

## **2021 Northern Illinois Annual Conference Wrap up**

### **Theme: Jesus Makes a Way**

From the comfort of home, coffee shop, office, or church, many of the more than 600 participants of the 182nd session of the Northern Annual Illinois Conference, with the theme "Jesus Makes a Way," made their way onto Zoom to take part in two days of business, voting, reports, Bible study, and worship services from July 16-17, 2021. For the second year, COVID-19 restrictions restricted in-person meetings, making it necessary to meet virtually. A special thanks to GNTV for production assistance and Barrington UMC for hosting all those behind the scenes.

This was the first time presiding in the Northern Illinois Annual Conference for Bishop John L. Hopkins, who came out of retirement to serve as interim bishop. He started January 1 in the middle of the pandemic and became accustomed to meeting via Zoom from his home in Indianapolis, Ind.

"I feel close to many of you because you have Zoomed your way into my heart," said Bishop Hopkins. "Amazingly, I have met with many of you in meetings, conference events, district gatherings, and small groups. I have had the opportunity to learn about you and your churches; listen to the stories you tell about the heart and soul of this Conference; and feel your love of Jesus and some of your anxiety about the future."

Hopkins delivered his Episcopal Address in two parts, focusing on what he's perceived as the Conference's strengths and challenges. "Most of the realities I have discovered are incredibly positive. For example, we have gifted and dedicated clergy and laity, we take a strong stand for equity and justice with full inclusion of everyone, our local churches are doing amazing frontline ministry, the conference's new structure under the Annual Conference Shepherding Team is streamlined and productive, and we continue to have a devotion to missions (the Northern Illinois Conference gave \$418,199 and supported 18 missionaries through the Advance in 2020)."

Bishop Hopkins addressed the reality of a continual decline in apportionment payments, concern about jurisdictional realignment of conferences (if we share a bishop, the Northern Illinois Conference will *not* "merge" with another conference – at some future date two conferences can vote to merge if they desire), and concern about a significant shift in the denomination.

"The Church needs to be unified and empowered," said Hopkins. "The Church also needs to be clear about its mission: to make disciples; to love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves." Hopkins said it's important to equip local churches and ministry settings to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

"Our need to focus resources on the local church is not only about conference programs, budget, and strategy. It is about us," Hopkins concluded. "Can we focus our attention on the people in our communities who need to know about the God we serve? That is the shift we need to make. And that focus cannot be given over to a conference committee or task force. Each of us is responsible!"

## **Legislation**

The Annual Conference voted virtually on several pieces of legislation including support for marginalized communities negatively impacted by COVID-19, advocating for the rights of Palestinian children and families, humanizing criminal justice, reorganization and streamlining of the program areas in the Conference, and a revision of the standing rules to reinstate legislative sections at Annual Conference beginning in 2022. We lifted the following eight church closings in prayer: Beach Park: York House, Northbrook: Glenbrook Korean, Ringwood, Wood Dale: Community, Chicago: Fernwood, Lisle: Faith, Alfolkey: Bethel, and Elkhorn (note: these closings are not all from one year as the pandemic delayed action on some).

## **Laity Session**

The NIC's three Co-Lay Leaders hosted an evening Zoom meeting on July 15 to kick off Annual Conference, which included a time for conversation and learning. Several local churches from around the Conference highlighted their new and creative ministries and a tour of the NIC website with tips on finding relevant information. To watch the recording and for presentations, visit [umcnic.org/laity](https://umcnic.org/laity).

## **Bible Study**

Bishop Julius C. Trimble from the Indiana Conference, who at one point donned a Chicago Cubs hat as a nod to his Northern Illinois roots, led two Bible study sessions encouraging an "attitude of gratitude." He helped us reflect on this year's scripture verse, Matthew 14:13-21 and Jesus feeding the 5,000. The recordings are available to watch and download at [umcnic.org/AC2021](https://umcnic.org/AC2021).

## **Worship Services**

Bishop Hee-Soo Jung from the Wisconsin Conference and former NIC Bishop delivered the message titled, "A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership" during the Memorial Service as we remembered clergy, spouses, staff and laity who have passed in the last year, including the more than 600,000 of our fellow Americans and more than 3.5 million of our brothers and sisters worldwide who died from the Coronavirus. The Retirement Service celebrated those clergy and local pastors who have been a gift to the church, offering leadership to congregations and ministries beyond the church. Combined, this class has served 362 years.

## **Bishop's Appeal Offering**

This year's special Bishop's Appeal offering totaled more than \$25,000 and went toward the United Methodist Committee on Relief's COVID-19 relief efforts worldwide.

## **Statistics**

During an unprecedented year affected by shutdowns, the Northern Illinois Conference saw 2020 membership drop to 74,030. This is down 2,432 from 2019's numbers of 76,462. While in-person worship was impossible most of the year, churches reported more than 26,607 people joined them for online worship. During the first three months of the year, when the pandemic was spreading, but shutdowns were not in place, they reported 17,406 in-person worshippers. Professions of faith and reaffirmations totaled 605, down from 858 in 2019. Most churches halted small groups and missionary teams due to the social distancing and health safety measures. During the periods when these could occur, the number of adults and young adults in small groups was at 19,332, down from 24,567. Sunday School attendance dropped from 5,814 to 3,629, while worshippers engaged in mission dropped from 15,594 to 10,103.

## **Upcoming Dates**

Keep on your calendar October 1 for the 2021 Service of Ordination and Commissioning (limited in-person, also livestreamed) and the October 2 business session (held via Zoom) to address the budget, nominations, and the United Methodist Foundation of the NIC's annual meeting. The 2022 Annual Conference will be held June 8-9 and return in person at the Renaissance Schaumburg Hotel and Convention Center.

For updates and more on the October session, visit [\*umcnic.org/AC2021\*](https://umcnic.org/AC2021).