

2018 Annual Conference artwork draws on theme  
By Kyungsu Park



The worship committee of the 2018 Annual Conference played an integral role in the final product of the paintings. It was the committee who took the raw materials of Bishop Dyck's vision for Annual Conference and refined the concepts that enabled me to put paint to canvas. Navigating Uncharted Waters is an apt metaphor for living life. The worship committee came up with many ideas for the theme. My thanks goes out to everyone and also to Gary Rand who made many contributions in the meetings.

One of the first metaphors that came to mind for many of us was that of a frigate or a tall ship. The beautiful sails and the sense of exploring the unknown seemed perfect. However, in our care to be sensitive to the dynamics of oppression in the world, we realized that the image of tall ships were also symbols of colonialism and the slave trade. Therefore we chose not to utilize them and challenge their claim on our lives. For many of us, moving forward into the unknown was fraught with fear and anxiety. Bishop Dyck helped us to remember that a sense of adventure was also an inherent part of navigating uncharted waters. We need not have a spirit of fear, but of courage. As the Northern Illinois Conference, as leaders in the United Methodist Church, and as the body of Christ, we face many challenges ahead—and by the grace of God, we have many opportunities, knowing that God blazes the way forward and calls us into deeper waters.

The paintings were made on Owens Corning FOAMULAR 1 1/2 in. x 4 ft. x 8 ft. R-3 Squared Edge Insulating Sheathing. I used Pittsburgh Paints latex paints and Liquitex heavy body acrylic paints. The four paintings are entitled, from left to right as laid out at Annual Conference: Water, Stars, Map, and Spirit. All the paintings have a sacramental element to them, and they all relate to concepts of navigation, adventure, and risk. I also attempted to incorporate time by making nods to the past and the future, for the sake of the present.

**Water:** This work brings us into the series by being composed primarily of water. The white water evokes ideas of the uncontrollable and powerful forces that exert themselves upon our lives. The water is also a metaphor for time. There is a raft of adventurers anchored by an African American woman whose gaze breaks the fourth wall. She is aware of the rocks before the raft but her eyes are set on the way forward. She is not afraid and navigates with grit and grace. The spray of water between the rocks is bird-like and is to remind us that the Holy Spirit may not protect us from the rocks but will lead us and accompany us through them.

**Stars:** Again we encounter uncharted waters. A raft is front and center. It is NOT a pleasure craft. There are so many bodies in the raft that one cannot tell where one body begins and another ends. The only details that can be made out are the life jackets and the head covering of a little child towards the front. Towards the back of the raft, if one looks carefully, one can see that the raft is taking on water. The global migration crisis is a horror, not only for the devastation meted out on human lives but made worse by the fact that it is preventable. In spite of the travesty, the stars above, by which humanity has navigated throughout history, share their beauty and remind us of our hope in a God who is always with us and emerges at the margins to bring relief to the least, the lost, and the abandoned. I pray that the church will follow the call to be the hands and feet of our Lord Jesus.

**Map:** Today we do all our navigating on our devices with apps. "The Future" has been typed into the search bar. The map has not fully resolved and is still loading so the roads have not been fully imaged. Next to the icon representing a delay in the download, are the words, "Here There Be Dragons." Before there was Google Earth and iMaps, cartographers wrote, "Here There Be Dragons" to indicate an area that was uncharted. In this painting especially; the future, the past, and the present are brought

together. On a personal note, my wife and I were married on June 5, 2004. So our wedding anniversary has always fallen on Annual Conference dates. In choosing a time to be represented on the "phone," I chose 6:54. So there.

**Spirit:** The paintings and our lives as Christians, are bracketed by Water and the Spirit. In the continuum between is a Holy Mystery. The Spirit painting is that of a campfire set beside a body of water. The campfire reincorporates the idea that navigating uncharted waters is not only risk, but can be adventure. A campfire evokes many things but for me it is security, comfort, and relationship as my experiences with campfires always involve other people (and S'Mores). There are three logs that, in my mind, recall our Trinitarian God. The flame is blazing and all encompassing. It looks like a blazing fire but, the Holy Spirit is more than that and so I stylized the flame to look like fire, but is not. The tendrils of the flame are seeking, grasping, dancing, inviting, and reaching for us so that we too might be consumed with a passion for God's purposes in the world. The "embers" will hopefully find other kindling that the fire of the Spirit may spread.

Looking back, I am surprised to find that every monumental painting I have completed has been for the church. From the Children's Sanctuary at my home church, Salem Korean UMC, to VBS backdrops, and now Annual Conference, I pray that these works will be a blessing to someone. It has been an distinct honor and privilege to work with the Annual Conference worship committee and a pleasure to share my gift in God's name. May peace be with you.