregor, President

The year 2024 had the NICUMM continuing to recover from the COVID shutdowns within our new districts organization while reaching out in ministry and mission to help others to know and grow in Christ. At the NICUMM Lenten annual meeting hosted by Prairie South District, Mark Dehority shared future plans for the NACP/GCUMM (he is the new president of the NACP). He stated we are in the servant/leader/disciple-making business! He talked about revival and some of the things we are doing in the UMM.

Our Spiritual Congress and our mission efforts continue to be focal points for our men. The topic of Spiritual Congress 2024 was “A Thousand Roads – Every Man’s Journey of Faith”. Our keynote speaker was Jim Boesch, our GCUMM Staff Leadership Trainer and public speaker. The other keynote speaker was Jeff Isaac, CEO of Pathway to Adventure Boys Scouts of America (BSA). The primary focus of the weekend event was to experience self-testimonials and to develop your own testimonial.

Over the last few years, GCUMM/NACP has launched a new brand and website at UnitedMensMinistry.com. These new programs were presented at NICUMM conference, district and local unit meetings, as they were part of the NICUMM display at the annual conference. Many men are now starting to use the “United” app in place of the Live Bold app for their individual spiritual journey. In late 2023, the Live Bold app was phased out.

At our December NICUMM Executive meeting, it was decided that in 2026 NICUMM and the Boy Scouts of America would have a joint NIC Scouts Circuit Rider event in the Midwest for the first time.

EMS/Legacy Builders & Charters were a major emphasis to invite men to become involved in Men’s Ministry, especially those with elapsed memberships.

Scouting Ministries Programs are reaching out to younger men and women. The United Methodist Men supports, with National Memorandums of Understanding, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the United States of America, and Big Brothers / Big Sisters.

The Conference Prayer Advocate is working with the District Presidents to establish district Prayer Advocates in the effort to build a team to establish Prayer Advocates in churches.

Document: 400.24

Conference Committee on Accessibility Ministries Historical Report

Christina Crusius and Alexander Dungan, Co-Chairs

The NIC Committee on Accessibility Ministries supports local churches in making their buildings and congregations more welcoming to people of all abilities. We do this by awarding annual grants to churches working on accessibility projects, consulting with congregations exploring improvements and connecting them with resources, hosting workshops on accessibility topics, focusing on neurodiversity and authentic welcome and inclusion of people living with mental illness, coordinating information about accessible churches and parsonages, and advocating for fully physically accessible buildings.

When churches request our services, committee members visit a church and meet with the pastor, trustees chair, and/or other interested people. We complete an assessment for them of accessibility issues and work to recommend possibilities for improvement based on the national UMC Committee on Disability Ministries audit. The majority of our budget each year goes to grants for specific projects we have endorsed, such as making areas accessible for people in wheelchairs or with limited mobility, adding equipment for people with visual or hearing impairments to assist them in fully participating in worship, or purchasing products such as large print hymnals. Our grants only ever fund a portion of the project – the local church and other funding entities cover the rest.

In 2024, we worked with Aurora: Wesley UMC and awarded a grant to help them replace a broken wheelchair lift.

We also awarded a grant to Chicago: Gorham UMC to help fund an assistive listening system to make their space ADA compliant for worship and community events.

Additionally, our committee underwent a transition of leadership in 2024. We thank Rev. Violet Johnicker for her 5 years of service as chair, which concluded Summer 2024. Christina Crusius and Alexander Dungan have since stepped up as co-chairs.

We look forward to further equipping congregations for accessibility in the coming year through consultations, grants, and educational opportunities.

Document: 400.25
Keagy Town and Rural Committee Historical Report
Libby Rutherford, Chair

The Keagy Committee is responsible for publicizing and awarding grants for churches in small towns and rural areas. The Keagy Grants are funded by a bequest from Martin Keagy, who had a big heart for small-town and rural churches. These grants are for larger ministry projects that benefit the community and strengthen the church through evangelism, discipleship, justice, and compassion. This fund has been awarding grants for over 50 years. Awards range from \$500 to \$5000. The PACK (Planned Act of Christian Kindness) Grant is meant to support churches' work to be a blessing to those in the neighboring community to show them the love of Jesus Christ. Awards range from \$100 to \$500.

The creative ministries that won awards ran the gamut from quilting to seniors meals, and food pantries to youth outreach. The churches that received a Keagy Grant in 2024 included: Ashton, Cedarville, Dixon: Grace, Elizabeth, LaSalle Grace, Leland, Lena, Mendota First, Morris, Norway, Orangeville, Oregon, Sterling: First, Sterling: Wesley, Stockton: Wesley, and Tampico. Churches that received a PACK Grant in 2024 included: Apple River, Bethel, Brookville, Creston, Dixon: Grace, Durand, Esmond, Oregon, Pearl City, Prophetstown, Rochelle, Savana, Scales Mound, Stockton: Wesley and Tampico

The Keagy Committee also holds a Town and Rural Festival, which was graciously hosted by Dixon: Grace in 2024. There was a time of worship, project presentations, a discussion on racism in our small towns by Rev. Violet Johnicker, and a networking luncheon. The Keagy Committee is served by outstanding volunteers, including Hwa-Young Chong, Brian Gilbert, Ann Hecathorn, Leanne Keate, Rosa Lee, Toni Lucas, Bob Oorlong, David Saam, and Jeremiah Thompson. The committee is chaired by Libby Rutherford.

Document: 400.26**Conference Committee on Church and Society Historical Report****Rachel Birkhahn-Rommelfanger, Chair**

Over the past year, the Committee on Church and Society experienced both transition and renewed momentum as we entered a new quadrennium. Many of our previous members rotated off the committee, and COVID last quad interruptions contributed to a lull in our ongoing projects. As we welcomed a new chair and committee members we were renewed with fresh perspectives and energy; but our core mission remained intact: supporting local congregations in promoting peace, justice, and dismantling systemic inequalities through education, advocacy, and grants.

To meet these need our committee continued with essential programs—particularly our grants initiative and legislation to annual conference—while focusing on ways to rebuild and strengthen participation across the conference. We have also engaged in outreach and brainstorming to refine priorities that will guide our efforts through the remainder of the quadrennium.

Grants and Local Church Support

A key component of our work continues to be awarding grants to local churches engaged in social justice, peace, and anti-oppression ministries. This past year, the committee awarded a total of \$9,500 to congregations whose projects address the root causes of systemic injustices. Recipients are expected to provide reports detailing how these funds were utilized, which will help us shape future grant cycles.

One such initiative was led by First Evanston, which hosted the event “Rainbow Resistance and Reconciliation—Now Is the Time.” With the help of a committee grant, they not only advanced their church’s commitment to reconciliation but also offered valuable resources to the entire conference. Over 60 people from across the conference attended, underscoring the effectiveness of local churches as catalysts for broader community engagement. The rest of the grant awards are below.

Organization	Project Title	Amount Granted
Morrison United Methodist Church	Little Library for the Celebration of Community	\$1,000
Broadway United Methodist/Urban Village	Religious Nationalism Education Initiative	\$2,500
Pan-African Rural Health and Social Services c/o Glencoe:North Shore UMC	Supplemental Agricultural Initiative	\$1,500
First UMC Evanston	Winter Rainbow: Reconciling All Event	\$3,500
Pecatonica United Methodist Church	Soup Kitchen Support	\$1,000
Total		\$9,500

Advocacy and Resolutions

We remain committed to active advocacy and legislative engagement. Working alongside the Conference Commission on Religion and Race (CORR), our committee helped host a second lobby day in Springfield on May 7.

Beyond financial support, we have developed practical resources for congregations. These include one-page briefs on emerging social issues, particularly around immigration, which will be crucial for faith communities navigating the political climate following the 2024 presidential election. Our hope is that these materials will inform local church discussions and strengthen communal responses to injustice.

Partnerships and Outreach

Collaboration with community organizations, such as the Chicago Religious Leadership Network (CRLN) and Rockford Urban Ministries, has allowed us to broaden the scope and impact of our advocacy work. By joining forces with these and other faith-based groups, we enhance the conference's commitment to social change that is centered in faith and shared values.

Looking Ahead

Moving forward, the Committee on Church and Society will continue revitalizing our membership base and refining our strategic priorities. With our grants program continuing to thrive and our partnerships expanding, we remain steadfast in our commitment to empowering churches across the conference to be transformative agents of peace, justice, and systemic change.

Document: 400.27
Conference Board of Global Ministries Historical Report
Ayla Samson, Chair

The year 2024 was a remarkably fruitful one for Global Ministries. We welcomed new members to our Board and had the privilege of electing a new chair, Rev. Ayla Zaki. With a profound passion for mission and a deep love for the Church, Rev. Zaki has led our meetings with dedication and vision.

We are delighted to report that we successfully allocated the Bishop's Appeal offering to support migrants and refugees in our communities. Through a structured grant process, the generous contributions were distributed among 17 churches and organizations. In November, we gathered to celebrate and reflect on the profound impact these resources have had on the lives of migrants, offering them hope and assistance in their journeys.

We are also pleased to report the continued success of our virtual itineration program. This initiative encourages supporting churches and missionaries by fostering meaningful connections through smaller virtual meetings. These sessions provide an opportunity to learn more about United Methodist missionaries and their daily experiences in the field. #STILLINMISSION, a monthly Zoom event, allows local churches to hear firsthand from missionaries about their calling, challenges, and the communities they serve.

Also, we are delighted to share that churches and individuals across the Northern Illinois Conference responded with extraordinary generosity to last year's Bishop's Appeal in support of children through UVC. Through this collective effort, \$37,701.13. was raised, demonstrating a profound commitment to this vital cause.

We extend our deepest appreciation to all who generously contributed to the Mission Challenge in support of the Midwest Mission Distribution Center for an extraordinary act of generosity—donating over 5,000 pounds of essential goods along with a financial contribution exceeding \$2,100. Such a remarkable effort exemplifies the true spirit of compassion and service of our local churches in the NIC.

In February, we had the honor of hosting two missionaries within our Conference: Rev. Jonathan Daniel McCurley, who serves as the Tochigi District Youth and Young Adult Chaplain of the United Church of Christ in Japan, and Rev. Dexter F. Ceballos, the Country Director of the United Methodist Mission in Mongolia. Their visits provided invaluable insights into the mission work being carried out in these regions.

Additionally, we communicate the transition of Rev. Jane Eesley, who currently serves as the Methodist Liaison Advocacy Coordinator with The Methodist Liaison Office in the Middle East. Effective June 30, 2025, Rev. Eesley will transition from mission service to a full-time appointment as the Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church Chicago Temple.

Currently, we are in the process of reviewing the projects and ministries featured in the Mission Link: Living the Beatitudes booklet. This critical evaluation ensures that our efforts remain aligned with our mission and continue to serve communities effectively.

Together, the members of the board remain steadfast in their passion for mission, fostering connections with communities both near and far and embodying the call to serve our Lord through our work in the NIC.

Document: 400.28

**Commission on Christian Unity & Interreligious Relationships (CCUIR) Historical Report
Lynn Pries, Chair, and Catiana McKay, Ecumenical Officer**

CCUIR is a commission that is mandated by The Book of Discipline par. 642.

The work of CCUIR to provide representation of NIC and the Bishop in ecumenical, interfaith, and interreligious spaces, including councils and dialogues; to foster ecumenical, interfaith, and interreligious relationships; to equip and encourage the building and strengthening of ecumenical, interfaith, and interreligious relationships between congregations and their neighbors. This work is in cooperation with the Bishop and the Council of Bishops. Our work is discipleship strengthening, rooted in humanizing and understanding the “other,” and encourages active engagement in our local churches and communities, often creating new opportunities that strengthen vitality.

We pray that together, with our ecumenical and interreligious partnerships, we may address the new reality of today with the care and compassion of our faith.

Laity and clergy participated in the following in 2024:

Spring Lobby Day in Springfield with Racial Justice Taskforce and with the Commission on Religion and Race.

June Annual Conference: Guests from the Council of Islamic Organization of Greater Chicago were welcomed by our Bishop, and our 2006 Document of Relationship was lifted.

World Methodist Conference and Council 2024 Meeting

August of 2024 in Sweden - 2 NIC Delegates, Rev. Megan Tobola & Rev. Catiana McKay

Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago (CIOGC)

On September 23rd, 2024, NIC and CIOGC met as a planning team at the CIOGC Chicago offices to rekindle our relationship action. This meeting included Bishop Dan Schwerin and Dr. Abdulgany Hamadeh, CIOGC Chaiman.

We began our planning for the December 4, 2024 and March 11, 2025 NIC/CIOGC Dinner/programs. We hosted the December 4th dinner at Community UMC, Naperville. The CIOGC will host the March 11, 2025 dinner. Our Bishop, Dan Schwerin and Rev. Jane Eesley were the United Methodist speakers.

The Illinois Conference of Churches (ICC) 2024 Annual Assembly met in Bloomington on September 20

The National Workshop on Christian Unity (NWCU) met Monday, November 18, through Wednesday, November 20, at the Lutheran Center in Chicago

The United Methodist Ecumenical Interreligious Training (UMEIT) monthly meetings through Zoom. Theme: "Hear what the Spirit is Saying to the Churches".

Ecumenical Metro Chicago organized a “Care of Creation Declaration” signing event by thirteen denominational executives at the Parliament of World Religions and a dedication of the “Care of Creation” plaque at Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago on May 18.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Ecumenism Metro Chicago prayer service and we encouraged local ecumenical gatherings for prayer services.

Parliament of the World's Religions <https://parliamentofreligions.org/focus24/>

The theme, *FOCUS24 | Faith, Democracy, and Our Common Future: Shaping A Path Forward*, centered on concern for human rights, freedom, and democracy expressed throughout the Parliament's conference held in Chicago in August. **FOCUS24** was a year-long series of integrated events conducted in preparation for the conference.

Document: 400.29**Conference Commission Religion and Race (CCORR) Historical Report****Nadia Kanhai and Tim Alexander, Co-Chairs**

CCORR has assumed the role and projects of the Anti-Racism Task Force. The two bodies began meeting together in 2024 for this transition. As a result, CCORR Co-Chairs, Nadia Kanhai and Tim Alexander, actively work with numerous teams, including the Champion Team, Advocacy Partners, and the Arts and Cultural Series. This team has sponsored several events since the 2024 Annual Conference, including visits to various cultural events around the Conference. In addition, CCORR members as well as the Champion Team served various roles at the School of Congregational Development.

In October 2024, a joint project with the Committee on Native American Ministries (CONAM) culminated with a well-attended, day-long event at Starved Rock State Park for indigenous Peoples Day. A CCORR team helped coordinate a film series based on Isabel Wilkerson's film, *Origin*, that included over 500 viewers at various locations, including churches, libraries and community centers with discussions and an interview with Dr. Suraj Yengde, Harvard University, who helped in researching the film. In October, CCORR also participated in the North Central Jurisdiction (NCJ) CORR's Annual Learning Event in Ohio.

In December, the Co-Chairs attended a dinner and conversation with NIC Cross-Racial/Cross-Cultural clergy, who shared insights into the issues facing these types of appointments. CCORR committed to work with the Director of Connectional Ministries, Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer, to address issues raised. In January, CCORR continued their work with Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) to plan NIC's annual Martin Luther King Celebration. The Reverend Danita Anderson, Assistant to the Bishop, gave the keynote address at First UMC, Downers Grove. Over 150 people attended in person, and the event was made available virtually and later on the NIC website.

During 2024, we published an anti-racism monthly newsletter, "What's Going On?" for members of the Champion Team. Unfortunately, we ceased publication in 2025 due to lack of an editor. The Champion Team, comprised solely of volunteers, plays a critical role in supporting and spreading the word about our efforts and events to their local churches. The Advocacy Partners, led by Lisa Rogers of CCORR, held a Lobby Day in Springfield, to bring attention to Illinois legislative issues focusing on racial justice. Advocacy Partners also works on projects such as HEAL (Helping Everyone Access Life) Well, to assist community gardens and plant trees on Chicago's west side. Michelle Sweeney, Advocacy Partners member, leads BRIDGE (Building Relationships in Diverse Groups for Equity) Interreligious Alliance to connect people of faith to support each other through anti-racism and justice work.

NIC also participated in the 2024 Jurisdictional Racial Audit, and CCORR member Alka Lyall was elected as the General Commission on Religion & Race (GCCR) vice chair. Other CCORR project teams include Disciplining Anti-Racist Youth (DAY), led by Rev. Matthew Krings (Chicago: Renewed Hope UMC) of CCORR and Sharon Rice (Naperville: Community UMC), Chair of NIC's Young Peoples Ministry. The Becoming Beloved Community training team, led by Dr. Richard Guzman, continues to hold hands-on anti-racism workshops in the conference.

Document: 400.30

Conference Commission on the Status and Role of Women Historical Report

Irma Clark, Chair

The purpose of the Status and Role of Women shall be to challenge The United Methodist Church, including its general agencies, institutions, and connectional structures, to a continuing commitment to full and equal responsibility and participation of women in the total life and mission of the church, sharing fully in the power and the policy making at all levels of the church life.

The United Methodist Church advocates for full participation of women in the life of the church. We're helping the church recognize every person clergy and lay, women and men as full and equal parts of God's human family, and we believe that a fully engaged and empowered membership is vital to the United Methodist Church's mission to help make disciples of Jesus Christ to transform the world.

Women have gained a stronger voice and greater roles of leadership and responsibility in the mission work and leadership in The United Methodist Church since the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) was formed in 1972.

After 52 years, our work is far from being finished.

- Many congregations still do not accept women pastors.
- Women are five times more likely than men to be targets of sexual harassment and misconduct in the church.
- Women are less likely than men to hold top leadership roles-such as Chairing the Finance committee or Staff Parish Relations Committee (slowly getting better).

What we do:

- We address gender discrimination and sexism within church structure.
- We raise awareness of women's issues and opportunities. We educate Church Leaders on sexual ethics and policies.
- We monitor Annual Conferences and General Conferences for inclusiveness.

To help educate ourselves:

We had Lunch and Learn Sessions: Research Sessions on Salary Studies for Female and Male clergy and other workshops.

Our thanks to Rev. Arlene Christopherson for her time and energy she shared with COSROW and Rev. Pamela Pirtle for her faithful leadership.

Also, thanks to our New Staff, Rev. Fabiola Grandon-Mayer and Amania Drane, for your knowledge that you are sharing with us to help COSROW continue to be a healthy Ministry ~ we appreciate you very much.

I attended and was one of the speakers at Rev. Christopherson's Retirement Celebration held at Downers Grove First UMC, as well as the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the same church in January 2025.

Only a church that embraces the gifts and leadership of women and men equally is a church that is faithful to Jesus Christ.

Only a denomination that opens its doors to women and girls of all races, clans, cultures, and circumstances is one that is truly concerned with making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

We will continue to do all the good we can, to all the people we can, in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, as long as ever we can.

Document: 400.31

Conference Committee on Native American Ministries Historical Report

Michelle Oberwise Lacock, Chair

Our **Native American Ministry of Presence** served the community through Bill Buchholtz who coordinates this ministry. He provided an inspiring ministry through his music throughout Northern Illinois. His ministry has been with the St. Kateri Center, the American Indian Center, the Indian Health Service, the American Indian Association of Illinois (AIAI), Gichigamiin Indigenous Nations Museum, local UMC churches for worship services and for funeral services. He played for Midwest SOARRING (Save Our Ancestor's Remains) PowWow, performed at U of I Champaign, Aurora University for the special opening of the exhibit entitled "Away From Home", Illinois Central College, for International Peace Day, at the Peace School of Chicago. He performed at the Goodman Theatre prior to the performance of the Christmas Carol, at the Spiritual Unity of the Tribe gathering and at the Field Museum.

Bill played for our celebration at Starved Rock for Indigenous People's Day on October 14th. This was a joint event with the Anti-Racism Task Force. Featured were Brian Fox Ellis, a storyteller and historian, Gerald Savage-Illinois Humanities Road Scholar; Taylor Thornton who shared her Indigenous people's research and Jody Roy Director of Kateri Center in Chicago. Prior to the event we held four learning sessions featuring Gerald Savage on a *Brief History of the Reintroduction of Native Americans into Illinois*, Amy Allan on *Harmonious Kinship with the Land*, Dr. Dorene Wiese Executive Director of AIAI on, *Healing the Urban American Indian Erasure* and Rev. Chebon Kernel-Director of UMC Native American Comprehensive Plan on-*Indigenous Sovereignty: Respecting the Voices of Self Determination*. All events were well attended, and we were grateful for the participation and financial support for these projects.

We also worked with CORR and sponsored an evening at the *Away from Home* Boarding School exhibit at Aurora University. Joseph Standing Bear, Director of Midwest SOARRING gave a moving presentation.

We sponsored a scholarship for Native American college students who are part of the American Indian Association of Illinois, (AIAI) an urban-based nonprofit dedicated to transforming American Indian education. Assisted Midwest SOARRING (Save Our Ancestor's Remains) PowWow both financially and by being in attendance. The committee members promoted Native American Ministry Sunday in their local churches as well as participated or led services throughout the annual conference. We also participated in the monthly NCJ CONAM committee meetings where we partnered with a variety of activities that are happening in NCJ.

"Friend do it this way-that is, whatever you do in life, do the very best you can with both your heart and minds. And if you do it that way, the Power of the Universe will come to your assistance, if your heart and mind are in Unity. When one sits in the Hoop Of The People, one must be responsible because All of Creation is related. And the Hurt of one is the hurt of all. And the honor of one is the honor of all. And whatever we do effects everything in the universe. If you do it that way-that is, if you truly join your heart and mind as One-whatever you ask for, that the Way it's Going to be." *Lakota Instructions for Living passed down from White Buffalo Calf Woman*

Document: 400.32
NetZero Taskforce Historical Report
Harriette Cross, Chair

The NetZero Taskforce continues to work to move the conference toward using zero gas emissions by 2050. This is the third year since Bishop John Hopkins called this taskforce to this work. Bishop Dan Scherwin has continued to support this work. He said “As a church, we are called to take care of creation. The United Methodist Church and now our own NetZero Team, offer us countless ways to practice stewardship that increases care of the planet.” The taskforce has worked to inform the conference about the importance of eco sustainability. We have provided resources and support for the conference; churches and individuals to make their spaces environmentally friendly. 2024 has been a busy year. Over the last year we:

- Passed legislation to encourage all congregations to select a NetZero Advocate during the nomination process.
- Met with the entire taskforce via zoom three times. Membership for the taskforce includes members from all five districts.
- Worked with the Board of Global Ministries
- In September, we held a Green Summit at Geneva UMC. We presented certificates to 7 churches for their eco sustainability work; organizations gave presentations of how they can help congregations; and resourced representatives from congregations from all over the conference.
- Gave presentation at all 5 District Leadership Trainings. We are working with the District Superintendents to resource congregations.
- Provided resource tables at Annual Conference and other conference events
- written several articles for the Reporter, we also have a website and Facebook page

Our goals for the coming year are: to increase participation in the taskforce across all districts, encourage all congregations to have a NetZero Advocate, to present monetary awards to congregations who are developing NetZero programs, and to take steps to become a committee of the Annual conference.

We invite every United Methodist in Northern Illinois to pledge, partner and advocate for reduced carbon emissions in an equitable and just manner.

Document: 400.33
The Zone Historical Report
Zaki Labib Zaki

Southeast United Methodist Youth & Community Center - A Shalom Zone
Celebrating the Journey
2002 - 2025
Submitted by Rev. Dr. Zaki Labib Zaki

After 23 years of passionate, committed, and voluntary ministry to the Southeast Side neighborhoods of Chicago, the leadership of the Southeast United Methodist Youth & Community Center (the Zone) passed the baton back to the Northern Illinois Conference by turning its assets and property held in trust back to the Board of Trustees of the Northern Illinois Conference.

Since the Zone was always an Easter force in the Southeast neighborhoods of Chicago, it was decided that the passing of the baton back to the Northern Illinois Conference be done during Eastertide on April 30, 2025.

Here is a summary of the Zone's ministries and activities during the past 23 years:

1. The Zone served as a major community hub hosting job fair, community forums, and major community events. During COVID, the Zone functioned as the major center for free COVID vaccination in the area.
2. The Zone developed and led mentoring programs at several local Public schools including Douglas Taylor Elementary School, William K. New Sullivan Elementary School, George Washington High School, and Bowen High School in South Chicago.
3. The Zone offered high quality after-school programs, summer camps, as well as music, computer, arts, drama, dance, martial arts, boxing, and Christian Discipleship programs for children, teens, and adults. 100s of children and youth had enrolled in the Zone's programs. All of the Zone's programs were offered free of charge.
4. The Zone contributed significantly to strengthen the environmental movement in the Southeast Side of Chicago. The Zone helped develop and lead the Environmental Justice Alliance of the Greater Southeast Side of Chicago.
5. The Zone contributed significantly to address gang-related violence in the Southeast Side of Chicago. The Zone helped develop and lead the Southeast Chicago Anti-gang Initiative which brought together 30+ community organizations and schools.
6. The Zone provided support for seniors in the community and offered free office and meeting space for the Steelworkers of America retirees.

The Zone received numerous City and State Awards including the State of Illinois Distinguished Leadership Award awarded jointly to Rev. Dr. Zaki L. Zaki and the Zone, the Chicago Police Department Community Service Award, and the City of Chicago Outstanding Community Partner Award.

We acknowledge with much gratitude all the United Methodist congregations that had contributed generously to the ministry of the Zone through the Northern Illinois Conference Rainbow Covenant.

We acknowledge with much gratitude the visionary leadership of Bishop C. Joseph Sprague and Bishop Hee-Soo Jung, and their Cabinets in founding and establishing the ministry of the Zone.

On October 5, 2002, Bishop C. Joseph Sprague led a Service for the Consecration of the Zone.

Among the prayers lifted that day was the prayer "Prophets of a Future Not Our Own," written by Ken Untener in 1979, and commonly known as "Oscar Romero's Prayer":

*".... This is what we are about: We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.
This enables us to do something, and to do it well.
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter
and to do the rest..."*

The Zone, with help from the Northern Illinois Conference has indeed laid faithful foundations. These will need further development. We have done a few things and have done them well. Now we trust God's grace working through the Northern Illinois Conference will continue the work of spreading God's Shalom in the communities of the Southeast Side of Chicago through acts of love, justice, and peace for the glory of God's holy name. Amen.

Document: 400.34

Commission on Archives and History Historical Report

Dan Swinson, Convener and Conference Historian

This has been another challenging and interesting year for the NIC Commission on Archives and History. Each of our active members has particular interest or expertise in an area: UMW/United Women in Faith history, history of this annual conference, history of Norwegian-Danish Methodism, and history of Swedish Methodism. We would welcome new members with special interest in racial/ethnic minority churches, or other aspects of our history. We usually meet once a quarter, either at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary or at United Church of Sandwich, Illinois. We also participate in monthly Zoom meetings with archivists from other annual conferences around the United States.

Our work has been concentrated in the conference archives, housed in a restricted area of the basement of Styberg Library at G-ETS. For whatever reason, we had fewer research requests than in previous years, but among the requests for information we received were questions about former ministers at Pullman UMC, information about a minister at the former Wabash Avenue MEC, further research about El Buen Pastor UMC (formerly Bethany-Riverview Park UMC), searching for an article in the former *Together* magazine, and information about the late Rev. Thomas Krumpe (it turned out he was in IGRC). Beginning in March 2025, we collaborated with a researcher from the Chicago History Museum who is interested in specific congregational histories for an exhibition project.

One project we undertook was creating a display for Annual Conference about the sixtieth anniversary of the merging of the Rock River and Lexington Conferences in June 1964. We copied photographs of the former Lexington Conference churches, and indicated their locations on a silhouette map of Chicago and nearby suburbs. Brief histories of each church were included. We hope to display our work again at this year's conference.

The bulk of our time was spent in gathering and then sorting through boxes of materials from closed and/or disaffiliated churches. We have nearly one hundred banker's boxes to sort through. Marilyn Steenwyk has focused some of her time in organizing UMW materials, discarding duplicate (and triplicate) copies of documents. Carol Noren has created still another interim finding aid, noting the locations of newly filled and labeled archival boxes. With materials received from the NIC office after it moved, we created two new categories for the archives: 'public' materials about retired or deceased clergy (such as newspaper articles) and photos of clergy and laity that do not clearly belong in any congregation's files. We have maxed out our leased shelf space; something will have to change and discussions regarding the best way(s) forward have begun.

In the meantime, we will participate in the July 2025 NCJ-CAH meeting in Greencastle, Indiana, and are discussing these possibilities:

- hosting the NCJ-CAH in 2026
- serving as a resource by offering workshops to the districts in NIC.
- recruiting more members for NIC-CAH. All our participating members are ex-officio, over 70 in age, and our terms on CAH have long-since expired.

Document: 400.35

**Chicago Black Methodists for Church Renewal, Inc., of Northern Illinois Historical Report
Sylvia Jo Oglesby, Chair and Program Coordinator**

The Northern IL Conference 2024 Program Budget Proposal was approved for the \$50,000 requested. This meant that BMCR could continue to carry out programs within the three (3) priority areas of the NIC: 1) Make Disciples of Jesus Christ; 2) Support Church Revitalization; and 3) Address Racism as Incompatible with Christianity. Our major goal was to focus on “making disciples” in every program endeavor and activity as indicated below:

The Annual Laity Roundtable of local church leaders convened for a Friday night fish fry and discussion about the status of our local churches, how we can work closely and how they are key to the work, mission and ministry of BMCR. We agreed to strengthen our communication by sharing information about church programs and events.

We rejoiced to celebrate the 5th Annual Black Teens Matter (Pembroke Institute component) Presidents’ Day Holiday Hook-Up in two events, one virtual and one in-person, led by Julian Davis Reid and Jonathan Banks. This has been the entity to engage available youth, due to the lack of teens in local churches to participate in a Pembroke Institute program designed to serve a larger group of youth for a week-long retreat.

March brought forth an edict to reorder and reset many of our churches, which resulted in a number of church closings, mergers or other partnerships. There had been no prior warning and members of churches being merged or closed were displaced having to make hard choices about future church affiliation. This was unsettling for some congregations but a welcomed solution for others.

The Annual Conference Martin Luther King, Jr., service was held at St. Mark UMC and we represented BMCR by bringing a prayer. It was duly noted that attendance by members of Black churches was sparse.

We endeavor to ensure a BMCR presence at most church events and special programs, such as youth-led worship services, etc., concerts, revivals, anniversary celebrations; support is also extended by purchasing tickets and inviting members to attend. These occasions are also opportunities to invite persons to become members.

The General Membership meeting kicked off a challenge for several churches to compete to bring in 25 memberships. The host church pastor announced the BMCR meeting would be held at their church and a number of members attended in response. The Lay Leader used that opportunity to sign up more than 15 new members. This sparked an endeavor by two other churches to follow suit to bring in more members and they did.

SECOND QUARTER 2024

It was a great privilege to attend the Garrett Evangelical graduation and support Rev. Sandra Gullledge on receiving her Master of Divinity Degree and Pastor Linny Hartzell who received her Doctor of Ministry Degree. Next, we attended the McCormick Theological Seminary Graduation to support Valorie Tatum as she received her Master of Divinity Degree; Rev. Charles A. Woolery, Sr. also received his Doctor of Ministry Degree. We are still seeing second-career women entering ministry and no persons coming forth from local churches.

On Pentecost Sunday we attended the Hartzell Memorial UMC Confirmation worship service and witnessed the very talented confirmands who spoke. That afternoon we attended the Pentecost Hymn Fest at East Side UMC led by Pastors Luther Mason and D. Josiah Montgomery.

Of course, a lot of attention was focused on the General Conference and a number of people attended or followed the proceedings. Many persons were delighted by the Conference and outcomes and many are still celebrating Bishop Tracy Smith Malone in her new role as President of the Council of Bishops. This has been uplifting news, as we witness and take pride in a Pembroke Institute alum as a Disciple who is indeed transforming the world. Our LIFE member, Rita L. Smith, a Conference Delegate, has kept us informed on a regular basis, leading up to and since General Conference.

During this period, we were intensely engaged in developing a major exhibit for display at the Northern Illinois Annual Conference. Labeled the "Divine Project," it displayed photos of Pembroke Alums as Disciples of Jesus Christ transforming the world, Disciples on the rise and Disciples in the making. It was created with the help of some amazing talented professionals who contributed toward a decorative display and handout with information about each disciple. Gifts of BMCR beverage cups filled with delicious cake pops were also shared with exhibit guests.

We were able to share in the final worship service of Chicago Faith UMC as they were ending the ministry of their congregation. It was painful to witness the number of church closings voted upon during the Annual Conference.

Our next major endeavor was the Confirmation and Annual June Worship Celebration on June 23rd at Morgan Park UMC where we celebrated the 2024 class of 7 confirmands from 3 local churches and sent forth 9 youth and 4 chaperones from Maple Park UMC to attend Harambee at Claflin University, June 25-30. The preacher was Rev. Harlene Harden who encouraged the youth to dream, pay attention to and consider following their dreams for dreams can come true. All students were given book bags filled with an engraved BMCR Bible along with other treats and useful items. A time of fellowship and refreshments was shared following the worship service. It was truly "A Family Affair."

THIRD QUARTER 2024

Saturday, July 20, we celebrated children at the Annual Kwanzaa in July Dreamers and Dream Makers Awards Luncheon of the Bronzeville Children's Museum. This was part of our community outreach and collaborative relations.

We expressed our concern and support for pastors challenged by appointment changes.

August 3, our Annual Black Teens Matter Back-To-School Send-off sponsored 12 youth and 12 adults to enjoy the Timeless Gifts Show featuring performances by students trained to perform in many areas of the arts.

August 4, we shared in the worship services of Wesley UMC and celebrated Pastor Woolery's 30-Year Anniversary of his ministry, his graduation from seminary receiving his D. Min and his birthday. We were blessed by the worship experience and the warm fellowship and celebration with mimosas and a bountiful meal.

Also, during August, a number of churches were having community outreach and back-to school events, serving food and giving away gift bags, school supplies and book bags to students. Our local church food pantries continued and even expanded to faithfully address the food deprivation in their communities.

The month of September was filled with church fundraisers, United Women in Faith events each Sunday, a 3-night revival and installation of the pastor of 3 merged churches, intense preparation for the forthcoming 33rd Laity Awards Luncheon celebration and planning for Church Conferences.

The third quarter general membership meeting took place, hosted by Faith UMC in Dolton, where a number of clergy attended. Rev. Sandra Gullledge, the host pastor, put forth a special effort to encourage clergy to attend and received a positive response.

Four youth and two chaperones from Resurrection UMC were sponsored to attend the NIC Youth Retreat which was a valuable experience and broadened their outreach and exposure

Three representatives attended the NCJ Annual Meeting in Ohio. A tribute was paid in memory of Rev. Dennis M. Oglesby, Jr., who served NCJ for many years.

Sherman UMC sponsored the Fisk University Choir in its 16th annual concert. BMCR supported this event with representation by four members. A tribute was also paid to Rev. Oglesby for his legacy and service.

The 33rd Laity Awards Celebration was successfully carried out honoring 31 Disciples of Jesus Christ from 16 local churches. Attendance of over 300 people was a surprise even though participation was down by six churches due to church closures or mergers in June. Linda L. Davis, a Founding Member of BMCR, and member of Southlawn UMC, 96 years old, served as Presiding Elder over the event. She lit the BMCR Founders' Legacy Candle in memory of our ancestors, founders and those who passed away since the 32nd Laity Awards Celebration. Bishop Schwerin shared a video greeting and it was a wonderful gathering. Young people were in the forefront and a good time was had by all.

The 2024 December World AIDS Day collaboration with McCormick Seminary was a celebration of 20 years of convening the Clergy and Lay HIV/AIDS Leadership Summit. The collaboration was broadened by holding the event at Bishop Allen House AME Headquarters in the Bronzeville Community. An update on the progress in HIV/AIDS treatment was a major revelation while equitable funding for Black health providers was cited as an ongoing challenge.

We celebrated 56 years at the Annual Meeting on December 14, hosted by Maple Park UMC. The program focus was to shine the spotlight on, and hear from, youth who are Disciples on the Rise and Disciples in the Making. Several youth spoke on their participation in Harambee at Claflin University in South Carolina, the NIC youth weekend retreat and the Laity Awards program. A surprise guest was Caleb Bunton, St. Mark Morehouse student, who greeted us and shared remarks.

Bettie and Donald Lusk served as Presiding Elders over the Annual Meeting and were named BMCR Honorary Founders' Legacy LIFE Members, to be celebrated at the next major BMCR general membership gathering.

IN LOVING MEMORY

While the annual gathering of the BMCR General Membership is a warm and generous fellowship, it is also an opportunity to remember and acknowledge our ancestors, founders, members and loved ones who departed from our midst. When the Founders' Legacy Candle is lit, we mention those who passed away during the past year. We cherish the memory of Rev. Margaret Ann Williams, Rev. Dennis M. Oglesby, Jr., James Trimble and Rev. Dr. Francine Taylor-Thirus, Esquire. Their legacies will remain with us forever.

IN APPRECIATION

We give thanks “with grateful hearts” for the service of all the volunteers, laity in leadership and committed BMCR members who give of their time and talents toward the mission and ministry of Chicago BMCR. Thanks be to God, also, for the continuing partnership with the Northern Illinois Conference and opportunity to carry out the ministry of Jesus Christ.

~~ ***Our Time Under God Is NOW!*** ~~

Document: 400.36

**Fellowship of Asian American Caucus of the Northern Illinois Conference Historical Report
Jeremiah Lee, President**

The Fellowship of Asian-Americans (FAA) is a caucus within the NIC that is rich in diversity, comprising both laity and clergy, active or retired from a multitude of Asian cultures. As of 2024, the FAA has over 100 plus members committed to fostering a supportive and inclusive community. Within the FAA, a wide array of perspectives is reflected, with representatives from various countries, including Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, China, Japan, India, and Pakistan. This cultural mosaic brings a wealth of insights and experiences to the FAA and to our conference, enriching conversations and enhancing the FAA's ability to lead and serve in various committees throughout the Northern Illinois Conference. Through our diversity, we strengthen our relationships and build a more cohesive community.

The FAA organizes two significant annual meetings dedicated to fellowship and support. The first meeting takes place during the Annual Conference in June. We met at Our Savior's UMC in Schaumburg and had approximately 80 active and retired clergy, laity, seminarians from Garrett, missionaries, and guests in attendance. We celebrated and honored our retired pastors and encouraged our newly commissioned and Ordained Asian American Clergy with gifts. The second is held during the Advent Season to worship and celebrate the ministries we have accomplished throughout the year. On December 1st we joined our Filipino brothers and sisters for their traditional service called "Simbang Gabi," These gatherings serve as vital opportunities for members to connect, share experiences, and provide mutual encouragement.

The FAA is deeply committed to supporting its youth, seminary students, and local churches, as well as their various programs. Recognizing the importance of nurturing future leaders and ensuring the growth and vitality of our communities, the FAA provides financial assistance by offering scholarships and program grants to ethnic churches. In 2024, we awarded three academic scholarships, provided grants to support our youth, and helped them attend a NIC youth retreat.

In 2024, the FAA continues to thrive as a diverse and inclusive organization dedicated to fostering fellowship and support among its members to serve the broader conference. Through our diversity, we enrich our conversations, strengthen our relationships, and build a more united and dynamic community. The FAA remains committed to its mission of supporting youth, seminary students, clergy, and local church programs, ensuring a bright future for all members and the communities they serve.

FAA Executive Team: President Rev. Jeremiah Lee, Vice President Rev. Cerna Rand, Finance Officer Rev. James Fu, Secretary Rev. Sophia Hyon, Scholarship/grants officer Agnes Guevarra and Advocacy Rev. Scott Christy.

Document: 400.37

Hispanic / Latinx Ministry Historical Report

Noemi Meza and Lino Aragon, Co-Chairs

This period of 2024-2025 has been a blessing to continue the work and revival of the Latinx Hispanic Ministry. As co-chairs, this past year, Reverend Noemí Meza and Reverend Lino Aragón have worked to maintain the legacy and continue exploring new ideas and projects for the development of our ministry.

As tradition, and to represent our diverse Latinx/Hispanic culture, we celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month. On Saturday, October 19, we held a wonderful worship service. The guest speaker was Reverend Dr. Rodrigo Cruz, executive assistant to the bishop of the Georgia Conference, and Dr. Emma Escobar, director of the Latino/Hispanic Center and assistant professor, who organized grassroots groups in faith. The event continued with a delicious lunch accompanied by traditional music from the Andes of South America. We had an attendance of 120 people, with participation from Hispanic churches in the Northern Illinois Conference.

As pastors, we support the Academy of Lay Servants (in Spanish) and encourage lay members of each church about the importance of educating themselves in the doctrine and leadership of the United Methodist Church. The basic course was held from August 31 to October 26, 2024, at the Franklin Park United Methodist Church, with an attendance of approximately 80 people.

In December, we celebrated the Christmas Party. On Saturday, December 6, we gathered with all the Hispanic pastors for a Christmas party and cantata, enjoying a delicious dinner, activities, and prayer. The purpose was to get to know each other better and to pray for the church in general and for our ministry.

Recently, a group of licensed local pastors and candidates for ministry were invited by the Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary and the Central Jurisdiction of the United Methodist Church to the School of Ministry, from March 28 to 30, 2025. The topics of interest presented were:

- Presentation I: Movement and Wesleyan traditions from a Latin American perspective in ministry and leadership.
- Presentation II: Structure and doctrine of the United Methodist Church.
- Presentation III: The Methodist movement and social change.
- Presentation IV: Theological preparation to respond to our calling.

This year 2024-2025 continues to be a year of challenges for us as Latino/a pastors and for our community, as we face the threat of deportation by the current government. This affects not only undocumented individuals but also naturalized U.S. citizens, legal residents (with green cards), and those with temporary protected status.

In the midst of difficult situations and new challenges, we continue working and preparing to make disciples for the transformation of the world. We walk in faith, with humility, always following the motto of our denomination: **"Open hearts, open doors, open minds"** (1 Corinthians 15:58, NIV).

“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58, NIV)

To God Be the Glory!!

Document: 400.38

Africa University Historical Report

James H. Salley, President/CEO of Africa University (Tennessee) Inc. and Associate Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement, Africa University.

AFRICA UNIVERSITY REPORT

Greetings and thanks to you, the members of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference, for your love of Africa University! Your love, lived out in the local church, and across every level of The United Methodist Church worldwide, is a source of hope and of dreams brought to life.

Africa University's students, faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni are deeply appreciative of the gracious investment of 46.5 percent of the asking to the Africa University Fund apportionment by the local churches of the Northern Illinois Conference in 2024. Thank you for investing in equipping change leaders who share the gospel of Jesus Christ, reduce hunger, improve public health, instill hope, and build prosperous and peaceful communities. As the 2025-2028 quadrennium unfolds, Africa University is urging the members of the Northern Illinois Conference to:

- **Encourage their congregations to maintain their support for the Africa University Fund at the 2016 budget level and strive for 100% investment of the asking each year.**
- **Help identify at least two (2) churches (keystone congregations) in the conference to provide second mile gifts of \$7,000 each (or \$14,000 in total each year) for annual scholarships for two undergraduate students.**

Through Africa University, the Northern Illinois Conference of The United Methodist Church is nurturing servant leaders with ethics, empathy, and an audacious, can-do mindset. Having experienced God's grace through your love in action, students and graduates of Africa University are stepping forward to help churches and communities to thrive. Here are highlights of the impact of Africa University faculty, administrators, and students in 2024:

- Africa University start-up, Reagan Technologies, earned a semi-final finish in the Hult Prize Global Accelerator competition (<https://aunews.africau.edu/africa-university-start-up-earns-semi-final-finish-in-the-hult-prize-global-accelerator-competition/>). Known as the '*Nobel prize contest for students*' the three-student AU team impressed the Hult Prize judges with an innovative concept for generating electricity from footsteps. The team's climate-smart pavement tiles stood out against the competition from more than 60 universities.
- Another AU trio is transforming education by bridging the digital divide in Africa. Three students majoring in computer science won the top prize at the UbuntuNet Alliance Women's Hackathon (<https://aunews.africau.edu/au-trio-eyes-transforming-education-through-bridging-the-digital-divide-in-africa/>) with FUNDISA. It's a chatbot that delivers instant, curriculum-aligned explanations to students who lack internet access, but have phones with SMS functionality. The chatbot enables students to simply send a text to a short code to receive educational support.
- Africa University is excited to share that its Doctor of Ministry program, a first for the continent of Africa, was accredited by the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education. Future D.Min. candidates have options for specialization in Mission and Evangelism, Liturgical Theology, Church Administration, Church and Society, and Chaplaincy Ministry. A pioneer group of ten (10) senior officers in the military, prisons and policing from Botswana, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have completed the program, thanks to a collaboration between Africa University and Wesley Theological Seminary. The doctoral research projects of this first group of candidates generated new knowledge that addresses deployment trauma, reducing drug abuse among officers, and the use of Psalms of lament for facilitating healing in families of inmates.

This is the transformation story that Northern Illinois United Methodists, in their faithfulness, are writing through Africa University. Your leadership and generous contributions are as pivotal today as they were at Africa University's inception, 33 years ago. Thank you for your continuing partnership with Africa University.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Your partnership, prayers, and support are a cherished gift as BUSTH seeks to serve the church and the world! In a year like 2024, BUSTH's commitments to equip transformational leaders for peace and justice are more necessary and significant. We are hopeful and vigilant in our continued partnership with you.

NEWS:

Students: Our academic year 2024-25 entering class was among our most diverse, with 109 new students enrolling, 33% of whom are international students.

Faculty: In July, Shively T. J. Smith was promoted to Associate Professor of New Testament, and in September we welcomed new faculty member emilie m. townes, Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Religion and Black Studies. In January we welcomed new Assistant Professor of Religion and Society Luther Young, Jr.

Expanding Online/Hybrid Programming: BUSTH's first fully online master's degree—the Master of Religion and Public Leadership (MARPL)—continues to expand since launching in fall 2022. MARPL seeks students who wish to be prepared for leadership roles that creatively engage challenges of public life: bu.edu/sth/marpl. An online Master of Divinity program is planned for Fall 2026.

Faculty Research: Associate Dean Cristian De La Rosa received a second Lilly Endowment Parenting Grant for \$1.25 million. Faculty published more than 130 books, scholarly articles, op-eds, presentations, and book reviews during 2024. Many were interviewed by media publications or featured on podcasts for their scholarship in topics such as social justice activism, historical Methodist leaders, responding to trauma, and the use of AI to predict religious extremism. Selected stories are found at bu.edu/sth/research/faculty-research/.

Scholarships: We continue to offer free tuition to UMC-registered candidates for ordained ministry and leadership fellowships that support students in ethnic, gender, and sexuality studies. New funds include Rev. James M. Smith ('51) Fund for Latinx Lay Education and Rev. Tom Sears ('59) Chaplaincy Operating Fund. We have increased an endowed fund for students specializing in Hebrew Bible.

Accreditation and Curriculum: BUSTH concluded a thorough curriculum revision for the MDiv and MTS programs which launched in fall 2024.

Online Lifelong Learning: BUSTH offers online courses for professional and spiritual enrichment of religious leaders. Recent offerings include "A Womanist Ethic of Care." To learn more, visit bu.edu/sth/oll.

Development: Recent accomplishments include endowing the Raíces Latinas Program in Theology, Leadership, & Research and meeting a \$250K match in support of the Religion & Conflict Transformation Program.

COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE and COMPASSION:

BUSTH's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offers webinars on timely inclusion efforts, such as "[Spiritual Leadership in Divided Times: Trauma and Thurman](#)," and \$500 DEI scholarships are offered to students with financial need to participate in our travel seminars.

Our Fall 2024 Lowell Lecture premiered "Simulating Religious Violence," which captured the work of computer scientists and religious scholars to seek to address conflicts rooted in religious violence.

Work continues to improve accessibility, sustainability, and responsible investing as written in our 2030 Strategic Plan. BUSTH is the first certified Green School at BU and is active in the Green Seminary Initiative.

Document: 400.40

Candler School of Theology Historical Report

Office of Communications, Candler School of Theology, Emory University

Since 1914, **Candler School of Theology at Emory University** has educated faithful and creative leaders for the church's ministries throughout the world. An official seminary of The United Methodist Church, Candler holds true to the Wesleyan value of ecumenical openness, welcoming students from more than 40 denominations. Our student body reflects the diversity and breadth of the Christian faithful, with an enrollment of 416 from 13 countries, 41 states, 32 annual conferences, and 43% persons of color. We see this diversity as a blessing, enriching our life together and providing the perfect context for training for relevant ministry in the 21st century—ministry that cultivates community across difference, welcomes all to contribute and belong, and embodies Christ's love in and among us.

Candler offers six degrees (Master of Divinity, Master of Theological Studies, Master of Arts in Religion and Leadership, Master of Religion and Public Life, Master of Theology, Doctor of Ministry), most of which are available in hybrid or online formats. Response to our hybrid-format Master of Divinity, blending online classes and in-person intensives, continues to be strong: 63% of 2024's MDiv entering class chose the hybrid model. Nearly a quarter of MDiv students participate in Candler's Teaching Parish program, earning contextual education credit by serving as student pastors in local churches. And our proven DMin program—with a near 90% completion rate—is 90% online. These flexible options along with Candler's recognized academic excellence and hands-on learning opportunities are opening possibilities for more people to follow God's call to ministry.

Generous financial aid is a top priority for Candler. In 2024-2025, we are on track to award nearly \$6.5 million in scholarship support across all degree programs. All MDiv students receive scholarship support, and those who are certified candidates for ordained ministry in the UMC receive full-tuition scholarships. Plus, a remarkable gift this year of \$20 million from the O. Wayne Rollins Foundation promises to have a transformative impact on the school and future students alike, fueling a considerable expansion of our scholarship program and reducing financial barriers to high-quality theological education.

Several programs beyond our formal degrees make Candler a hub of Christian learning for an expanding audience. Those who are not seeking a graduate degree can engage in learning through The Candler Foundry, which offers in-person and online short courses, events, and certificate programs; the United Methodist Course of Study for educating licensed local pastors; the Candler Center for Christian Leadership for refining business skills of United Methodist leaders; and La Mesa Academy, offering a graduate certificate in theological studies via a two-year hybrid program with courses in Spanish, English, and Korean.

Candler continued to strengthen the already robust United Methodist presence among our faculty with four key appointments this year: Geordan Hammond, associate professor of Methodist and Wesleyan studies; Soren Hessler, assistant professor in the practice of leadership and administration; Jennifer Quigley, assistant professor of New Testament; and Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, who joined us as bishop-in-residence following the retirement of Bishop Larry Goodpaster.

Jonathan Strom became dean of Candler in August 2024, when former dean Jan Love returned to the faculty. Strom has served on Candler's faculty since 1997 as professor of church history, with nearly a decade as senior associate dean of faculty and academic affairs, and a number of years as director of international initiatives. He is committed to nurturing the school's deep connection with The United Methodist Church.

Candler is strengthened by your prayers, partnership, and support. Thank you for the countless ways you advance this vital ministry in the life of the church. We invite you to visit us online at candler.emory.edu and follow us on social media to stay informed of all we offer throughout the year.

Document: 400.41

Drew University Theological School Historical Report

Edwin David Aponte, Dean and Professor of Religion & Culture

Drew University Theological School educates and mentors pastors, preachers, deacons, activists, teachers, thought leaders, and change agents for ministry and service in the church, society, and the wider world. Building upon its Wesleyan and Methodist foundations, Drew Theological School is diverse in theology, vocations, age, as well as racial, ethnic, national, and international identities of its faculty, students, and staff. Many Drew students are just beginning their ministry, while others come to graduate theological education with prior ministry experience. The latter reflects a growing trend among all theological schools in the United States and Canada. In providing theological education to the world, Drew holds in-person classes in Madison, New Jersey, classes that meet exclusively online, while others meet in hybrid fashion, i.e., partially online, partially in-person, as well as in-person Doctor of Ministry cohort in South Korea and a pilot in-person Master of Divinity cohort in Liberia. Regular chapel worship originates on campus in Seminary Hall, but also is live-streamed so that students, alumni, and friends around the world can participate. Drew Theological School is a global seminary with a global student population serving the worldwide church.

In Fall 2024 Drew Theological School welcomed 94 new students in all degree programs, with total student enrollment (by headcount) in Fall 2024 semester being 388. Enrollment of international students at Drew increased from 120 students in Fall 2021 to 157 students in Fall 2024. This number includes students who are studying full-time in the U.S.A. on a student Visa, students who are studying online from their home country, and students in the South Korean Cohort of the Doctor of Ministry program.

Drew's interdisciplinary degree programs provide real-world apprenticeships, promote adaptive leadership skills, and encourage innovation through team-taught core courses as well as a variety of electives that integrate theological disciplines and faith practices. The Drew faculty's shared values are infused across all aspects of the teaching, learning, and the formation of students: 1) a commitment to anti-racism; 2) gender and sexual-identity equality; 3) eco-sustainability and environmental justice; and 4) interfaith understanding and cooperation. Drew Theological School has an increase in United Methodist students, additionally, Drew has many United Methodist Global Fellows pursuing further education for ministry. UMC graduates are serving in conferences across the United States, and especially within nearby regional episcopal areas of The United Methodist Church in the annual conferences of Greater New Jersey, Eastern Pennsylvania, Susquehanna, Upper New York, New York, and New England.

Document: 400.42

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary Historical Report

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary continues to live into its mission of *Forming courageous leaders in the way of Jesus to cultivate communities of justice, compassion, and hope...for the thriving of the Church and the healing of the world.* We do this work in partnership with the annual conferences of the United Methodist Church and other partners who share our values. Now in our 172nd year of ministry to the church, the academy, and the world, Garrett is a strong, growing, thriving community of faith and learning that represents the fullness of the global church's witness.

During this past academic year, Garrett welcomed its largest entering class in over a decade for a fifth straight year, with 135 new students, and a current enrollment of 324 students representing 38 states and 24 nations from across the globe. We continue to see growth in our student body from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, adding to an already richly diverse student body. While our denominational diversity also continues to grow, we also proudly welcomed growth in our United Methodist students who constitute more than half of our student body. Our faculty also reflect this regional and global diversity, with fully half originating from nations outside the United States.

Our growth in recent years continues to reflect patterns seen across theological education, mainly in distance and online learners. For the first time in our history, distance learners in the entering class outnumbered residential students. This has allowed for truly global learning spaces that have enriched our conversations and our overall learning environment. We're blessed to have the world represented in our classrooms, which also impacts how our faculty teach, what they research, and for whom.

Over the last year Garrett has also been blessed by multiple major grants to fund faculty research and institutional priorities. A major grant is funding the work of our Center for Ecological Regeneration, allowing the seminary to partner with local congregations in the Midwest to equip them to respond to climate change in their communities and the disproportionate impact it tends to have on the poor and local economies. Another major grant is funding work in our Centro Raíces Latinas to strengthen Hispanic-Latiné pastoral leaders and congregations, helping clergy and communities build institutional capacity and expand their ministries. Yet another grant is helping to expand the reach and impact of our Garrett Collective, our lifelong learning and resource platform that seeks to make theological education accessible and affordable to a significantly broader audience.

Garrett's world-class faculty continue developing curricular innovations that are responsive to the church's growing needs, while also contributing a significant body of scholarly work to their respective fields. They are also partnering with annual conferences and local churches in delivering much needed programming for leadership development and faith formation, an expanding focus of our Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships division. Garrett is proud to be a United Methodist institution, and proud to continue to deepen its partnership and programming with annual conferences around the globe.

Document: 400.43

Saint Paul School of Theology Historical Report

Jay K. Simmons, President



Saint Paul School of Theology is a seminary serving a diverse community dedicated to forming leaders for innovative, creative ministry. Our integrated theological education, enriched by faith and social justice, combines real-world experience with academic rigor. Through our FLEX schedule offering on-campus, online, and hybrid learning options, our Master's and Doctorate programs provide customized education guided by dedicated faculty, experienced pastors, and community leaders. Our graduates emerge equipped with the tools and first-hand experience to pursue diverse paths in ministry, service, and leadership locally and globally.

Saint Paul recently launched an innovative Doctor of Ministry program: Spirituality, Innovation, and Adaptive Leadership. This program focuses on developing contemplative spirituality practices that empower students to become change agents in church and society. Grounded in divine listening, students engage with innovative ministry practices while learning to manage and sustain them through adaptive principles, emotional intelligence, and intercultural competence. The program prepares leaders to forge renewed paths for faithful leadership in a challenging world. Discover more about the Saint Paul DMin at spst.edu/doctor-of-ministry/.

In July 2024, the Pause/Play Center for Preachers welcomed its first cohort of 12 preachers from five denominations nationwide. These leaders sought to revitalize their preaching through Spiritual Direction, coaching, retreats, and specialized resources. The Center's inaugural public gathering drew 50 pastors nationwide for a two-day event featuring keynote speaker and Saint Paul alumna Dr. Marcia McFee. The Center accepts applications for the next pastor cohort open in March, with registration for the July 30-August 2, 2025 Kansas City gathering beginning in January.

Saint Paul School of Theology earned the distinction of hosting the Smithsonian traveling exhibit "Exploring Human Origins: What Does It Mean to Be Human?" through a national competition by the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) and American Library Association (ALA). Scientists and experts from the NMNH Human Origins Program will visit our Kansas Campus in Leawood to lead community events, including clergy programs, educator workshops, and community conversations. The exhibit, running February through May 2025, features interactive panels, kiosks, hands-on displays, and videos that explore humanity's evolutionary journey. This free public exhibition encourages meaningful dialogue about human origins while embracing diverse perspectives from both scientific and theological viewpoints.

The 2024-2025 academic year brought significant leadership changes to Saint Paul. The Board of Trustees appointed Mrs. Dana Aldridge as Board Chair and welcomed Tom Cochran as Executive Director of Development and Alumni Relations. Cochran's extensive experience strengthens our donor relationships and alums network. We are actively reconnecting with alums across the Midwest and beyond through regional events, fostering collaboration and sharing recent achievements.

Saint Paul School of Theology is blessed to be your partner in ministry and help those seeking to discover more and answer the call. Your advocacy for the seminary and generous financial support have been vital

in realizing our accomplishments. Many thanks for the innumerable ways you have helped Saint Paul. Your prayers and actions on behalf of the seminary are a blessing to all of us.

Document: 400.44
United Theological Seminary Historical Report
Kent Millard

Since 1871, United Theological Seminary has prepared faithful and fruitful Christian leaders who make disciples of Jesus Christ. United welcomes all who are following God's call on their lives, and many are answering God's call! In the 2023-2024 academic year, the seminary served 595 graduate students, making it the second largest of the thirteen United Methodist seminaries in the United States, according to the Association of Theological Schools.¹

A diverse community of many denominations, races and nationalities, United welcomed students from 35 states, 21 nations, and 48 denominations, with United Methodists representing the largest group at 30 percent of the student body.²

Academics

In large part, enrollment growth is due to continued interest in United's Houses of Study programs, which offer master's and certificate tracks to equip students for the unique ministry needs of the communities, movements, and denominations in which they serve.

In summer 2024, United welcomed its inaugural cohort of Doctor of Theology students. The advanced research degree program is conducted primarily from a distance, requiring only four weeks of in-person intensives during the three-year program. During their program, students develop original research with a focus on church renewal.

United's Doctor of Ministry program continues to attract students looking for an advanced professional degree to expand their ministerial and leadership capabilities. In the 2023-2024 school year, 267 students participated in the mentor-led program.

Finances

United celebrated becoming debt free in May 2024, after making its last payment on a \$3.3 million debt to its endowment. In addition to eliminating the seminary's debt, United has been focused on reducing the educational debt of its students. The Fresh Wind campaign to raise \$10 million for the endowment will expand scholarship opportunities for students for generations to come. With the increase in scholarship gifts from the Fresh Wind campaign and the reduction of United's own debt, the seminary has significantly increased scholarship support for United students.

Innovation Center

The Bishop Bruce Ough Innovation Center celebrated the third anniversary since its launch as United's "research and development" hub for ministry practitioners and thought leaders seeking to create and provide innovative resourcing for congregations. In 2024, the Innovation Center engaged over 2,200 participants through more than 30 live webinars, training events and courses.

In Romans 10:14, St. Paul writes: "How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? *And how shall they hear without a preacher?*" United's students and graduates are going out into the world to proclaim the Good News of God's unconditional love. Thanks be to God!

¹ ATS 2023-2024 Annual Data Tables (Table 2.12 and Table 2.2-A) on fall 2023 enrollment.

² Student data represent unduplicated headcount enrollment for the 2023-2024 academic year. Demographic figures represent those who responded.

Document: 400.45

Wesley Theological Seminary Historical Report

David McAllister-Wilson, President

WESLEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The mission of Wesley Theological Seminary (Wesley DC) is to equip persons for Christian ministry and leadership in the church and the world, to advance theological scholarship, and to model a prophetic voice in the public square.

Today, the world needs public servants. Wesley DC remains committed to nurturing future leaders in church and society with theological and spiritual growth and community engagement:

Master of Divinity, Master of Arts, Master of Theological Studies Degrees: Our diverse programming serves our diverse student population. We offer traditional, brick and mortar, in- person study and flexible, online and hybrid models. Wesley DC is committed to curating space for diversity, community, and (re)imagining ministry. <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/study/>

Doctor of Ministry Degree: Wesley DC maintains one of the largest Doctor of Ministry programs, offering specialized tracks of study for scholars going into local parishes, global missions, or military chaplaincy. <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/doctorofministry/program/>

The Hub for Collaboration and Imagination: Wesley DC envisions a dynamic, Spirit-inspired church that responds to God and neighbor. To that end, we catalyze faith communities and leaders to learn about innovation and spiritual entrepreneurship to enact transformative ministry. <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/wesley-innovation-hub/>

Center for Public Theology: Wesley DC continues to provide sound theological training for future ministry leaders. We foster an entrepreneurial mindset and the practical skills needed to create ministry models which help the church to remain a vital institution that fosters flourishing. <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/ice/programs/public-theology/>

Community Engagement Institute: Wesley DC offers ground-breaking foundational courses and electives in community engagement, public theology, political theology, and social ethics. <https://www.wesleyseminary.edu/ice/about-us/overview-2/>

The Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion: Wesley DC is thrilled to share two new exhibits, *Un/familiar Terrain{s}*, a creative dialogue between UK-based artist, Michael Magruder, and Artificial Intelligence; and *Notebook*, featuring works by Iranian-born artist, Mojdeh Rezaeipour. We also welcomed Ama BE, a Ghanaian-American transdisciplinary artist exploring African migration ecologies. <https://www.luceartsandreligion.org/>

Lewis Center for Church Leadership: The Lewis Center conducts leading edge research for the local church. Wesley DC is pleased to report generous support from the Lilly Endowment; and continued training for clergy and lay leaders. <https://www.churchleadership.com/>

Call us: (202) 885-8659 **Email us:** admissions@wesleyseminary.edu

Follow us: Facebook/IG: @WesleySeminary and LinkedIn: @WesleyTheologicalSeminary Submitted by Lyvonne Briggs, Director of Strategic Communications and Marketing

Hope in Times of Change

2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE REPORT

“Lord, show us favor; we hope in you. Be our strength every morning, our salvation in times of distress.”
(Hebrews 33:2).

These words from Hebrews both ground and inspire the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) as we participate in the *missio Dei*, the mission of God. GBHEM stewards the intellectual life of the Church and supports the formation and calls of transformative leaders. We approach our changing work and world with hope and dedication to listen and collaborate closely with our partners worldwide, to create space and opportunity for growth in leadership and ministry.

GBHEM strengthens the educational mission of the Church by fostering environments of intellectual development alongside spiritual growth. Through GBHEM programs, such as Clinical Pastoral Education, the Course of Study, the Central Conference Theological Education Fund, the Black College Fund, and robust scholarship programs, GBHEM supports Methodist scholarship and leadership around the world.

Alleviating student debt through financial support remains a priority. GBHEM awarded over \$3.7 million in scholarships to 2,165 students in 2024, including students from 51 annual conferences in the United States and 28 annual conferences in the central conferences. In addition, GBHEM stewarded the distribution of roughly \$17.4 million in grants to United Methodist ministries.

Because of your generous support, approximately \$6.4 million is apportioned annually for the 11 historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) related to the Church through The Black College Fund. The funds enhance capital improvements, provide scholarships, and support the work of faculty and staff. There are approximately 13,534 students at BCF-supported HBCU's; 70% receive Pell Grants.

GBHEM is also responsible for two initiatives approved by General Conference: The Methodist Global Education Fund for Leadership Development (MGEFLD), which includes the Grants and Scholarships Program (GRASP); and the Central Conference Theological Education Fund (CCTEF). The CCTEF advances theological education in all central conferences by strengthening theological institutions, creating networks among these schools, and increasing access to theological education.

GBHEM has established 9 regional Leadership, Education and Development Hubs (LEAD Hubs) around the world. Each LEAD Hub is a part of the agency's strategic plan to connect with The United Methodist Church worldwide through collaboration with Pan-Methodist and Ecumenical leaders in Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe, and Eurasia, Latin American and the Caribbean, and North America.

The agency's ongoing alignment efforts with Global Ministries were further enriched when Roland Fernandes became general secretary of GBHEM on July 1, 2024, following the retirement of the Rev. Greg Bergquist. After several years of collaborative work, agency priorities focus on a unified presence and integrated structure. This holistic understanding of mission encompasses all the work of both agencies and improves our ability to serve and support partners in mission and ministry around the world.

Global Ministries and GBHEM's board met jointly in Atlanta, prior to General Conference; that meeting honored the many contributions of board members who had served during the last quadrennium. Spirit-led worship accompanied the fall Board of Directors meeting, also held jointly, in Nashville. This meeting welcomed new board members, who will serve during the 2025-2028 quadrennium.

As we partner in ministry, we will continue to look for ways to better serve the Church, cultivating a call to mission in the hearts and minds of people across the connection. We celebrate our partnership with your Annual Conference and thank you for nurturing and supporting United Methodist lay and clergy leaders throughout the UMC world-wide connection.

4/2025

