

2019 Northern Illinois Annual Conference

June 2-4 in Schaumburg, Ill.

“Back to the Future”

The 2019 Northern Illinois Annual Conference wrapped up June 4 at the Renaissance Schaumburg Hotel and Convention Center in Schaumburg, Ill., after two and a half days of worship, business, voting (and more voting), celebrating anniversaries, fellowship, speakers, and Bible study with more than 900 clergy and lay members participating.

While the theme “Back to the Future” helped us reminisce about our 180-year history, much of the conversation and legislation focused on moving forward and what's next for The United Methodist Church and our annual conference.



Presiding Bishop Sally Dyck began her Episcopal address with a question, “Back to the Future...who do we want to be?” Dyck referenced the 1980s science fiction movie starring Michael J. Fox as Marty McFly who is accidentally sent 30 years in the past in a time-traveling DeLorean and has a chance encounter with his teenage future parents possibly changing history.

“The movie ‘fixes’ the past so that the present is made perfect,” said Dyck. “Maybe many of us in the church and in society, as well as in our personal lives, think it might be a great thing to be able to ‘fix’ the past so that the present and even the future will be better than it seems.”

Dyck said a lot has happened since the last annual conference gathering. “Uncertainty about who we will be as an annual conference and even a denomination continues to hang over us,” she said. “Short of a time machine, particularly an ecclesiological time machine, we can’t fix the past...but we can reclaim our future when we understand our history in order to be clear about just who we are and want to be as followers of Jesus.”

The Annual Conference worship team steered away from the DeLorean car as an image for the gathering and instead chose the West African Sankofa, a mythical bird from a tribe in Ghana. The word "sankofa" literally means "to go back and fetch it." The egg in its mouth symbolizes that future of potential.



"We often have to go back to the place where we lost our way or our identity in order to regain/fetch who we have been at our best. Then we can go forward, knowing who we are," said Dyck. "I think the Sankofa is a beautiful image of what our task is at this point in history as the UMC and the NIC. This is a perfect year for us as an annual conference to look back in order to fly forward."

Retiring Bishop Wayne N. Miller of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church Association (ELCA), returned as an ecumenical guest for the fourth time and recognized The United Methodist Church's current struggles. The ELCA adopted a social statement on human sexuality and inclusion in 2009 after 20 years of debate and angst.

"As you work through your present turmoil, I offer you encouragement to remember who you are and whose you are," said Miller. "Hold that we are accountable as new creations in Christ Jesus to live lives that manifest the fruits of the spirit...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, generosity, and self-control."

Laity Address

One of the three NIC Co-Lay Leaders Jessie Cunningham delivered this year's Laity Address lamenting the decisions made at the February Special Session. "If you are like me, you are going through the five steps of grieving," said Cunningham. "We know we have to move on but where do we go from here? We can't go back. We



must always look and go forward." Cunningham encouraged laity to continue the work of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and remember our [professing vows](#) as members of The United Methodist Church.

Year of Anniversaries

While we looked to the future, we also celebrated 200 years of mission in The United Methodist Church through the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), 50th anniversary of the Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR) in the NIC, and 150 years of ministry and mission with United Methodist Women (UMW). Harriett Olson, UMW's General Secretary, was this year's



Bible Study leader looking to women in the Scriptures who persisted and followed God's call despite barriers. Dr. David W. Scott, director of Mission Theology for GBGM remembered the UMC's first missionaries and the contributions from the NIC. Our conference currently supports four missionaries and gave nearly \$240,000 last year for disaster relief in the U.S. and around the world.

2020 General and Jurisdictional Delegation Elected

After mastering the voting electronic keypads and a total of 20 ballots, annual conference members elected three clergy and three lay delegates to the 2020 General Conference and three clergy and three lay delegates for the Jurisdictional Conference, along with two clergy and two lay alternates. The equally diverse delegation includes some new faces and some who are serving again. The delegation is made of 50% female and 50% male



delegates, 50% new and 50% experienced delegates, including four new laity and four new clergy. Three delegates are under age 35, which two are new to the delegation.

General Conference will be held in Minneapolis, Minn., **May 5-15, 2020**. The North Central Jurisdictional Conference, where Bishops are elected, will be held in Ft. Wayne, Ind., **July 15-18, 2020**.

In order of election, the delegates are:

General Conference Lay: Lonnie Chafin, Nadia R. Kanhai, Adrian Hill (Vice Chair).

General Conference Clergy: Alka Lyall (Chair), Luis F. Reyes, Gregory Gross.

Jurisdictional Conference Lay: Rita L. Smith, Jessie Cunningham, Ronnie Lyall.

Alternates: Nancy Pendergrass and Mark Manzi

Jurisdictional Conference Clergy: Hwa-Young Chong, Jacques A. Conway, Brian Gilbert.

Alternates: Britt Cox and Rachel Birkhahn-Rommelfanger

Ordination and Commissioning Service

Bishop Sally Dyck ordained seven elders and two deacons and commissioned four for the work of a deacon and two for the work of an elder. In her sermon "Take Off Your Coat...and Light a Fire," she encouraged all of



us "to go and love, forgive, share our faith, reach out to others to make something happen in the name of Jesus." Bishop Dyck also baptized two babies, Brielle Somang Lee, daughter to the Rev. Esther and John Lee, and Landen Scott Paul Garcea, son to the Revs. Tiffany and Joseph Garcea.

Retirement Service

We celebrated and continue to give thanks for our nine retirees who served a combined total of 261 years of ministry. To read more about where they've served, their ministry highlights, and plans after leaving the pulpit, [click here](#).

Memorial Service

We honored and remembered those pastors, spouses, and lay members to annual conference who have touched our lives and passed away in the last year with a message from Bishop John Schol from the Greater New Jersey Conference.

“Jesus was at work through each of your loved ones and we give thanks for their commitment and sacrifice for the church,” said Schol.

He also used the opportunity to speak about the future of The United Methodist Church.

“God wants to make us whole again but it won’t be by fixing it. We’re not going to change a few disciplinary paragraphs and everything will be fine,” said Schol. “God is looking to do a new thing in the United Methodist Church. Our church needs to be renewed. We are no longer connecting with the people in our communities who are hungering for a word of hope and resurrection. So, let’s all work together, not to fix the UMC but to renew it.”

We especially remembered the lives of the Rev. Bruce and Eugenia Johnson, who were killed 50 years ago on September 29, 1969, in their parsonage at Armitage Avenue



United Methodist Church in Lincoln Park. The murders remain unsolved. During the service, participants wrote names of loved ones and friends on pieces of fabric, which were then tied together and placed on a large loom in remembrance.

Gary Rand served as the worship leader for a second year and *The Many* band performed in each service. An all-conference choir, led by Rand, sang "Total Praise" at the Retirement Service.



Legislation Passed

Much of the legislation that passed at Annual Conference reflected the disapproval of the Traditional Plan adopted at February's General Conference Special Session, which emphasizes the current policies around homosexuality in the Book of Discipline for ordination and same-sex marriages while strengthening enforcement of those rules. Approved legislation included suspending payments to the General Administration Fund until changes are made to the structure and practices of General Conference. Also, a call to form a task force to explore a way forward for the NIC, including the possibility of a new Methodist expression, was approved.

Members approved taking a non-binding straw poll to gauge the annual conference on which direction it would choose for its future. The two choices included: 1) a conference whose policies allow for clergy to officiate at same-gender weddings, allow for consideration of ordained ministry people of varying sexual orientations and gender identities, and in which appointments are made with consideration given to the full range of contextual realities, or 2) according to the Book of Discipline as amended in 2019. The result was 441 for option #1 and 79 for option #2.



The Annual Conference

Shepherding Team (ACST), the NIC's coordinating and connectional group, presented three top strategic goals for the Conference to be implemented through a two-year plan. The goals approved are: 1) To Grow and Reach New Disciples of Jesus Christ, 2) To Live Out the Conviction that Racism is Incompatible with Christian Teaching, and 3) To Increase the Number of Highly Vital Congregations.



"These three interrelated goals are intended to have the greatest impact on the sustainability and future ministry of our annual conference," said ACST Co-Chair Liz Gracie."

The closings of four churches, Elmwood Park, New Hope in Chicago, Pilgrimage Protestant Church in University Park, and Lindenhurst Trinity were affirmed. We celebrate and bless the faithful ministries, witness, and legacies of these churches, pastors and members down through the years. The cabinet celebrated new beginnings, too, with the recent chartering of The Center in Itasca.

Offerings

Churches and individuals gave more than \$53,500 to this year's annual conference Bishop's Appeal for the NIC youth camps. The Aurora District came in first for most giving per capita, edging out last year's winner, the Elgin District, to take back the coveted traveling trophy! (Aurora came in first in 2017 and 2015.) With this money, the conference will be able to help send



many kids to camp! During the ordination service, attendees gave \$4,129 in the offering designated for the Ministerial Education Fund. This fund supports the ongoing work of the NIC's Board of Ordained Ministry in the work of recruitment, education, and deployment of pastors. Thank you!



Mission Truck Filled!

NIC's Secretary of Global Ministries

Rev. Shirley M. Pulgar Hughes said the Annual Conference mission challenge to collect dignity kits for the Midwest Mission Distribution Center was a huge success. Again this year, districts went above and beyond their goal.

With nearly 50% of NIC churches participating, we packed about 50,000 items or 5,271 pounds on the truck, an increase of 200 pounds from last year!

The only snag in this friendly competition: this year there was a tie! Rather than take it up for a vote on the electronic keypads, the title of the mission challenge winner will be shared between the DeKalb and Chicago Southern Districts! Thank you to all the churches for their generosity.

2018 Statistics

NIC's membership stands at **77,682**, down 2,850 from the previous year.

Worship attendance stands at **26,701**, down 1,765. Church school attendance stands at **6,521**, down 353. Professions or reaffirmations of faith was **875**, down 59.

The number of adults and young adults participating in small groups was **27,759**, up 465. The number of worshippers engaged in mission was **758**, up 73.



Next year's Annual Conference will return to the Renaissance Schaumburg Hotel and Convention Center from **June 7-9, 2020**. This will be Bishop Dyck's last annual conference as she announced her retirement after 41 years of ministry starting September 1, 2020.