

The 2021 Annual Conference of the Northern Illinois Conference held its first part on 16-17 July. The theme for July was “Jesus Makes a Way.” The Conference was conducted via Zoom with electronic voting.

Presiding in July was interim Bishop John L. Hopkins, and he is expected to preside in October as well. He addressed the Conference on both the 16th and 17th, and he spoke about his impressions of the Northern Illinois Conference from the perspective of a “temporary outsider.” He noted that ours is perhaps the most diverse conference in United Methodism—for example, we have rural, suburban, and urban churches, our people speak not just English but also Spanish, Korean, Tagalog, and other languages, and our membership comprises persons of Asian, Black, Latinx, Native American, and White racial and ethnic groups. Bishop Hopkins urged us to celebrate this diversity, but he also cautioned that such diversity requires effort to remain “united.”

A Bible study began both days, led by Bishop Julius C. Trimble of Indiana. There were also standard corollary activities outside the Conference sessions, including the Memorial Service and the Retirement Service. Although announced previously, Bishop Hopkins “fixed” the appointments for 2021-22. Reports were received during the Conference as usual, but they seemed fewer and more succinct than in the past.

Similarly, there were relatively few legislative items to vote on. The largest legislative item was the consent calendar, which was adopted. It included the following:

- action to close eight churches.
- action to re-configure the program ministries with the intention of combining like programs together into seven large umbrella groups and encouraging more efficient and effective use of Conference resources.
- action to increase the number of lay members in the Conference in order to get closer to, if not achieve, the required parity in membership between lay and clergy.
- a resolution calling for the creation of a United State Regional Conference. This would allow the American branch of United Methodism to adapt certain provisions of the *Discipline* to meet regional concerns much as United Methodists in Africa and elsewhere currently may do.

There was one item withheld from the consent calendar with a recommendation that it not be adopted. This item, which nevertheless was adopted, requires the process for creating the consent calendar to be more transparent by requiring a roll call vote on each calendar item and requiring a transcript where a discussion of recommending approval or non-approval is involved with any calendar item. Related to this was a further item not part of the consent calendar for adoption purposes but relating to the creation of the consent calendar was adopted that creates legislative study sessions to review and select legislation to go into future consent calendars, which appears to render the current Consent Calendar Committee moot. It is also unclear how this will be reconciled with the adoption of the item requiring roll call votes and transcripts.

There were five other individually voted items, all of which passed:

- a resolution requesting the Conference and its individual members to support efforts to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian children living under Israeli military occupation.

- A resolution requesting individuals and churches to contribute to the UMCOR COVID 19 Response Fund, which Fund supports members of marginalized communities during the pandemic.
- A resolution calling for a North Central Jurisdictional Conference to be held in order to elect and assign bishops. Such a Conference would normally have been held in 2020 but was postponed due to the pandemic yet with the result of bishop vacancies (as in the Northern Illinois Conference).
- A resolution calling for increased efforts to overcome racism in the criminal justice system.

There was also a motion from the floor that was adopted by vote. This requires District Superintendents (or their proxies), during church/charge conferences, to enquire about the attendance of lay members at annual conference sessions and what barriers or hindrances may discourage or prevent such attendance to the end that the Conference might be able to alleviate some or all of those barriers.

The Conference reconvened for its second part on 1-2 October. Five pieces of business were conducted:

1. The Conference received the historical report of the Conference Shepherding Team.
2. The Conference approved its budget for 2022. The following summary shows totals for the two large areas of expenditure, giving actual 2020, budget 2021, and anticipated 2022 numbers:

ITEM	ACTUAL 2020	BUDGET 2021	PROPOSED 2022
Total Conference Income	4,725,921	4,401,960	4,331,931
Total Conference Expenses	3,976,288	4,401,960	4,331,931
Total General Church Expenses	1,187,173	1,722,057	1,823,556
Total Expenses	5,163,460	6,124,017	6,155,487

3. Approved the slate of committees and boards proposed by the Nominating Committee.
4. Adjourned in order to re-convene in oversight of the United Methodist Foundation of the Northern Illinois Conference and conducted the following business:

- a. Approved two new members to join the Board of the Foundation.
- b. Heard a report about activities of the Foundation. The Foundation manages three investment funds with the following summary of their performance:

FUND	YEAR-TO-DATE	LAST 5 YEARS
Aggressive	14.6%	14.21%
Moderate	10%	10.76%
Conservative	5.06%	6.88%

- c. Learned that the Foundation also maintains a Climate Control fund, offers leadership training programs, offers support to area Food Banks, and matches various scholarship funds for minority students.
5. Considered two legislative items coming from the Board of Pensions.
- a. The Conference adopted a plan to modify slightly current clergy health insurance in order to eliminate a few cases where individuals were eligible for both Conference-funded insurance and insurance funded through private employment. The savings to the Conference for this change was estimated at \$75,000.
 - b. Adopted the *Because They Cared* initiative by which individuals and churches can donate money in honor or memory of a clergyperson who was especially important in the life of the congregation or individual. The funds collected would form a reserve fund to be used to cover any future shortfalls relative to clergy pensions due to poor investment performance; the hope is that this reserve fund would save the Conference from having to cover a shortfall from the Conference budget or pass the cost on to local churches to cover. It is expected that this initiative will continue into the future. A minimum donation of \$100 is needed to have an honored clergyperson be acknowledged on a website to be designed. Clergy who are or were not members of the Northern Illinois Conference may be so honored.