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Greetings in the name of our Risen Lord!

We want to affirm again all the ways you are reaching your churches, extension ministries, and communities in creative, inspiring, and engaging ways. Keep up the good work!

As we all know, information about COVID-19 and appropriate responses to its spread are complex. It is understandable that you and your ministry leaders would have many questions about relaunching in-person worship and reopening your churches and ministries. We all want to make responsible decisions as we transition from our current status of having no meetings of more than 10 people at safe distances from one another to a graduating increase in public gatherings with fewer restrictions.

Guided by our faith and informed by medical experts as well as national, state, and local government officials; the Cabinet has been considering the best ways for us to respond to this ever-changing situation. While this letter is full of information, we pray you will digest it and reach out to your District Superintendent should you have questions.

First, we are guided by:

- The Greatest Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind’ and ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:36-40);
- Paul’s words to the Philippians, our 2020 Annual Conference theme: “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:4);
- Wesley’s Three General Rules – “Do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God.”

These texts and rules for Christian life are the guiding principles of our response.

Second, we recognize the unique position churches and pastors find themselves in, navigating our relationship with the state while appreciating the separation afforded by our Constitution.

This did not escape the teachings of Jesus. When asked about paying taxes, Jesus responded, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:15-22). What we want to provide you with is a way to keep people safe and comply with the governmental guidance while recognizing that our ultimate allegiance is to God’s kingdom.

Third, we uphold what our Social Principles affirm: “Stewardship of health is the responsibility of each person to whom health has been entrusted. Creating the personal, environmental and social conditions in which health can thrive is a joint responsibility – public and private” (¶162V).

How will we respond together? By following Wesley’s Three General Rules.

First, by doing no harm:
- Always follow the guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention regarding the size of crowds which can be together. Currently, that is 10 people or less who are practicing social distancing of at least 6 feet.
- Recognize that these guidelines will likely change over the next few weeks. As they change, you will want to stay current and communicate updated expectations.

Second, by doing good:
- Continue to reach out to your community in safe ways.
- Make vulnerable populations a priority. Urge church members to check on their neighbors and make sure they have what they need,
including care for body and soul. Third, by attending upon the ordinances of God:

- Offer online worship, discipleship opportunities and appropriate pastoral care.
- Offer the sacrament of Holy Communion as you see fit for your context. (See our pandemic resource page for further guidance on this.)
- Engage your church leadership team in Christian conferencing as you plan and prepare for next steps. There will be a time when you will have some clearance to reopen and you will want to be ready. If you need assistance in doing this, please communicate your need with your district office.

It is our expectation that all United Methodist Churches remain closed and that staff work from home as much as possible. We do not recommend that any in-person gatherings take place for any reason except for recording worship services and messages of devotion and encouragement and small groups to provide for community needs. As a reminder, the guidelines are 10 people or less who are practicing social distancing of at least 6 feet.

Will our guidance change?

In a Wednesday, April 22 press conference, you may have heard the Governor’s office saying that churches could reopen as early as May 1. While we deeply appreciate the desire to re-gather in-person, we will continue to follow the CDC guidelines and expect United Methodist pastors, churches, and ministries in Oklahoma not hold public services until Bishop Nunn gives specific instruction for when and how to do so. We will follow closely how Oklahoma moves through this phased reopening and we will communicate any updates to this communication after May 17. We have noticed so many of you who are fulfilling the ministry to which you are called using safe practices. Thank you! If you or your church need support in this difficult time, please contact your District Superintendent.

When will we communicate with you?

For the foreseeable future, we will be communicating with you via email each Friday. These regular Friday communications will allow you to know when to expect any updates.

Camps (from the May 1 letter)

The Board of Trustees of Camps and Conferences, led by director Ed Parker and chairperson Herschel Beard, met in special session on Tuesday and made two decisions of note. First, all scheduled OKUMC Camps for the 2020 season have been canceled. The second decision was to look at possible alternatives to bring people to the campsites after July 1. A tremendous amount of planning has already gone into developing these alternatives, but details have not been finalized. Please watch this communication as well as the Camps social media accounts for further decisions.

How can we help?

We have launched a new web hub called “Resources for Relaunch.” These resources will help church leaders and pastors facilitate conversation and make plans amid uncertainty.

We highly recommend that those of you who will be relaunching worship services watch the video produced by Path 1 (Discipleship Ministries) and use the accompanying discussion guide. A guide for creating a relaunch team is also provided. We believe that every congregation and ministry can benefit from doing this strategic work together. You can expect that more resources will be added including reconnecting with your community in mission. We will include links in the Friday updates along with alerts as the web hub is updated with new information. We pray that these resources are a blessing to you and your leadership teams.

A Call to Prayer

We want to close our letter inviting you to pray without ceasing (1st Thessalonians 5:17). Let us be in prayer for each other, our churches and communities as well as leaders at all levels of our government. Let us remember those who have contracted this terrible illness and the families of those who have died. Let us intercede for those who have to work on the front lines and in the sectors of public safety and healthcare. Let us lift up those who have lost their jobs and have nowhere to lay their heads at night. Pray for this and so much more.

Questions?

Should you have questions, need clarification or simply want to discuss how to proceed in your own context, reach out to your District Superintendent.
What we can learn from “In Case of Katrina: Reinventing the Church in Post-Katrina New Orleans” and author Dr. Ellen Blue

BY REBEKAH HASTY, PROGRAM COORDINATOR FOR CONNECIONAL MINISTRIES AND DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Ellen Blue is the Mouzon Biggs, Jr. Professor of the History of Christianity and United Methodist Studies at Phillips Theological Seminary. She is ordained in the Louisiana conference of the United Methodist Church and is an accomplished author. She graciously agreed to visit with me on April 16 about her book and the similarities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and COVID-19. Her research and analysis are invaluable and share wisdom in a time of uncertainty.

Get a “seat at the table”

Church leadership needs to step forward as the moral authority. John Wesley said, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”

Wesley had a commitment to social justice and believed people could organize and change society for the better using science and medicine.

Blue wrote, “It can be easier to believe that we should simply submit than to believe that what I do makes a difference in how things will turn out not just for me and for those I love, but also for total strangers and unborn generations. Profound interconnectedness means that my life impacts all other lives, whether I want it to, and whether I am aware of it or not” (pg. 161).

Wrestle with theological questions: “Why did this happen? What does God have to do with it?”

Blue shares, “Among other changes, tragedy dramatically alters the survivors’ spiritual lives.”

We hope that times of trial and strife draw people to God and one another, yet many times fear and uncertainty alienate them from God and those they love.

People are searching for sanctuary in the traditional sense. The sanctuary is not only the place people come to worship, it is the place they come to feel safe. This unprecedented time has made that impossible and people are unlikely to feel the shelter of sanctuary the way they did in the past.

Realize congregations will look different

A great number of displaced residents of New Orleans left, never to return. Churches reopened not knowing where many of their congregants were living or even if they had escaped the floods.

Similarly, our congregations will be changed. Many will fear contagion and leaving their homes. We will need to take specific measures to protect and reassure our most vulnerable populations. This will not happen overnight or on an aspirational timetable.

Engage collaborative leadership

Clergy, staff, and laity must work together to address immediate needs. Involve laity with expertise. In New Orleans, authoritative leadership by the Catholic diocese proved rapid, but problematic. Pay
In Case of Katrina, cont.

attention to those on the “ground.” It will take longer, but it will be more organic and ultimately more successful.

Be creative! Now is the time for innovation and reaching out to new people in new ways not tried before.

Different churches will make different choices. What works today might not six months or a year from now. We are in uncertain times and needs will continue to change.

Collaborate with other churches. Separate churches working together support our hurting communities and congregations. We are stronger together.

Blue’s final chapter shares a quote from Vaclav Havel, a Czechoslovakian statesman and playwright: “Hope is not about believing we can change things; hope is about believing that what we do matters” (pg. 205).

As Christians and Oklahoma United Methodists, we cannot change COVID-19. What matters is we can share the hope that is Jesus Christ.

Pass the Baton seminar to take place online

Speaker Jim Ozier has created a Passing the Baton webinar for the Oklahoma Conference. The webinar will be held on two different dates: Tuesday, May 5 from 6:30-8:00 p.m. or Thursday, May 7 from 2:00-3:30 p.m.

The webinar is geared toward coaching pastors who are moving from one church to another, but it is also beneficial for laity and district superintendents as well.

There is no charge for the webinar, but registration is required to receive a Zoom invitation for the chosen date.

For more information, please contact Chris Tiger by phone at 405-530-2005 or ctiger@okumc.org.

Register online at okumc-reg.brtapp.com/PassingtheBatonWebinar

SAVE THE DATE!

You’re invited to join us for the VIRTUAL 2020 NSO Good Samaritan Awards Luncheon!

Please save the date: Thursday, June 18, 2020 at 12:00pm and help NSO celebrate our wonderful honorees, while raising critical funds for our vital programs.

More information to come soon, but keep an eye on our website and social media for everything NSO! We can’t wait to celebrate with you!
April 19, 1995 is a day all too familiar to Oklahomans.

“Everyone knows Oklahoma for three things: tornadoes, the musical and the bombing. Even when I lived in the UK, that’s what people knew about Oklahoma,” said Tabitha Beckman, who was only 10 at the time of the bombing. “I think it’s just become part of our collective psyche.”

Across the state and across the country, people are remembering the 25th anniversary of the Murrah Federal Building bombing.

Beckman, who grew up in Lawton but now lives in Oklahoma City, said the bombing feels both long ago and still present.

“I remember driving by OKC-Federal just a few years after the bombing and seeing it still covered with scaffolding. My family went to the fifth anniversary and memorial dedication event,” Beckman said. “It’s an important moment in our history and impacted a lot of people’s lives.”

Mary Myers, who was working just over a mile away on the day of the bombing, agrees.

“In some ways it seems like it was a lifetime ago,” she said, “but every time the anniversary comes around, it seems more like it was just yesterday.”

Myers, who worked in computer services for the Oklahoma Conference at the time, thought that one of the air conditioners had fallen through the roof and shaken the building.

“I stepped out of my office and saw other employees doing the same,” Myers said. “While we had been standing around, Boyce Bowdon had been finding answers.”

Bowdon, the communications director for the conference at the time, had been conducting an interview in the lobby when the explosion took place. The interviewee said it sounded like a bomb he had heard while on a mission trip in Bosnia.

“We looked out the front door and saw smoke billowing up downtown. I thought it was coming from the First United Methodist Church area, and immediately ran to my car and...
headed downtown toward the smoke,” Bowden said. “From that moment for weeks that followed, I did my best to keep the United Methodist Connection and the local and regional media aware of the United Methodist’s ministry in response to the bombing, along with the inspiring faith stories I saw.”

Myers remembers hearing a plea for blood donations, so she and several coworkers got in their cars and drove to donate blood. She said the number of people volunteering to donate backed up traffic for several miles.

Less than 10 miles away, Tate Monroe was walking outside at Midwest City High School. He felt the blast and looked west to see the smoke cloud rising over the city. After school, he and other friends from OKC-First, one of the hardest-hit buildings, started calling each other to find out where to meet that night for youth group. It was then that he learned his father, a nurse at the nearby county jail, had contributed as a rescue worker on site.

“My dad had been tasked with carrying those who had not survived into our church where it was being used as a morgue and for identification,” Monroe said. “His telling of the sanctuary having imploded and collapsed in on itself was chilling.”

“Even more gripping was that all of the Easter lilies from service a few days prior were still standing lined up along the altar rails and unharmed, [and] the center of the stained glass Rose Window that featured the face of Jesus also remained intact,” Monroe continued. “These incredible symbols of God’s goodness also remind me of the large banner that went up on the outside of the church a few months later. It said, ‘Our God Reigns and We Will Remain!’”

Rev. Lesly Broadbent, who pastors OKC-First today, said this year’s memorial service is different because for the first time, it is entirely online.

“I think that the message that we have about the bombing is also the same message we need to hear about this coronavirus outbreak, and that’s words of hope and words of comfort in the face of despair and disaster,” he said.

Broadbent said it’s important to battle against the kind of forces that fueled the tragedy in 1995.

“The reasons behind Timothy McVeigh and others that were associated with the bombing, a lot of those stemmed from white supremacist beliefs and also anti-government beliefs, and those are both still in existence today,” he said. “Whether a person is in Oklahoma, or a person of faith or not, those are things we can all rally around to fight against.”

Monroe has worked to pass the history and his experience on to his children. He’s shared stories, pictures and articles with them, and he’s taken them to both his OKC-First and to the memorial across the street.

“There is, honestly, so much more I could [share] about this time period, from being interviewed by national publications and broadcasters, to entertaining rescue workers at the Cox Center… from rehearsing the musical Godspell in the bombed-out sanctuary… to the day we, as a congregation of almost a thousand people, walked together from Trinity Baptist Church where we’d held service during construction to the grand reopening of our church,” Monroe said. “Even in the midst of tragedy, there is proof of God’s blessings in the middle of it all. It’s all about what you choose to look for.”

Nick Harris, pastor of OKC-First, holds up a piece of stained glass that survived the bombing. This and additional surviving pieces were used to make a new window. Photo from the Communications Ministry archive.
In the midst of the global coronavirus crisis, Circle of Care is leaning in to respond to the increased needs of foster families, single mothers at Pearl's Hope and PAL youth.

Immediate needs of our clients include supplemental child care for essential workers who are fostering, diapers/wipes/pullups, groceries (kids eat A LOT!) and activity funds to enrich the home-schooling expenses.

Want to help? Please give online at circleofcare.org and designate your gift "COVID-19" in the comment section.

Thank you!
Epworth Villa “call team” mobilized

BY BETH CASE, COMMUNITY OUTREACH COORDINATOR FOR EPWORTH VILLA

New acquaintances and friendships are blossoming. Sally Lenz, a call team member, said this project was a step out of her comfort zone. Employees Rev. Marsha Purcell, a chaplain, Elizabeth Newell, a licensed clinical social worker, and Destiny Helms, director of independent living, have mobilized a group of volunteer callers made up of them and approximately 35 independent living residents, including Lenz.

The call is a daily check in. The callers check on the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of our neighbors. The callers are instructed that it is not a time to pry. The call is voluntary to the recipient, but it is a way to keep in touch and not feel isolated.

“We are in the business of assisting members of our community to thrive,” Purcell said. “They have always been thriving educators, entrepreneurs, business leaders, church leaders, and continue to be a gift to our community. We do not want in any way to diminish any independence that is not mandated to each of us.”

The recipients are also asked by the caller assigned to them, “Please call and check on me, if you don’t receive my call.” The volunteers and those being called all agree that, “we are in this together.”

The callers ask questions like,
“How was your dinner?”
“Do you need any groceries?”
“What are you doing for fun?”
“Are you feeling well?”
“Do you have all the medications you need?”
“Do you need a puzzle, a book, art supplies, stationary, or something else to occupy your time?”
“Are you finding time for spiritual renewal?”
“Are you reaching out to other people in your faith community?”
“Do you need devotional materials or devotional websites?”
“Have you been outside to see the beautiful spring flowers?”
“How is your family?”
If they just need to talk and vent, the volunteers say that’s fine, too.

Purcell went on to say that occasionally a resident might not be aware of something going on such as Wednesday morning breakfast. She has been able to find answers to questions on some occasions and says, “that’s been a positive thing.”

Lenz also said she enjoyed getting to know residents she didn’t know before, adding that it’s been fun and that she really likes them.

“They all seem truly happy to be at Epworth; they think management is doing a good job in a tough situation,” Lenz said. “One lady was hoping that we would get through this whole pandemic without a single case of COVID-19 at Epworth!”

“I’ve heard about kids and grandkids and such, have found commonalities among us, and sorta marvel that they truly don’t seem to mind my calling them every single day,” Lenz continued. “One lady and I were, just today, talking about how we couldn’t wait to go to a grocery store again! A ‘chore’ we agreed that, in normal pre-lock down times, could be a bit of a burden.”

Epworth Villa is a non-profit, life plan retirement community located in north Oklahoma City. To learn more, visit www.facebook.com/EpworthVilla.
Team leaders and churches who had planned local and international mission trips through Volunteers In Mission (VIM) now have to figure out how to prepare or continue to support their mission partners while social distancing.

South Central Jurisdiction UMVIM and Disaster Response Director Karen Distefano and the Oklahoma Conference VIM held an online meeting to help equip churches and VIM team leaders with resources and ideas for holding online missions or training for missions. The webinar encouraged volunteers who are stuck at home to use their time to work on team roles and learn more about the area they are in mission with.

In the recorded meeting, Distefano was joined by Una Jones, director of the Mission Volunteer Office, Global Ministries; Rev. Tom Lank, Northeast Jurisdiction UMVIM Director; Rev. Tammy Kuntz, North Central Jurisdiction UMVIM Director; Ronda Cordill, Western Jurisdiction UMVIM Director; Gray Miller the Southeast Jurisdiction Assistant UMVIM Director; and several conference coordinators and team leaders.

Distefano emphasized that everyone should remember their original reason for engaging in mission.

“Many of you felt called to serve your neighbors,” Distefano said. “Some of you may have been called, or have a passion for a particular issue, or a particular location in the world. Maybe you’re particularly drawn to sites that work with children or with hunger issues. Maybe you’re really drawn to Central America or Africa.”

She continued to emphasize the need for ongoing mission work and encouraged leaders to examine why it’s important to to keep connected with partner sites. These partners, she said, are still in mission, and their resources are going to be extremely limited now. That need is a very important reason to still be in mission.

Distefano explained that it’s also important for team leaders to bring the passion and the excitement of their mission to the team members they have worked hard to recruit.

“They still want to be connected, they still want to serve, and so as a team leader, your new ‘why’ could be that you’re wanting to keep your team focused on that mission site,” Distefano said. “And we still want to empower people during these uncertain times.”

She also said it is important for team leaders to work with their mission site directors, “letting them know you are still in partnership, and you still want to support their mission, and they can tell you what they have going on and what they need.”

Webinar leaders said self-isolation is also a great time to educate team members and churches about issues such as immigration, hunger and the fair treatment of all people. Tips included starting a Bible study or book club, researching statistics in your community, and getting involved with local agencies that are already addressing these needs. Volunteering at a food bank was used as an example to get teams involved. Even in this uncertain time, Christians are still called to be in mission.

To watch the whole seminar, visit this link.

For more information contact Distefano at kdistefano@scjumc.org or conference VIM Coordinator Lori Foster at lfoster@okumc.org.
Every year the vast majority of Americans who pass away do so without having prepared a valid estate plan.

A Plan Brings Peace
Almost everyone feels better with a plan. It is easy to complete your estate plan and achieve peace of mind. It is comforting to know that you have organized your life and your plans in a way that provides for and protects your loved ones.

Take Advantage of Incentives
Approximately 65% of Americans do not have a will. This statistic is especially astounding since state and federal laws provide some significant incentives for the preparation of an estate plan.

These incentives are designed to make it easy for very personal wishes to be known and followed—wishes that deal with child custody, property distribution and a legacy of values. Not to mention the fact that, in many cases, a carefully created estate plan serves to actually minimize costs related to settling an estate.

1. Too Little Property to Merit an Estate Plan
What may seem small today could grow significantly before death. And, where no estate plan exists, the state determines the distribution of the assets.

2. Distaste for Legal Documents
An estate without a plan becomes much more complicated than creating one. Furthermore, attorneys can provide a summary to ensure your estate plan meets your desires.

3. An Estate Plan is Costly
In some cases, heirs will bear the brunt of settlement costs. Having an estate plan can actually save you and your family money.

4. Life Gets in the Way
We hope to shift your thinking to consider what good could be accomplished through making an estate plan today.

Find what is keeping you from planning, and we can help you overcome the obstacles. We are here to guide you, give us a call anytime.

You can change someone’s life by how you invest your time, energy, and resources. We can make it possible; call David Battles to start planning your invested legacy today.

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GIVING LEGACY A VOICE
FUTURE REASONS AMERICAN AVOID PREPARING AN ESTATE PLAN

Invest in Lasting Good
OKLAHOMA METHODIST FOUNDATION
Pastors across Oklahoma have been putting the adage “the church is not the building, it’s the people” into literal action since in-person gatherings were restricted to 10 or fewer on March 24 in response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Rev. David Player, who pastors Guymon-Victory Memorial, has worked to keep his congregation in ministry with their community. He’s taken blessing bags made by volunteers to local truck stops for truck drivers who have to continue their deliveries. He’s made a point to text members on a regular basis as individuals and families have been self-quarantined at home.

Like many pastors, Player has joined the world of online worship. A weekly worship service is recorded in the sanctuary with a piano, hymns and leaders who practice social distancing. By contrast, a weekly devotion featuring only Player and a guitar is recorded on a smartphone. He’s received positive feedback from members regarding online worship, and an average of 120 participate online each week.

“Broadcasting over YouTube Live Streaming and Facebook Live is simple, low-cost, and easy,” Player said. “Select the YouTube Live or Facebook Live application, have your thoughts prepared and ready to share, [and] hit record, share, and then end. Easy peasy, lemon squeezy.”

Rev. Robert Rose, who leads Duncan-First, has also been recording services in the sanctuary. He said they have people from other states joining them on a regular basis, and they get just as much viewership during the week as they do during the live worship on Sunday morning. In addition to music and a sermon, every other week a nurse from the congregation will close with tips on how to stay healthy while sheltering in place.

“We try not to scare people, but empower people. Right now, a lot of people just feel helpless, and when you give them tangible things they can do, then they’re able to feel like they’re more in control,” Rose said. “That’s just the same way you handle grief; you just try to help people give more control over their life, and it gives them comfort.”

Rose said the church has been divided into several “flocks” with each led by a “lay shepherd” who is in communication with their group every week. Bible studies take place by Zoom, an online meeting software, and individual pre-packaged communion cups are delivered to homes of members who want them for Sunday.

“I just remind people we’re not on our own, we’re not alone,” Rose said. “God is with us. There is a resurrection after Good Friday.”

Though Rev. Jinx Barber has also used Zoom
Left the building, cont.

for discipleship and livestreaming for worship, his church in Dewey has organized a drive-in approach for worship. Barber credits Rev. Tari Carbaugh, who serves at Samaritan Counseling and Growth Center, with having the prior experience to put it together in a safe manner.

A stage wide enough to accommodate social distancing for the worship team is set up in the parking lot of a local park, and families pull into parking spaces and stay in their cars. The service is broadcast on KRIG 104.9 FM, a local country station, which allows members who can’t attend or who don’t have livestreaming capabilities to listen in. Visitors from different churches have come, but there’s no desire to lure them away from their church homes.

“We’ve had some people go to other drive-in worship services and say it feels just like church in the open, but when they come here, they feel like they’re a part of something,” Barber said. “That’s when we know we’ve hit the nail on the head.”

Alyssa Hamilton, who attends Dewey and participates in the drive-in weekly worship, said the energy in the cars is contagious.

“It feels 110% like worship. It’s funny how when the situation changes from what we are always used to and we think outside the box we live even more in the moment,” Hamilton said. “This is one of the most unreal times in our lives. Nothing is ‘normal.’ Having church keeps some sense of ‘normal’ and helps keep you surrounded by community even if it’s from a physical distance.”

Barber said his congregation isn’t rushing to go back to the building in May because no one can truly predict what the next few months will look like for communities. Among the uncertainty, however, he has seen his members step up to help each other in practical ways. He expressed both gladness that people are more aware of each other’s needs and sadness that it took a pandemic to make it happen.

“When church left the building, we had to learn to be the church,” Barber said. “We’re not always good at taking care of people when they’re in our building, and now this pandemic has forced us to be a better church.”

Rose agrees, and he thinks the church will be stronger for the experience.

“I wish the coronavirus had never happened, but I think coming out of this, the church is going to be so much stronger,” Rose said. “I believe this will be a defining moment for our generation, and the church is being forced to reach out in ways and to gain expertise that I don’t think we would’ve otherwise gained.”

We miss being at church, but have been listening to audio version of sermons and Bible study sessions. I know the work of the church is still going on despite this time.

A personal note to Rev. David Player serves as encouragement from a member of Guymon-Victory Memorial. Photo submitted by Player; published with permission.

The choir at Duncan-First meets online as part of ongoing discipleship efforts at the church. Photo from the Duncan-First Facebook page; published with permission.
Author addresses questions about online attendance practices

In a recent blog, Christian author and speaker Carey Nieuwhof has addressed five awkward questions about how churches track online worship attendance.

Nieuwhof encourages churches to consider five areas of concern when calculating their online attendance, including what metrics to use, how to address low view times, whether to use a multiplier, how to define accuracy and why online attendance matters.

Additionally, Nieuwhof offers five best practices for churches to follow, including using consistent benchmarks, tracking engagement, connecting with engagers, monitoring momentum and experimenting with content.

The full article is available on the author’s website at careynieuwhof.com.

Five Questions: How to Measure Online Attendance

- Should three second views count?
- What do you do about low average watch times?
- Should you use an attendance multiplier?
- Is physical attendance more accurate?
- Does counting attendance even matter?

Five Practices to Track Attendance and Generate Growth

- Set a few simple, consistent online attendance benchmarks
- Measure and track engagement
- Connect with your engagers
- Monitor momentum
- Keep Experimenting

Read the full story at careynieuwhof.com.

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Spiritual Leadership in Unsettled Times

Offered in partnership with the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Gamaliel, and Metro Organization for Racial and Economic Equity

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Church damaged during spring hailstorms

Spring hailstorms resulted in broken windows, damaged siding and ruined Sunday school supplies at Lawton-Bethel on April 21.

“It could have been much worse, but it looks really, really bad,” said Rev. Cydni Tillery. “Everybody has said it’s heartbreaking to see the building take that kind of a beating, but it’s just a building; it’s not the church. We’ll get it fixed up and get it ready to go again.”

Tillery and a small group of church leaders gathered at the church the morning after the storm to assess the damage and secure the building. The damage was most significant on the north side of the building, and damage to the roof was minimal.

“Everything that faced north was just battered,” Tillery said. “[The siding] looked like there were holes all punched in it, and windows were just broken, including the children’s Sunday school classroom.”

Tillery said she and others in the group wore masks and practiced social distancing while cleaning up the debris from the storm. She said she hopes the building is repaired by the time members are able to return for in-person services.

“Handshakes and hugs are a cornerstone of what they believe in; it’s rough to have to keep them apart,” Tillery said. “They’re just really fantastic folks, and when things come up, they take care of it and they take care of each other.”

Hailstorms damaged the windows and siding of Lawton-Bethel UMC on April 21. Photos provided by Rev. Cydni Tillery.
OKUMC Briefs and Events

Save the Date

Passing the Baton Webinar

Created by Jim Ozier
May 5, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. | May 7, 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.
No cost for the webinar. Registration required for Zoom invitation.
https://okumc-reg.brtapp.com/PassingtheBatonWebinar

Employment

- Associate Director of Programming. OU Wesley Foundation, Norman, full-time, starts July 16. Campus ministry experience preferred. Please contact David Mullins (OU Wesley Board Chair) at wesleyboard@okwesley.org for more information and a job description.

- Ministry Intern. OU Wesley Foundation, Norman, full-time, starts July 27, 2020 and ends May 21, 2021. Please contact Josh Coats at josh@okwesley.org for more information and a job description.

- Youth Director. Sapulpa, part-time. Please contact allen@sapulpafrmuc.org for more information.

- Administrative assistant. Blanchard, part-time. Must know QuickBooks and Microsoft Office. Contact david@blanchardfumc.org.

Passages

Lucy Sayler-Shields passed away on April 4 after a long illness. Lucy was married to retired Rev. James Shields for more than 20 years. In light of the coronavirus pandemic, a memorial service will be held on a future date.

Rev. Joe Molencupp passed away on April 5 at the age of 78. Molencupp pastored seven churches in the Oklahoma Conference between 1988 and 2009, though he retired in 2005. Services will be held at a later date.

Rev. Terry Fox passed away on April 18. Fox began his service in the Oklahoma Conference in 1983. Though he retired in 2009, he continued to pastor part-time between 2011 and 2020. Funeral arrangements were not yet made public at the time of this publishing.
Appointments

- Josue Araujo, from Tulsa-St. James to OKC-The Christ Experience/Lambuth, effective May 1.
- Richard Ayers from Yale to retired, effective July 1. (Serving the same charge in retirement)
- Rebekah Belase, from Director for Funds Development to Senior Director for Funds Development at Church World Services Fund, effective Feb. 5.
- Todd Bergman, from Mooreland to medical leave, effective April 1.
- Sean Boehm, from not appointed to Lucien, effective March 15.
- Gail Edmison from Enid-First UMC Associate to retired, effective July 1. (Serving the same charge in retirement)
- Devon Krause, from associate at Norman-McFarlin to Enid-First, effective July 1.
- Cindy Havlik, from assistant to the Council Oak District Superintendent to retirement, effective August 1.
- Brian Hagen Jackson, from Pond Creek to Perry/Morrison, effective July 1.
- Steve Harshaw, from Davis-First to Tulsa-St. James, effective July 1.
- Katie Hill from Bristow to Alva, effective July 1.
- Tracy Hoskins, from Morris/Schulter to Hobart, effective July 1.
- Jessica Husted from Cleo Springs to Aline, effective July 1.
- Bo Ireland, from associate at OKC-Southern Hills/Skyline Urban Ministry to full-time associate at OKC-Southern Hills, effective May 1.
- Frankye Johnson, from OKC-Christ Experience to retired, effective May 1.
- Donald Jones, to Fort Gibson, effective July 1.
- Mark Mann from Sheridan Ave to Sheridan Ave/Nueva Esperanza, effective July 1.
- John Miller, from Coweta to Verdigris, effective July 1.
- Nathan Oney, from Cal-Pac Annual Conference to supply at Enid-New Hope, effective July 1.
- Katie Paul, from the North Carolina Conference to Stillwater-Highland Park, effective July 1.
- Adrian Pollard from Mulhall/Orlando to retired effective July 1. (Serving the same charge in retirement)
- Dawn Richards, to the New York Annual Conference, effective July 1.
- Janelle Roberts from unappointed to First UMC Coweta, effective July 1.
- Susan Southall from Enid-First UMC Associate to retired, effective July 1. (Serving the same charge in retirement)
- Sarah Thornhill, from Owasso-First to Skiatook-First, effective July 1.
- Paul Vickery, from Haskell/Porter to retired, effective July 1. (Serving the same charge in retirement)
- Micah Welcher from Tuttle to Mooreland, effective July 1.

Share your event or job opportunity in the Contact.

For consideration, email your listing to editor@okumc.org.
Deadline for the June issue is May 21.