June 14-16 Pastor Heather & Maddie Connor, Pastor Rob and Carolyn Sprawka attended the 187th Session of the United Methodist Annual Conference of Northern Illinois. The theme of the Conference this year was “Practicing Hope.” The theme comes from Romans 5:3-5, but I’m also reminded of the quote attributed to the Protestant Reformation leader Martin Luther, “Everything that is done in the world in done by hope.”

Both these references were on full display as both Clergy and Laity convened to further the work of a connectional church. The three days were packed with inspirational music, meaningful celebrations of ministry, and reports from various Methodist Committees and Ministries. The reach and impact of the Northern Illinois Conference and UMCG was extraordinary and inspiring. Each of you are making an impact to bring God’s world to God’s people – Practicing Hope!

There was also the business side that needed to be accomplished. The 2027 apportioned budget for the Conference was approved. Expenses and funding sources are expected to balance. All financial indicators have seen increases surpassing those of the same time frame in 2025. An encouraging sign.

Have you ever wondered how or who decides apportionments or how decisions are made in the Methodist Church? Legislation is voted on in Plenary sessions. These voting sessions are presided by a leader or the Bishop. Roberts Rules of Order are followed. Amendments can be made to proposed legislation. Voting members are encouraged to speak for or against the legislation, limited to three (3) for and three (3) opposed. Then, a vote is held by raising of the hand. On display was a functioning, respectful, reflective, approach to important issues before the church. The Methodist Church is not a “top down” model, it is the people from local churches (laity) along with Clergy, discerning and following what God is calling the church to do.

One of the most affirming opportunities was visiting the table displays that various NIC ministries had set up. Immigration Law & Justice, Midwest Mission, Creation Care Committee, United Women in Faith, UM Volunteers in Mission, United Voices for Children to name a few. Upon being asked “what church are you with” we were enthusiastically met with “oh, we know your church and what you are doing – thank you!” UMCG was one of the examples of churches on the display of the NIC Creation Care display (photo attached).

Lastly, how wonderful it was to have Maddie as one of UMCG’s Lay Delegates. There was much conversation at Conference about intentionally including young people in our ministries at all levels. Young people bring hope – and going back to Martin Luther – that’s how everything gets done in the world – hope!

I am grateful for the opportunity to have represented UMCG at Annual Conference.

Carolyn Sprawka