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Bishop appoints two new district superintendents
If you’re like me, you’ve spent the last few weeks in a fluctuating state of uncertainty, exerting as much control over your particular situation as you can.

If you’re like my family, you may have felt isolated or lonely, looking for every opportunity to connect with friends and family in a safe but meaningful manner. You may have also started distance learning for your child or for yourself, with varying degrees of success.

And if you’re clergy like my husband, you’ve been planning for Holy Week, adapting worship services, approaching appointment season, planning your next sermon series, and receiving an influx of conference emails offering resources and strategies, all while trying to juggle the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the communities and congregation(s) you serve without leaving any family members feeling like they are being left behind or neglected in the process.

Life during a pandemic can be overwhelming. Life during a pandemic is overwhelming.

This isn’t exactly a new revelation. As of this writing (early morning, April 2), there are more than 939,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19. By the time you read this, that number will likely be more than a million people. More Americans have already died from the coronavirus than were killed during the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, and that number is rising.

It’s getting harder and harder to think that nobody I know will get infected, or worse. It’s a scary thing, and being stuck at home with no sense of relief only compounds the worry. To be honest, I don’t know how many more platitudes of comfort or diatribes of judgment I can handle. And you know what? I think it’s okay to admit that.

In some ways, life feels like Psalm 22:2: “Oh my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest” (NRSV). That’s not to say I think God is absent or not listening to the prayers of the faithful. Rather, it’s to say I find comfort in knowing that God’s chosen people could express the negative or overwhelming feelings in their lives. Thousands of years before I was stressed about a virus, they were giving me permission to mourn.

I think sometimes we speed past scriptures like Psalm 22 because it feels better to think about the promises that come in Psalm 23. I’m glad for those promises. I just also appreciate that scripture, and by extension God, is big enough to handle my grief when I’m feeling overwhelmed or overtaken by sorrow.

Like I said, right now, life is overwhelming, and if you need to claim God’s promises of hope for the future, then you absolutely should. But if you’re like me, if you need some time to just sit in the moment and name your experience for what it is – stressful, chaotic, unhappy, overwhelming – take heart.

This, too, is a faithful and biblical response, and God’s promises will always be there, even if first you mourn.
Bishop appoints two new district superintendents

Bishop James Nunn recently announced several changes to district leadership, including the appointment of two new superintendents. The changes will go into effect on July 1.

Rev. James Kim has been announced as the next superintendent for the Wichitas District. He will take on the leadership role currently filled by Rev. Connie Gibson, who will move to the Council Oak District upon the retirement of Rev. Cindy Havlik.

“(James Kim’s) focus on making disciples, service to churches in the conference, and his work on the Board of Ordained Ministry and the Conference Relations Committee equip him for the work in the district,” the bishop said in his announcement.

Rev. Carol Cook Moore has been announced as the next superintendent in the Northern Prairie District. She will fill the role currently held by Rev. Tish Malloy, who will be appointed to lead the Crossroads District as Rev. Rockford Johnson returns to the pastorate to lead Norman-McFarlin.

“(Carol Cook Moore’s) knowledge of the personnel processes of the church have equipped her to serve effectively on the district,” the bishop said in his announcement.

Kim is the pastor of Purcell-Trinity in the Heartland District where he has served since 2014. His service in the Oklahoma Conference dates back to 1999, and he has previously served at Comanche and Noble. Kim earned a bachelor’s of theology at Methodist Theological University in Seoul, South Korea in 1989. He moved to the United
States the year after he graduated, and he earned both a master’s degree and a doctoral degree from the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. Kim said he had not thought about being a superintendent before he was appointed to the role, but he hopes he can help people build relationships that help all Christians focus on functioning together as a family.

“I’m overwhelmed, so I’m praying. I’m really praying hard to discern God’s will for my life, for this task,” Kim said. “It’s absolutely the time to bow down and seek God’s will, guidance and vision.”

Cook Moore is the pastor at Alva-First and the chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry. Her service in the Oklahoma Conference dates back to 1984. She earned a bachelor’s degree from Oklahoma City University in 1980, a master’s degree from Saint Paul School of Theology in 1984, and a doctoral degree from Drew Theological Seminary in 2009. Over her ministry career, she has served four churches, the Northeastern State University Wesley Foundation, and the Wesley Theological Seminary as an assistant professor of worship and preaching. She said she is humbled by the opportunity, even in light of the uncertainties facing the denomination.

“I think every pastor needs to ask, ‘what is essential?’ I think we’re getting there pretty darn quick with this pandemic,” Cook Moore said. “What is essential to me is to keep the standard before myself, to treat everyone with dignity, to listen, and to seek compassion in whatever discernment and decisions are before me individually, are before the cabinet, before the conference, the general church.”

When Kim and Cook Moore step into their roles on July 1, five out of eight of the conference’s superintendents will be either female or a person of color. Oklahoma has had female superintendents and people of color in the highest levels of leadership before, however, this is the first time that the majority of the superintendents will represent a minority race or gender. Cook Moore said having a diverse group of leaders can help ensure different perspectives are present and prevent homogenous thinking.

“The reality is that I do not represent all women, and neither do my female colleagues,” she said. “But when you have voices that come from a non-dominant power culture, I believe it creates more openness to seeing the possibilities for the church in a broader way.”

Kim, who has led cross-cultural ministry for the last 20 years, said diversity is often helpful for the life of a congregation. He also believes it will help the Oklahoma Conference grow spiritually.

“I’m from Korean churches, and we practice the Christian faith a little differently than the western cultures. In my experience, I’ve learned from my congregation, and they’ve learned from me,” he said. “If we can put all these different ideas and experiences from different cultures in one part and recreate the spiritual culture, not only for the local churches but for the annual conference, I think we can contribute to something great.”

Both Kim and Cook Moore are keeping their faith central as they discern the will of God for their churches, districts, conference and denomination. For Kim, faith is the guiding principle for how to think and act like Jesus; faith gives him hope for the future. When he considers what future the denomination might face, he is reminded of the Biblical call to love one another.

“We all read the same Bible, but interpret the message differently,” Kim said. “I like to say that it is all about God’s love. It teaches us to know and believe God’s grace of salvation through Jesus Christ. I like to state that the core message of the Bible is to love God our Lord with all our heart, mind and soul. Anyone who truly loves God desires to know God’s will and obey His word. God’s will for His children is to love one another as Jesus loves us.”

Cook Moore defines faith as an action, a noun and an identity – both personal and communal – that affects how a person chooses to live in the world. She believes that faith has to be engaged with so that it does not become stagnant, brittle or weak.

“Faith is something that has to be exercised. You pray. You read scripture. You attend to the means of grace,” she said. “If we read the Lord’s prayer or Psalm 23 or John 3:16 and think, ‘Oh, I’ve heard that, I know what it means,’ then we’re not exercising anything other than a memory.”
A charitable gift annuity is a great way to make a gift to support the causes that you care about.

Here’s how it works:
You make a gift of cash or property to us. In return, we will make payments for life to you, you and a loved one, or another person. Each payment will be fixed and the amount of each payment will depend on the age of the person who receives the payments. After all payments have been made, we will receive the remaining value of your gift to support the causes that matter to you.

There are a number of benefits with a charitable gift annuity. Your payments are fixed as of the date of your gift. This means that your payments will never change, even if interest rates or the stock market changes. Depending upon your gift, you may receive the added benefit of mostly tax-free payments. You will also receive a charitable deduction in the year that you set up the gift annuity.

To find out how a Charitable Gift Annuity can reliably support you and the causes that matter to you, give us a call today. David Battles is ready to help 800-259-6863.
Discipleship in the time of COVID-19

BY REV. DERREK BELASE, DIRECTOR OF CONNECTIONAL MINISTRY

What has happened in these few short weeks since the Thunder/Jazz game was called off just as it was beginning at the Chesapeake Arena on March 11? The economy has virtually shut down. Lives are on pause. People have lost their jobs. Stock portfolios have plummeted. Friends, neighbors and colleagues have gotten sick, and some have died.

Churches have missed two-to-three Sundays of in-person worship already and now are bracing to be closed through the end of April. Easter will be celebrated in our homes, more like the first Easter than the celebrations to which we are accustomed. The creativity we have seen has been overwhelming and amazing, to say the least.

If anyone was opposed to social media or the use of it for the work of the church, I suspect those feelings are being reevaluated every day. There are great ways to use social media, as outlined in this article by Rachel Gilmore of Path 1, our denomination’s new church start branch.

Wesley’s General Rules

United Methodists and followers of Wesley around the world hold true to his Three General Rules. Those being ordained covenant to follow and teach the rules in their places of appointment. During this unique time in our common lives, these rules have taken on new significance.

First, do no harm. We can do no harm by complying with guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as well as local authorities. In Oklahoma, we are under the “Safer at Home” order, issued by Governor Stitt.

It prohibits gatherings of larger than 10 people and regardless of size, a distance of 6 feet should be maintained between anyone. This enables us to protect people from danger. While most dangers are visible and obvious, the coronavirus is not. As President Trump has said, it is an invisible enemy. I think we all can agree.

Second, do good. Churches are doing outstanding work within the constraints brought on by this virus. As Bishop Nunn said in his video, “We are inspired by what you are doing.” That includes streaming or prerecording Sunday worship services, offering midday or evening devotions and times of prayer, reading books specifically for children or offering online platforms to small groups in your church so they can stay connected.

It is important for us to remember during this time of physical distancing that we do not have to be isolated. There are many ways to offer continued discipleship opportunities online. There are some resources posted at our website and you may be aware of even more opportunities through crowdsourcing.

What is most important is to keep as many groups together as possible. Or, this opportunity may provide you with the chance to start a new group. There is a good article here by Rev. Dr. Scott Hughes on online engagement for discipleship.

I have seen some very creative responses throughout these last few weeks. Here is my word of encouragement – pace! You need to find a pace which works for you. We were not sure in the early days how long this would last, but now we are getting a better picture that it may be at least through the end of April.

The frantic pace we began this journey keeping will likely not be sustainable. You may not have content to post two or three times a day. How much are people using what you post? Do not be discouraged, but determine the pace which works best for you and those you are trying to reach.

A final consideration is this, “What if you get sick?” Pastors, if you are doing everything during this time and you get sick or someone in your household does, what is your plan? Do
you have lay leaders in place to keep up with what you have in place? What other leaders have access to your passwords and access to accounts which will be necessary to continue your ministries? Begin to think about this alternative now and pray that you will not need to implement any of it.

Third, attend upon the ordinances of God. Public worship is one of the primary ways we attend upon the ordinances of God, but you are doing a great job in finding ways to help people do this. However, what resources might you provide to connect them throughout the week?

Maybe you could offer some scripture passages people could read in the days between worship services? This could be done by emailing them out in a PDF format. You could also choose a Bible study to do together through an online platform like YouVersion. There are a number of short- and long-term studies you could engage there. It is a great resource.

Holy Communion can be celebrated in unique ways. Bishop Nunn has granted permission during this pandemic for online communion consecration and serving. We have created a companion document with his instruction as well as some resources you might find helpful.

Certainly we can pray and this is a time to pray: alone, in groups via social media and during our worship services. The pandemic might be a time to share prayer concerns through email or through apps like GroupMe or Slack.

I read about a church which has a joys and concerns box set up near the church where prayer concerns can be dropped off written on slips of paper.

Continue to express care and organize non-contact appropriate ministries which are contextually appropriate for your community, church and ministry.

This article has been edited for length for this publication. Click here to read the full version.
GBHEM loans & scholarships to offer financial relief measures

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) recognizes that the coronavirus pandemic will cause financial hardship for many graduate and undergraduate students.

In response to the economic impact of the global pandemic, the GBHEM Office of Loans and Scholarships has made some important updates to its policies.

New 2020 guidelines – including a loan payment suspension option – are outlined below. Anyone with questions regarding these items should contact the Office of Loans and Scholarship at 615-340-7342 or email umloans@gbhem.org.

**GBHEM Student Loan Payment Suspension**

GBHEM is aiding student loan borrowers whose income has been impacted as a result of the pandemic. Borrowers currently in repayment may request a payment suspension for three months. Interest will accrue during the payment suspension once the request has been verified by GBHEM. Borrowers may pay interest or partial payments at any time. The payment suspension will not affect future deferment requests.

Borrowers may email umloans@gbhem.org to ask for a payment suspension request form. Payment suspension request forms must be completed and signed by both borrower and cosigner (electronic signatures accepted) by April 15, 2020.

GBHEM may in its sole discretion, discontinue taking new applications for payment suspension at any time without notice.

**GBHEM Student Loan Application**

The GBHEM Spring/Summer 2020 Student Loan application closed to new applicants effective March 23, 2020. Anyone with an application open will have until midnight April 1, 2020 to complete it.

The GBHEM Fall 2020 Student Loan application will be open from May 14, 2020 to October 15, 2020.

**GBHEM Fall 2020 Scholarships**

The GBHEM Fall 2020 Scholarships review and awarding is on track! Thanks to our current online process, scholarships will be awarded and recipients notified by July 1, 2020.

GBHEM is committed to helping all our students and constituents to the best of our abilities during this health crisis.

For additional GBHEM resources related to the pandemic, visit our new E-Resources page at www.gbhem.org/e-resources.
Oklahoma City University has restricted campus access to all but essential personnel through April 5 and has moved all in-person classes to online platforms through the rest of the spring semester in response to the coronavirus pandemic. All events on campus have been cancelled at least through May 10.

The university’s Emergency Operations Center and administrators have been meeting regularly to discuss the latest developments of the pandemic and make policy adjustments as needed. Updates are posted online at okcu.edu/coronavirus, along with announcements via campus email and social media platforms.

Students still living on campus have been asked to move out by April 5 during pre-designated time slots, but belongings are allowed to remain in their dorms for those who are unable to make it back to campus. The Residence Life staff has been scheduling each student’s move-out time in order to minimize person-to-person contact.

Emergency housing was made available to members of the OCU community who were unable to leave campus by last Saturday.

Meanwhile, classes went online Monday following spring break last week. The university’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and the Campus Technology Department worked diligently over spring break to help professors transition their classes to online formats.

In a statement to the campus community Monday, President Martha Burger said, “We will make decisions and move forward accordingly as the need arises. And as we’ve been doing, as soon as the decision is made, you will be informed.

These are unprecedented times but OCU has proven our resiliency in the face of challenges time and time again. We will navigate these uncertain times with decisive confidence, remain true to our mission and emerge from this crisis as the strong, vibrant university we have always been.

I urge each and every one of you to listen to health care professionals and maintain the safe practices that will help end the spread of the COVID-19 virus.”
The National Council of Churches (NCC) joins with Christians Uniting in Christ (CUIC) and Christian Churches Together (CCT) in sending a letter to congregations across the United States. The United Methodist Church is a member of all three groups.

The letter issues “an invitation to join together in witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus for all in the United States to see.”

The letter states, “Holy Week is April 6-12 for Western Christians and April 13-19 for Orthodox Christians. If we are still being asked to remain physically separated from each other and our worship spaces, would you consider inviting your congregations to do one or more of the following as a witness to our jointly held faith in Christ?”

Christians are asked to join in specific acts of worship as they celebrate this unprecedented Holy Week and Easter. The letter, a poster, and a children’s coloring page can be downloaded at the links on the page.

Three ecumenical organizations release unprecedented letter

Please help NSO’s residents by sponsoring a client today!

Many of NSO’s residents are employed in the service industries of Oklahoma and as these businesses close or reduce hours and staff, our clients will begin to feel the strain of lost wages.

Please help by sponsoring a mother and her children at NSO’s Martha’s House and Gatewood. Or by sponsoring a young man at NSO’s Carolyn Williams Center.

Just $175 will cover a resident’s program fees for a full month, which includes their housing, utilities and other basic human needs.

We know that everyone is doing their best to stay positive in this rapidly evolving situation. Join NSO to ensure our that residents can continue focusing on their very bright futures.

Visit facebook.com/nsookc/ to donate today!

You can also help by donating in-kind items through NSO’s Amazon Smile Charity List!
As community members heed important health precautions and executive orders related to COVID-19, organizations across the world are restructuring how they meet the needs of their consumers and members.

Oklahoma United Methodist Circle of Care has been serving Oklahoma’s children and families in crisis for over 103 years, through many social, economic and world crises. In this unique time in our country’s history, there is no shortage of demand for what they supply.

The nonprofit faith-based agency offers three programs: foster care, transitional living for single mothers, and independent living for young adults who have aged out of foster care. With offices and campuses across the state, Circle of Care staff are implementing innovative solutions to continue the mission of providing help, healing and hope.

The COVID-19 crisis has unfortunately resulted in vulnerable children entering state custody at an accelerated rate due to neglect or abuse. Therefore, Circle of Care recently asked their certified foster homes to consider expanding the ages and numbers of children they would accept. The response was amazing with 21 families stepping up to take more children. The agency’s capacity was increased by 47 beds without adding even one new foster home.

Other steps to serve their clients include restricting visitors to the campuses, converting 76% of their workforce to working from home, reducing office personnel to a maximum of three per building, implementing more stringent hygiene and cleaning protocol of the physical facilities, using video-conferencing to conduct foster home visits when possible and when not possible, pre-screening for COVID-19 symptoms of staff and foster family members, and checking in daily with residential clients.

President and CEO, Keith Howard, stated, “Our team is committed to fulfilling our mission, even when the ‘how’ looks different. This is not a season to step back, but to lean in greater, because we know the needs of Oklahomans have increased and will continue to increase as we face the reality of COVID-19.”

The vulnerable children and families served by Circle of Care were hurting, anxious and home-insecure before the COVID-19 crisis, before the entire country collectively became anxious about its future. Now, more than ever, these individuals must be supported and empowered to ensure their fragile situations hold up through the ordeal.

Circle of Care will employ whatever adaptations seem needed to continue providing help, healing and hope to children and families in crisis. For more information on how you can get involved, visit circleofcare.org.
The 2020 Native American Ministries Sunday celebration is scheduled for April 26, but congregations can observe this Special Sunday on a date that is convenient for them. This special giving day highlights the gifts and contributions of Native Americans.

Many United Methodist churches are using online technology to increase their visibility and to provide a convenient way to minister to their congregation. Therefore, churches are encouraged to conduct Native American Ministries Sunday celebrations online.

One secure method of giving to Native American Ministries Sunday online is to donate at umcgiving.org/giveNAMS. Contributions to Native American Ministries Sunday should be sent to the conference treasurer.

In light of health concerns due to COVID-19, the Oklahoma Conference and affiliated ministries have also cancelled or postponed several public events. A short list is available here. If you do not see information for an event you planned to attend, please contact the event organizer for details.

**Cancelled: ECU Wesley High School & Transfer Night | April 13**
For information about the ECU Wesley, email Janey Thomas at ecuwesley@gmail.com.

**Cancelled: Fresh Expressions Roundtable Workshop | April 18**

**Cancelled: Passing the Baton | May 2**
Speaker Jim Ozier developing a free webinar in place of in-person events. Those who have registered should receive a fee refund. For details, email Megan DeCastro at mdecastro@okumc.org.

**Cancelled: Dedication of Canyon Camp Nurses’ and Deans’ Cabins**
Event to be rescheduled in the fall

**Postponed: Circle of Care’s Friends of Children Banquet and Silent Auction**

**Native American Ministries Sunday set for April 26**

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**Native American Ministries Sunday Resources and Ideas**
- Download the Native American Ministries Sunday Pastor and Leader’s Kit to access worship, social media graphics, videos, offering talk and more
- Use the included 2020-2021 Special Sundays planning calendar to implement promotion and adjust as needed to fit the congregation’s schedule
- Include provided sermon starter, liturgy, poster and/or graphics during worship (available in Spanish and Korean)
- Announce the observance date to the congregation via social media, newsletters, websites and more
**Appointments**

- Matthew Austin, from Edmond-Connect to Tulsa-University, effective July 1.
- Michael Brannon, from Eufaula to retired, effective July 1.
- Adrian Cole, from Edmond-New Covenant to retired, effective July 1.
- Rudy Freese, from Jenks-First to Duncan-First, effective July 1.
- Gary Harber, from retired to Tulsa-St. James, effective Feb. 15.
- Cynthia Havlik, from Council Oak District Superintendent to retired, effective July 1.
- Emery Mason, from Enid-First to Muskogee-St. Paul, effective July 1.
- Michael Nathan Mattox, from Tulsa-University to Collinsville-Meadowcreek, effective July 1.
- Gloria McGee-Denton from Wagoner to Jenks-First, effective July 1.
- Matthew Patrick, from OKC-Church of the Servant to associate at Tulsa-University, effective July 1.
- Cody Robinson, from Muskogee-Trinity/Woodall to Muskogee-Trinity, effective Feb. 1.
- Emily Robnett, from Enid-New Hope to associate at Bartlesville-First, effective July 1.
- Michael Robnett, from associate at Enid-First to associate at Bartlesville-First, effective July 1.
- Robert Rose, from retirement to interim pastor at Duncan-First, effective April 1-June 30.
- Janice Sharp, from Duncan-First to Lawton-First, effective April 1.
- Valerie Steele, from Stillwater-Highland Park to Quail Springs, effective July 1.
- Greg Tolle, from personal leave to Wagoner, effective July 1.
- John Vick, from Edmond-Acts 2 to associate at Tulsa-Asbury, effective July 1.
- Gary Wilburn, from Quinton/Canadian to retired, effective July 1.

**Passages**

Rev. Dana Wood passed away on March 7. She lived in Burkburnett, Texas and served as the pastor of Randlett, Oklahoma from June 2018 until her death. Her work in the State of Oklahoma Office of Juvenile Affairs also had a positive impact on many lives.

**Employment**

- Youth Director. Muskogee-St. Paul, part-time, starts May 1. Please contact adminassistant@stpaumuskogee.com for job description.
- Children’s Director. Muskogee-St. Paul, part-time, starts May 1. Please contact adminassistant@stpaumuskogee.com for job description.
- Youth Director. Sand Springs, part-time. Contact Stephen Cagle at pastor@sandspringsumc.org for more information.
- Pianist and Contemporary Worship Leader. Sand Springs, part-time. Audition required. Contact Stephen Cagle at pastor@sandspringsumc.org for more information.
- Children’s Minister. Jenks-First, part-time. Experience preferred. Send resume to fumcjenks@gmail.com.

*Share your event or job opportunity in the Contact.*

*For consideration, email your listing to editor@okumc.org. Deadline for the May issue is April 16.*