

Francis Asbury Award for Excellence in Higher Education

Northern Illinois Conference 2026

Rev. Dr. Javier Viera

President, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary



HIGHER EDUCATION & MINISTRY

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



The General Board of Higher Education, in partnership with the Northern Illinois Conference, presents the Francis Asbury Award to Rev. Dr. Viera for his contribution to United Methodist ministries in higher education.

Named for early American Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury, this award honors his call to establish a school in the vicinity of every church. “We must,” he said, “... give the key of knowledge to your children, and those of the poor in the vicinity of your small towns and villages.”

Dr. Viera is the President of Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary and understands education “as a practice of liberation and transformation—of mind, spirit, and body. In an increasingly complex and religiously plural world, my work explores how meaningful learning occurs across difference and what conditions make such transformative encounters possible.”



We are honored to recognize Dr. Viera’s tremendous contributions to our conference as a theological scholar, marked by visionary leadership, faithful dedication, and an unwavering commitment to accessible theological education. His work has created meaningful pathways for both laity and clergy, fostering collaboration, partnerships, innovative ideas, and transformative projects that

have expanded opportunities for learning and spiritual growth, especially within our Hispanic/Latinx communities. Through his tireless efforts, he has built bridges across communities, strengthened connections among leaders, and made theological education more inclusive and attainable for all who seek to deepen their faith and service.