

## UMCNIC Annual Conference

**June 14-16, 2026**

The theme of this 187<sup>th</sup> conference was **Practicing Hope**. Lay delegates from RUMC were Lynn Washburn-Livingston, Meg Shook, and Jean Edie.

*We rejoice even in our struggles, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. (Romans 5:3-4)*

*For in hope we are saved. Though we do not yet see the fullness of what is to come, we wait with patience and trust. (Romans 8:24-25)*

### **Laity Session**

The focus of the Laity Session was a panel presentation and discussion with five young adults. They were asked what hope means to them; what brings them joy or a sense of celebration in the church today; where do they see signs of hope in the church, the country, or the world; what opportunities or areas of growth would they like to see; how do you imagine the future of the UMC, and other topics. See Appendix A for comments from the youth.

### **Legislation**

Fifteen legislation items were brought before the conference and all were approved:

- Nominations for committees
- 2027 Budget
- Special Sunday offerings
- Missions Links Advances (formerly Rainbow Covenant)
- Closure of Christ UMS in Alsip
- Closure of Wheatland Salem UMC in Naperville
- Amend the Conference Benefits Program
- Minimum salary increase for Full-Time Elders
- Creation Care action resolution
- Revise Nomination Committee standing rules
- Revise Shepherding Team standing rules
- Proceeds of closed church sales
- Elimination of the UM Ministers credit union
- Timely publishing of the conference journal
- Changes to conference housing policy

Specific information can be found at <https://www.umcnic.org/AC2026Docs> or from one of the delegates.

## **Bishop's Address**

Bishop Schwerin's address focused on "Refugia" which refers to small, hidden shelters where faith, community, and life persist during times of crisis. It is a metaphor for congregations becoming resilient, nurturing centers of renewal amidst cultural or climate collapse. Churches should be open to change to prevent closing. See Appendix B for other comments from the Bishop.

## **Other Presentations and Services**

- Episcopal Committee Report
- Bible Study
- Laity Address
- Garrett Seminary Report
- Celebration of Ministry
- Memorial Service
- Retirement Service

## **Lunch and Learn**

Global Ministries presented speakers from the Global Missions Fellows Program and United Women of Faith. Discussion included information about working with Palestinian Christians and other Advance giving programs through the Global Ministries Program. The Global Ministries website provides information on mission programs in our country and abroad. *#stillinmission* will connect you to monthly zoom meetings featuring missionaries throughout the world.

The Fresh Expression session discussed new ways to reach out to the community to share Christ with others. They stressed we need to show and provide a feeling of belonging rather than believing. Meet people where they are. What are their needs? It is about unbundling faith. Encourage curiosity, wholeness, connection and empathy. Jesus is already present. We need simply to listen to those around us and provide unconditional love. Take the church out of the church.

## APPENDIX A

### Young Adult Comments:

- Hope is:
  - Eternal, perseverance, contagious, faith, suffering (don't let yourself get too comfortable),
- Where do you see hope?
  - When groups unite in a diverse world.
  - Kindness/helping in the community.
  - Mentors and leaders working with youth.
  - Children showing love and positivity.
  - Older people paving the way for the younger generation.
  - Realizing that even though the world says no, there are always possibilities.
  - Realizing that you can't do anything without Jesus.
  - Seeing a hunger in young people to seek God and truth.
- Other comments:
  - Let youth mentor adults sometimes. Realize and accept that children/youth are not too young to make suggestions.
  - To older people, remember your time is not over. We need you.
  - What is the love language of your church?
  - Remember the church is still alive.
  - Create opportunities for intergenerational activities. Reach out to youth where they are from a Christian perspective.
  - Allow younger voices to speak.
  - Practice faith, even if you fail sometimes.
  - Make sure staff are welcoming youth.
  - Create small groups.
  - We don't serve the Pastor, we serve God.
  - Remember the end vision is God, not worldly things.
  - Love is action – pray, be there, listen.
  - Look for the presence of God in church. Don't just praise people.
  - Have children speak in church early to develop their confidence.
  - Hope is expecting, not wishing.
  - Being a teenager and keeping Christ-centered is hard, Cut us some slack.
  - Be diverse and open to change.
  - What can I give the church, not what can the church give me

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Bishop Schwerin comments:**

- We have an inexhaustible God.
- God's love is always poured out.
- Pilgrimage creates journey which creates pilgrims.
- Rapid change has created fractures. We need to create refuge or pockets of safety on the way to the next stage. This will allow for discernment.
- Make love louder than fear.
- Take the side of institutions.
- Hoarding will not help. Progress is mutual.
- What you pay attention to grows.
- A predictive statistic of churches closing is declining population of women over 60.
- A sign of healthy churches are baptisms