



# Northern Illinois Conference

OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

303 E. Wacker Dr. • Suite 2020 • Chicago, IL 60601

Office (312) 346-9766

**Prairie North District** - Rev. Dr. Hwa-Young Chong, District Superintendent

312-346-9766 Ext: 781: [hychong@umcnic.org](mailto:hychong@umcnic.org)

District News Letter

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Paul Chilcote in his book *Multiplying Love: A Vision of United Methodist Life Together* writes, referring to God's vision of peace in Scripture and hymns:

Grace characterizes this alternative community in the world. When grace, mercy, and love prevail, joy replaces sorrow, love displaces anger and hatred, community supplants envy and malice, and unity and harmony supersede our penchant for discord.

As we approach the Holy Week and Easter, I find Paul's reminder of grace powerful. The unfolding narrative of Jesus' birth, life, suffering, death, and resurrection is inseparable from the whole story of God's grace. Paul, as one of the finest contemporary United Methodist thinkers and historians, continues to write, "God transforms us from a people of noise, rancor, and division into a united family, in which the quiet and peaceable reign of Christ rules"(43, *Multiplying Love*).

We live in a culture in which going to church is not the norm anymore. Recently, during his message at our Day with the Bishop, Bishop Schwerin shared that over 50% of the Northern Illinois Conference churches have less than 35 people in average worship. While we know that many of our churches have been declining for decades, it still is surprising and even painful to hear about such a reality at our conference. It is not only a reality in our conference or denomination. The cover story of the most-recent volume of the Christian Century addresses exactly this matter of how hard it is to be in ministry in the U.S. The cover picture shows a person kneeling and trying to hold together a church building that is breaking apart. It is a heartbreaking image, and the article is equally disheartening.

Despite all the challenges we face, I believe our hope is the grace of God. People of faith have endured many challenges over the centuries, from persecution to wars, pandemics, internal divisions, and external misunderstandings. Through it all, God has always been with us, focusing on the good news of new life through Jesus Christ.

I pray that the Holy Week and Easter this year will be a time of finding strength and joy in God's grace in a new way for all of us!

As I visit with pastors and laity across our district, I'm deeply grateful for all of your faithful ministries. Some of you have significant church anniversaries. Some of you are preparing for pastoral changes. Some of you celebrate new baptisms and growing disciples in your communities. In all, through all, God is with us!

Blessings in the Spirit of our Triune God,

Hwa-Young

[Prairie North](#) District Superintendent