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Church takes steps to be a fully online community

When the pandemic hit, Dewey UMC was quick to suspend in-person worship. When they came back, they started a drive-in worship service with an FM radio signal and strict safety protocols. But Rev. Jinx Barber didn’t focus on how to get back to in-person services. Rather, he turned his eye toward what would inevitably come next: the capability to be a fully digital church.

“The next ministry has to be both,” Barber said, referring to in person and online worship. “Church isn’t just for worship; it’s fellowship, Bible study, making friends, and we have to find out how to get people involved like that online.”

Do Church is a fully digital church campus complete with small groups, volunteer and mission opportunities, and ways for people to interact, including committee meetings, prayer requests, and messaging other members. The campus is made up of two coordinating parts: the website DoChurchWithUs.com, and the Do Church app. Both products were designed by Subsplash, a company specializing in creating immersive technology platforms for churches and others.

Barber said it took two years of back-end work to get the church into a place where it had the infrastructure necessary for a digital campus to be feasible.

One priority was finding a way to ensure that older congregants would also benefit from technology change. The church chose to purchase plug-in streaming devices for home televisions that would allow their older members to watch the services and participate using their TV at home.

“One of my biggest things is we won’t leave our older people behind,” Barber said. “We can buy our folks a (streaming device), set it up in their home, and that lets us build our relationship up with them.”

Barber believes that offering livestream worship services will be a necessity for churches in the near future. He’s thankful that the congregation has been largely supportive of the effort to have a fully digital campus.

“We can’t keep doing ‘worship and give,’ ‘worship and give,’ ‘worship and give,’” Barber said. “Something’s gotta change. We don’t even know what the model will be, but something’s gotta change.”

Do Church is the digital campus for Dewey UMC. The combination app and website offer ways to interact with others, attend meetings, take attendance, split into devotional groups, and giving. Rev. Jinx Barber used Subsplash to create a user interface that their community has largely adapted. “We don’t even know what the model will be, but something’s gotta change,” Barber said.

Photo by Meagan Ewton.
Oklahoma Conference hosts workshop for online worship

On Thursday, March 4, the Oklahoma Conference will host worship expert Jason Moore for a 2.5 hour workshop called “Both/And: Maximizing Hybrid Worship Experiences For Online and In-Person Audiences.”

Identical workshops will be held from 9:30 a.m. to noon and 6:30 to 9 p.m. Registration is free and entitles participants to the webinar, workbook and a follow-up ZOOM call around April 1 for further coaching.

The workshop will delve into strategies for how to create powerful transformative worship where no one feels like they’re an afterthought. It will explore:

- Re-imagining worship for both/and
- How to create interactive both/and experiences
- Bringing at home and in-person audiences together in real time
- Alternative opportunities for online audiences watching in-person livestreams
- Repurposing in-person worship for online audiences
- Adapting practices for both/and
- Avoiding letting a groove becoming a rut
- And more

Known for his pioneering work in collaborative worship design and guest readiness, Moore has devoted more than two decades to resources development, training, and coaching that works for local churches of all sizes, styles and means.

The author of 10 books, Jason has designed worship alongside such leaders as Adam Hamilton, Michael Slaughter, Tony Campolo, Brian McClaren and Leonard Sweet. He has also lead hundreds of seminars and keynote addresses across North America - teaching in 47 states in the USA.

Jason began his ministry in the late 90s at Ginghamsburg United Methodist Church in Tipp City, Ohio and later went on to co-found Midnight Oil Productions. The workshop is open to both clergy and laity. To register, visit https://okumc-reg.brtapp.com/BothAndMaximizingHybridWorship.
The Oklahoma Conference has established a new policy for counting online attendance.

The new policy is intended to standardize counting procedures across various platforms and create uniformity in reporting.

The policy was developed with the cabinet, district administrators and Discipleship Ministries in Nashville. In summary:

- Attendance should focus on the number of viewers who watch for at least one minute.
- The most accurate count involves a check-in (such as on Facebook Live or Zoom), but when that is not possible, multiply the number of views for at least one minute by 1.7. This will help account for people who do not check in and for folks who have more than one person watching together.
- Attendance tracking should be cut off by Monday night. Track statistics around the same time every week for accuracy and consistency.
- Churches are encouraged to use engagement metrics such as comments and shares to promote online connections between worshipers. Though not counted on annual reports, they can reveal how well the church is connecting with its community.

OK Camps has announced their 2021 camp season. Registration for summer camps opens on March 1; early-bird registration is open through April 15.

The camp ministry has also announced that its annual Camp Book will be hosted online this year. The move is being described as providing a more accessible, economical, and environmentally friendly camp book.

Summer camps are scheduled from the last week of June through the last week of July. Options are available for children in first grade through high school graduates.

In addition to its summer camps, OK Camps has announced a promotion offering a family of four a room for just $100 per night. The price includes lodging and breakfast; additional meals are available for additional cost. The promotion will run through the end of March.

To learn more about summer camps or winter retreats, visit https://okcamps.org.
Race and Religion releases free resource for Lent

Lent, a period of 40 days of reflection between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, offers Christians an opportunity to renew their commitment to being more Christ-like.

This Lenten Biblical Reflection, Roll Down, Justice!, written by Faye Wilson and featuring the music and reflections of Mark A. Miller, poses the following questions to believers:

- What are you prepared to give in order to have a closer walk with God?
- What can you give in order to embrace anew the work of justice?

Mark Miller has written a collection of songs, lyrics and music, which remind us of the work we have to do. We all learn in different ways and this study calls us to sing to ourselves and to each other the call that we each have to do to “seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.”

Carry the commitment to care – to bring about justice in God’s world – as a song in your heart. Roll Down, Justice!

This Lenten Biblical Reflection, Roll Down, Justice!, is based on six songs that are included in the book/CD set Roll Down, Justice! – Sacred Songs and Social Justice. The songs in this Lenten series are offered as six videos, and each video includes a guide for study:

- Session 1: Child of God
- Session 2: How Long?
- Session 3: I Dream of a Church
- Session 4: I Choose Love
- Session 5: God Has Work for Us to Do
- Session 6: The Day is Coming

Words and music are written by Mark A. Miller, except for I Choose Love (words by Lindy Thompson), God Has Work for Us to Do (words by Carl Daw), and The Day is Coming (words by Laurie Zelman).

Produced by The Choristers Guild, the songbook and cd set may be purchased at www.choristersguild.org/store/.

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Lake Country hosts leadership academy

The Lake Country District will host the Next Level Leadership Academy 2.0 between March 12 and Aug. 13. The academy is conducted by Lake Country District Superintendent Larry Bauman and District Administrator Jacklin Drake.

The NLLA includes six 90-minute group sessions and six 30-minute individual sessions for a total of 14 hours of coaching.

The academy is $600 and is open to all clergy. Lake Country pastors can register for a reduced rate by contacting Drake via email at jdrake@okumc.org.

To learn more about the academy, visit effectiveministrysolutions.vipmemembervault.com/products/courses/view/1069796.
Blind man’s memoir sparks Advent sermons

BY SAM HODGES | UM NEWS

Clergy who come across good sermon material have been known to exclaim, “That’ll preach!” The Rev. Bob Long found worthy fodder for not one but five sermons — his entire 2020 Advent and Christmas Eve series — in “Hello Darkness, My Old Friend,” the recent memoir of a blind philanthropist named Sanford D. “Sandy” Greenberg.

Long’s “Light of the World” sermon series proved a hit with his church, 8,000-member St. Luke’s United Methodist in Oklahoma City. And it gave Long a new friend: Greenberg himself, who got in touch from Washington, after learning that he was being preached about in Oklahoma City.

“I looked down at some emails and I saw one that said, ‘Sanford Greenberg,’” Long recalled. “I thought, ‘What in the world? Who would be sending me this?’ I never imagined it would actually be Sandy.”

Greenberg, 80, grew up in a struggling Jewish immigrant family in Buffalo, New York. He won a full scholarship to Columbia University, where he roomed with Art Garfunkel, soon to win fame (and Grammys) with Simon & Garfunkel.

In 1960, their junior year, Greenberg’s eyesight began to fail. He was misdiagnosed twice. A third specialist finally determined he had advanced glaucoma. That doctor operated but could only save Greenberg’s eyeballs — not his vision.

As he lay in a hospital recovering from surgery, Greenberg felt despair. But he also made what he calls in his book a “deal with God.” He asked for strength to carry on and promised in return to do what he could over the rest of his life to combat blindness, so others wouldn’t have to suffer.

Garfunkel played a key role in persuading Greenberg to return to Columbia, promising to lead him to classes and read assignments to him.

Greenberg would graduate Phi Beta Kappa. He went on to be a Marshall Scholar at Oxford, to earn an M.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard, to serve as a White House Fellow in the Johnson administration, and to have a long, flourishing career as an inventor, entrepreneur, investor and member of high-level federal boards.

He has kept the faith in fighting blindness, which affects nearly 40 million people worldwide.

Greenberg chairs the board of the Wilmer Eye Institute, at Johns Hopkins University. In 2012, he and his wife, Sue, created End Blindness by 2020,
a campaign and prize of $3 million for researchers who were doing the most to help fulfill Greenberg’s hospital bed vow.

The awards were given in a virtual ceremony in December.

Last summer saw the publication of Greenberg’s “Hello Darkness, My Old Friend,” whose title comes from the opening of Simon & Garfunkel’s song “The Sounds of Silence.” Garfunkel wrote the introduction to Greenberg’s book, calling his former roommate “my gold standard of decency.”

Endorsements came as well from author Margaret Atwood and from Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the Greenbergs’ neighbor for decades at the Watergate complex before her death last September.

A friend recommended the book to Bob Long, who read it in two days. He knew it would preach. And he figured Sanford Greenberg’s example would lift his congregation’s spirits during a pandemic with soaring case numbers that had forced a return to online worship only during Advent and Christmas.

Long, completing his 30th year as St. Luke’s pastor, found himself getting much-needed inspiration as he read “Hello Darkness, My Old Friend.”

“It really was a story of a man who would experience tragedy, and yet he did not let that tragedy define his life,” Long said. “It was speaking to my soul as well as giving me lots of great material.”

The pastor embedded stories from the Greenberg book in his Advent and Christmas Eve sermons.

One is the memorable account of Garfunkel leading Greenberg on a trip from Columbia to midtown Manhattan, many blocks away. Once there, Garfunkel announced he had to stay and draw the Seagram Building for an architecture class, leaving the fearful Greenberg to try to get back to campus alone.

An epic, harrowing journey ensued by foot and subway, with Greenberg bumping into people and even bloodying himself. But he made it back to Columbia, triumphant.

The campus arrival yielded one more unexpected encounter.

“And as he started to walk along, he ran into another person who said, ‘Excuse me,’” Long said in his retelling. “And then in his own voice, Art (Garfunkel) said, ‘I knew you could do it, but I wanted you to know you could do it.’ He confessed to Sandy he really didn’t have to draw the Seagram Building. No, he’d been with Sandy the whole time, watching over him.”

The theme of Greenberg’s overcoming darkness, through his own determination but also with the help of friends and family, struck Long as just right for Advent in a pandemic.

“We may be in the darkest of days right now, but we will see the light. For us, we’re seeing the light of Christ,” Long said of his sermon theme.

Long’s series drew increasing online viewership as the weeks passed, and the locally televised Christmas Eve service had an audience of about 25,000.

People went out of their way to tell him they appreciated the Greenberg stories.

“I got texts back from people saying, ‘Tonight we were putting up our Christmas tree and listening to Simon & Garfunkel,’” Long said.

Meanwhile, neighbors of Greenberg’s in Washington were in Oklahoma City on business and heard Long’s sermons. The couple got word to Greenberg, and he listened to them online.

Greenberg was amazed and moved at how the United Methodist pastor so thoroughly mastered and shared the stories.

“Not just one tear flowed from my eyes,”
Greenberg said in a phone interview. “I have to tell you that it was unlike anything I have ever heard in my life, to have this man who did not know me talk about my life in a way that was so knowledgeable and compassionate.”

Greenberg, a practicing Jew, added that he was particularly touched to have his story be part of sermons offered in such a special season for Christians. And he felt he had to get word to Long.

So he dictated an email.

“I’m not one of those people who writes people I don’t know,” he said. “It’s just not my thing. But I was so stunned, appreciative, overwhelmed.”

Thus began an email correspondence that has continued and sparked a friendship.

Long sometimes leads small groups to Washington for tours of the Museum of the Bible, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

When the pandemic lifts, he hopes to make another such trip and visit Greenberg, too.

Greenberg is ready.

“I will see that man 24/7, anytime he wants.”

2016 photo of Sanford D. Greenberg (left) and Art Garfunkel. Photo by Jeffrey Saks, courtesy of Columbia Magazine, Columbia University.
Deadline nears for communications ministry scholarship and fellowship

Nashville, Tennessee – Persons interested in pursuing a career in religious communications are encouraged to explore education support offered by United Methodist Communications. Eligible parties have until March 15 to submit their applications for scholarship and fellowship consideration.

“We believe that it is vital to have professional communicators who reflect the diversity of the global United Methodist Church,” shares Gary Henderson, Chief Relationship Officer at United Methodist Communications. “Our fellowship and scholarship, named after communicators who exemplified excellence in communications ministry, provide critical training and experience for people interested in serving the church in this way.”

The agency’s annual education financial assistance options include:

- The $6,000 Stoody-West Fellowship assists one United Methodist student in their post-graduate study at an accredited U.S. college or university who intends on pursuing a career in religious journalism. The purpose of the fellowship is to enhance the recipient’s professional competence through news writing for secular press, church press or church institutions in print, electronic and broadcast media formats.
- The $2,500 Leonard M. Perryman Communications Scholarship for Racial Ethnic Minority Students is awarded to an ethnic minority United Methodist undergraduate pursuing religion journalism or mass communications at an accredited U.S. college or university. The scholarship promotes excellence in communication ministry through electronic and print journalism.

Applicants for both opportunities will be judged on five criteria:

- Christian commitment and involvement in the life of the United Methodist Church
- Academic achievement as revealed by transcripts, grade point averages and the required letters of reference
- Journalistic experience and/or evidence of journalistic talent
- Clarity of purpose in plans and goals for the future
- Potential professional ability as a religion journalist

Competed details and application information is available on the Communications section on ResourceUMC.org.
An Altus man is using his artistic talents to raise money for Blessing Boxes that provide free non-perishable food, hygiene and seasonal items for anyone needing them in Altus.

Larry Davis, a retired architect, started drawing family and friends’ pets after his niece requested he draw her pets. Davis, 80, had painted landscapes and animals for many years as a hobby. As he aged painting became more difficult due to tremor in his hands. Using colored pencils instead of paints reduced his shakiness. Davis used colored pencils to illustrate two children’s books written by his daughter, Darlene Alley, before starting to draw pets.

Davis, a member of Altus-First, said he became concerned about the growing amount of money the church needed to fill four Blessing Boxes located throughout Altus; COVID-19 has increased the need. The church went from filling the boxes once a month to twice a week. The church spends about $1,000 per month filling them and relies on donations.

“One night it hit me that I could possibly use my hobby to support this great ministry,” Davis said.

Davis asks for a minimum donation of $50 per pet portrait. So far, the project has raised more than $2,100 for the Blessing Boxes. He has drawn more than 30 pets, including donkeys, chickens, alpacas, roadrunners and raccoons, in addition to many cats and dogs.

“I enjoy trying to capture the personality of the animals. I usually start with the eyes,” Davis said. “Every animal has its own character, and I try to capture it. I also enjoy making people happy with the drawings of their pets.”

Morgan Young, youth director at Altus-First, said the church established the Blessing Boxes in 2017 as a project for their children and youth to reach out to the Altus community.

“God was calling us to bring tangible hope to the people right in front of us,” Young said. “And we knew this ministry could be a small part of building God’s kingdom. Students at FUMC helped build and paint the boxes themselves.”

The Blessing Boxes are located at Grace Life Fellowship at the intersection of Forrest and D Street, Strong Tower Ministries at the intersection of Martin Luther King and Ethel, Spirit of the Lord Church at the intersection of Joy and Wingfield and at the Altus-First church at the Corner of Cypress and Hudson.

Anyone wanting Davis to draw their pets in support of the Blessing Boxes may contact Morgan Young at Altus-First. She can be reached at morgan.fumc@gmail.com or the church office at 580-482-0795.

Larry Davis has drawn more than 30 pets to raise money for Blessing Boxes sponsored by Altus-First. So far, his drawings have raised more than $2,100. Photos submitted by Morgan Young.
Ministry in a Minute

The McLoud Methodist Quilters delivered 17 quilts and eight stuffed toys to Project Gabriel in Shawnee, a confidential ministry that supports women struggling with unplanned pregnancies. Project Gabriel received with great appreciation, according to the quilters, who continue to be in ministry even when stitching from home. The group said they are blessed to be a blessing, and as one quilter said, “this is our joy!”

Photo and story submitted by Rev. Trish Harris.

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A BEQUEST IS ONE OF THE EASIEST GIFTS TO MAKE.

Benefits of making a Charitable Bequest:
One benefit of a charitable bequest is that it enables you to further our work long after you are gone. Better yet, a charitable bequest can help you save estate taxes by providing your estate with a charitable deduction for the value of the gift. With careful planning, your family can also avoid paying income taxes on the assets they receive from your estate.

With the help of an advisor, you can include language in your will or trust specifying a gift to be made to family, friends or charity as part of your estate plan. A bequest may be made in several ways:

- Gift of a dollar amount
- Gift of a percentage of your estate
- Gift of a specific asset
- Gift of the residue of your estate

OTHER EFFECTIVE BEQUEST OPTIONS:

IRAs and Insurance Policies
A retirement asset like an IRA or 401(k) makes an excellent bequest to charity. If your IRA were given to your family, much of the value would be depleted through estate and income taxes.

By designating your church or favorite cause as the beneficiary of part or all of your IRA, the full value of your gift is transferred to them tax free at your death and your estate receives a charitable deduction. Similarly, if your insurance policy is gifted to your favorite ministry at your death, your estate avoids paying tax on the asset value and receives a charitable deduction.

To make a bequest of your IRA, other retirement account or life insurance policy, obtain a beneficiary designation form from your plan custodian or insurance company and designate the Foundation for the benefit of your favorite ministry as beneficiary.

For more information on the benefits of making a charitable bequest or for sample bequest language to complete your charitable plan, please visit our website or call us today.

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David Battles, dbattles@okumf.org
De-Colonizing the Church: A Commitment to Anti-Racism

5-week course begins Feb. 18 | 1 p.m. to 2:15 p.m. per session | Held over Zoom
Cost: $125/person | Names and emails for participants required
Contact Bryan Tener at btener@umcdiscipleship.org with questions
Register online at https://store.umcdiscipleship.org/product/decolonizing-the-church

Clinical Pastoral Education Unit | GBHEM Center for Integrative Pastoral Practice

Feb. 20 through Dec. 18
$30 application fee and $500 deposit to hold a program spot
Tuition must be paid in full before unit starts
Applications accepted until positions are filled
Learn more and apply at www.gbhem.org/clergy/chaplains-pastoral-counselors/clinical-pastoral-education

Global Mission Fellows Application

Open to adults age 20-30
Final deadline to serve in the U.S. is Feb. 24
Apply online at https://umcmission.org/gmfapply

OK Camps Registration Opens

March 1 | Early Bird ends on April 15
Camp details and virtual book at okcamps.org/2021-virtual-camp-book

UMHEF Scholarship Applications

Must be an active, full member of the United Methodist Church for at least one year prior to application
UMHEF scholarships are awarded separately from GBHEM scholarships
Apply by March 1
Additional details and requirements found at https://www.umhef.org/scholarships

Both/And: Maximizing Hybrid Worship Experiences For Online and In-Person Audiences

March 4 | 9:30 a.m. to noon or 6:30 to 9 p.m. | Identical 2.5 hour workshops
Registration is required, cost is free
Includes webinar, workbook and a follow-up ZOOM call
okumc-reg.brtapp.com/BothAndMaximizingHybridWorship

Next Level Leadership Academy for Pastors

14 hours of ministry coaching
Academy conducted by Lake Country DS Larry Bauman and DA Jacklin Drake
Sessions from March 12 through Aug. 13
Six 90-minute group sessions, six 30-minute individual sessions
Cost: $600 | Lake Country pastors receive a reduced rate
For Lake Country coupon code, contact Jacklin Drake at jdrake@okumc.org
effectiveministriesolutions.vipmembervault.com/products/courses/view/1069796
Appointments

- David Burris, from retired to supply at Oologah, effective Jan 1; from supply at Oologah to retired effective Feb. 28.
- Connie Cole Jeske, from Tulsa-First to retirement, effective Jan. 1.
- Laura Glover, to Senior Chaplain at Epworth Villa, effective March 1.
- Thomas Hoffman, from Tulsa-Hope to retirement, effective Feb. 1.
- Jennifer Long, from Oologah to Kingfisher, effective Jan. 1.
- Mark Mann from Tulsa-Sheridan Ave./Tulsa-Nueva Esperanza to Tulsa-Hope/Tulsa-Nueva Esperanza, effective March 1.

Mary McPherson, surviving spouse of Rev. Doug McPherson, passed away on Jan. 8. She was 87 years old. Rev. McPherson, who passed away in 2017, was a former district superintendent for the South Oklahoma City District and served several churches in the conference between 1962 and his retirement in 2000. A funeral was held on Jan. 14. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to The Shared Table in Taos, NM or Skyline Urban Ministries in OKC, OK.

Rev. Gary Holdeman passed away on Jan. 15 at the age of 70 after contracting COVID-19. Holdeman served in seven churches throughout the Oklahoma Conference, including Enid-First, Laverne/Rosston, Woodward-First, Guymon-Victory Memorial, and Fairview/Catesby. He was also the Enid District Superintendent from 2006 to 2011. Visitation was held on Jan. 20, and services were held on Jan. 21.

John Cramer, a retired local pastor, passed away on Jan. 22. He was 82 years old. He pastored Lawton-Alersgate Redemption and between 1989 and 2004. Visitation was held on Jan. 28, and a funeral was held on Jan. 29.

Passages

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Employment

- Program Director. Project Transformation Oklahoma, full-time. Full job description here. Email resume to marla.lobo4480@gmail.com by Feb. 12.
- Male Middle School Youth Pastor. Highland Park UMC, Dallas, Texas; full-time. Undergraduate degree required and relevant experience required. Click here for details. Email Matt McHugh at mchughm@hpumc.org for more information or to apply.
- Director of Youth Ministry. First UMC, Wellington, Kansas; full-time. Details available at www.firstumcwellington.com/job-openings. Contact Pastor Isaac Chua at wfumcminister@gmail.com.
- Minister of Children and Families. University Park UMC, Dallas, Texas; full-time. Bachelor’s in early childhood education or related field required; graduate degree in theology preferred. Job description and how to apply at www.upumc.org/employment.
- Director of Youth Ministries. Broken Arrow-St. Stephen’s, part-time. Send resume to Pastor Roland Youngberg at rolandyoungberg@gmail.com or call 918-777-8678.
- Director of Music and Worship Arts. First UMC, Ft. Worth, Texas; full-time. Undergraduate degree required. Details available online at fumcfw.org/employment. To apply, contact Rev. Lance Marshall at application@myfumc.org.

Share your event or job opportunity in the Contact.
For consideration, email your listing to editor@okumc.org. Deadline for the March issue is Feb. 18.