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Can we talk about race yet?

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Racism has no place in Christianity

Racism has no place in the Church of Jesus Christ. Neither does it have a place in society. Racist beliefs, attitudes and actions have their roots in hatred and are manifest in cruel, life threatening and life ending actions, and betray all of humanity. Racism is sin.

It is incomprehensible that racially motivated murders have been occurring with alarming frequency in the United States. A recent communication from the Council of Bishops named a few of the victims: “The list of innocent Black lives who have been needlessly killed grows each day: Eric Garner, Terrence Crutcher, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Samuel DuBose, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, Laquan McDonald, Sandra Bland, Walter Scott and now Ahmaud Arbery. These are just some of the ones we know. We are saddened that there are many more names that could be added to this list.” Unfortunately, another person has been added to that list. George Floyd has joined that list of persons who have been murdered.

Oklahoma has seen its share of horrific acts as well. Within the last few weeks, a delivery man, who was doing his job was detained by over zealous persons. He kept his cool, knowing that if he took any action, it could cost him his life. The virtual graduation ceremony at OCU was hacked and defaced with racist filth. The cowardly perpetrator(s) are free to plot more terror. Countless people, especially people of color, live in fear of random racist actions.

Racism is not Christian. It is a lie. It is demonic. It destroys. It is not what we believe.

The 2016 General Conference passed a resolution that I have reproduced below. This resolution was recently included in a letter from the Council of Bishops. It is a reminder of what we believe and a call for us to commit to act on our beliefs.

“Because we believe: 1. That God is the Creator of all people and all are God’s children in one family; 2. That racism is a rejection of the teachings of Jesus Christ; 3. That racism denies the redemption and reconciliation of Jesus Christ; 4. That racism robs all human beings of their wholeness and is used as a justification for social, economic, environmental, and political exploitation; 5. That we must declare before God and before one another that we have sinned against our sisters and brothers of other races in thought, in word, and in deed; 6. That in our common humanity in creation all women and men are made in God’s image and all persons are equally valuable in the sight of God; 7. That our strength lies in our racial and cultural diversity and that we must work toward a world in which each person’s value is respected and nurtured; 8. That our struggle for justice must be based on new attitudes, new understandings, and new relationships and must be reflected in the laws, policies, structures, and practices of both church and state. [Therefore,] we commit ourselves as individuals and as a community to follow Jesus Christ in word and in deed and to struggle for the rights and the self-determination of every person and group of persons.” [2016 Book of Resolutions, #3371]

Let us not be deceived by racist propaganda. It is not of God. Instead, let us follow Jesus Christ.

James Nunn
Can we talk about race yet?

A protester holds a sign that quotes James Baldwin as saying, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced,” as a crowd marches toward the state capital in Oklahoma City on May 31. Photo by Meagan Ewton.

BY MEAGAN EWTON

On June 13, 2019, the General Commission on Religion and Race released a statement regarding racist elements in a popular Vacation Bible School curriculum. Days later, I asked five churches to talk to me about it, and all of them refused. In response, I wrote an article titled “Why can’t we talk about race?” and published it as the cover story in our September issue of Say So, the Oklahoma Conference magazine.

Fast forward to 2020. Protests have erupted across the country decrying the death of George Floyd, a black man who died after a police officer kneeled on his neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds. Racism and police brutality are at the top of the news cycle. Protests against racist violence have spread to the rest of the world.

Oklahoma will soon be thrust into the spotlight: the president has chosen to relaunch his campaign in Tulsa – the site of one of the nation’s deadliest race massacres – on June 19, or Juneteenth – long celebrated as a holiday of freedom from slavery in the black community. The racial tension is thick, and it’s growing more intense by the day.

Is it okay to talk about race now?

“Racial issues and racial tensions will never go away unless the church actually stands up and speaks to it,” said Rev. Valerie Steele. “We as pastors have to assist in leading the way for that opportunity to happen.”

Has anything changed?

Steele thinks that nothing has changed yet in the way the church talks about or approaches issues related to race and racism. Though groups within the conference and the greater church are discussing justice issues of the past, like the Tulsa Race Massacre in 1921, there isn’t as much discussion about how to address current issues.

“We still have churches that bristle if they learn they’re receiving a pastor of another race coming,” said Steele, who is preparing to transition to a new appointment. “What are we doing to till the soil so it will be fertile to receive leadership that is capable, that is effective, that is gifted to be appointed to that church? I have my feelings where that lands, but I think it’s going to take all of us.”

Rev. Chris Tiger, director of New Faith Communities for the conference, agrees that churches as a whole have not reached a tipping point in changing their approach to race or racism. He’s hopeful that society has.

“I’m older, I have a longer memory in dealing with these things, and it seems there are tipping points,” Tiger said. “I’m hoping this is something just as
important in our history as the 1960s were. There’s just certain times that seem like maybe instead of slow gradual process, there can be a jump.”

Rev. Dr. Elaine Robinson, who pastors OKC-Village and teaches at the Saint Paul School of Theology, said it’s time for the church and the country to address disparities in the way people are treated.

“One of the most important things the church can be teaching is that it’s not enough to claim ‘We love everyone equally.’ Rigorous testing proves that notion actually minimizes difference rather than embraces it,” Robinson said. “Whenever we make that claim, we are implicitly adding, ‘as long as everyone adheres to the way I do things and the way I understand the world.’ We must learn that the experiences of other people in America who aren’t in the white majority culture are different from ours. And we need to learn to appreciate those differences, even as we see our common humanity.”

“Black Lives Matter”

Rev. Dr. Joseph Harris, director of communications for the conference, said there’s not only growing recognition that America’s history has not reflected a value for all lives, but also a growing desire to do something about it.

“Some think you can’t say black lives matter because all lives matter, but all lives matter can’t matter until all black lives matter,” Harris said. “It seems to me that the protests that we see across our state and around the world are different from protests that we’ve had in the past. They seem to be much more diverse, both of race and of age.”

Harris said he hasn’t attended a protest for health reasons, but he has researched other ways to be involved without risking his physical safety.

“I’ve tried to be as involved in that without putting myself physically at risk because of the COVID-19 challenge that’s still among us,” Harris said.

The pandemic is also a cause of concern for Rev. Jennifer Ahrens-Sims, who serves as an associate pastor at Norman-St. Stephen’s. Like Harris, she has encouraged people to participate in activities that do not require physical presence, such as writing letters to government representatives expressing concern for black lives. She and her children have participated in peaceful protests in Norman, gathering at noon every Monday at the Norman Police Department to take a knee for eight minutes and 46 seconds.

“I have deep, deep concern for the protests taking place. I am concerned about protesting in large groups amidst the COVID-19 pandemic,” Ahrens-Sims said. “I am concerned about the history of violent protest in this country. With white knuckles and clinched fists, I have nervously watched hours and hours of protest on TV, hoping they will not become more violent with more loss of life. I am relieved they have been as peaceful as they have been.”

It can be hard to escape racial divisions in Oklahoma because of its significant and diverse Native population, according to Rev. Brett Thomasson, who pastors the United Methodist church in Pawhuska. He said this diversity is a strong reason for Christians to want to chip away at racial division.

“I like it when people gather to express their points of view in a peaceful and respectful manner, even if it’s edgy and uncomfortable,” Thomasson said. “I feel badly when people with other motives hijack those protests for their personal gain or desire to just break things, because that becomes the focus instead of the issues we want to address.”

Protests in Oklahoma have reached as far as the panhandle. Rev. David Player, who leads Guymon-Victory Memorial, did the invocation for a mile-long march to the county courthouse. He also participates in an early watch prayer every morning from 5-6 a.m. to pray “against evil, racism, stupidity and division.
and for righteousness, justice, wisdom, peace and reconciliation.”

“Racism is ‘out there,’ but it is also in us,” Player said. “We must be honest before God, repent, ask for forgiveness and with the Spirit’s help become better and do better. For societal ills, we must listen up, show up, stand up, and speak up.”

Protestors, Police, and the Church

Rev. Travis Ewton, who pastors the Calumet and Red Rock churches, thinks the church has a tendency in times of societal unrest to try and play the middle between protestors and the police, which can in turn cause harm to the disenfranchised. He tries to remember that though Jesus was on the side of the marginalized, he still provided healing for the servant of a centurion, the law enforcement of Jesus’ day.

“Jesus healing the servant of this officer was directly connected to the fact that this was a good officer: he was good to the people, he cared for his community, he invested in the community and served the community,” Ewton said. “I think it’s important for us to be like Jesus and love all people and care for all people – including the centurions – but to also very much be on the side of the poor and to admonish that those who are in the position of power to care for and serve their communities.”

Rev. Derrek Belase said some of his friends have led the way in some of the protests and prayed for public safety officials, including those at the Oklahoma City Police Department. He believes the church can provide space for protestors and police to develop positive relationships.

“If the church cannot be a place where two groups of people co-exist, I don’t see how it can happen anywhere,” Belase said. “This may seem like a dream world, but it is certainly my dream. How can we know each other – what is on our hearts, what motivates our actions – if we cannot be in relationship in the same space? The church could take the lead here.”

“Pay attention, slow down, and listen”

One the things Rev. Thomas Hoffman, who pastors Tulsa-Hope, wants white allies to remember to follow existing leadership rather than act on their own.

“Whites can serve as effective allies, but only if we are willing to give up our power and privilege and first ask how we can best serve Black Lives Matter and other organizations,” Hoffman said. “Sometimes that means marching. Sometimes that means staying behind the scenes, making sandwiches for the protesters. Even white clergy should not assume a role without inquiring of local leadership.”

Rev. Carlos Ramirez, pastor at OKC-Putnam City, thinks the church should “pay attention, slow down, and listen before we make a judgment” on the Black Lives Matter movement. He thinks the denomination has more work to do before it’s in a position to teach about race or racism.

“How can we say, ‘Let me teach you about racism’? When people of color are not represented in the pews, in leadership, and communities aren’t feeling invited to be a part of this denomination, then something is wrong. We need to call it what it is: blunt systemic racism,” Ramirez said. “I think we should be humble as a denomination and say, what can you, demonstrator, teach us? You teach us, because there’s a chance we have it wrong.”

Harris believes it’s the responsibility of every person of God to address issues of race and racism. He believes God is trying to say something during this time of unrest, and that all Christians are called to listen.

“We’re at a starting point, but we may get distracted by something new that happens,” Harris said. “At that time, the key will be, will this issue slide back to the backburner again? Will this still be a priority when the next thing comes along?”
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Join us as we honor these outstanding philanthropic members of our community while raising awareness and critical funds for NSO’s vital programs.

Presented by:

Oklahoma Methodist Foundation
St. Luke’s United Methodist Church
Dear Members of the 2020 Annual Conference:

This is the third time we have written to you with updates related to our upcoming annual conference session. These words from John the Solitary in the fifth century seem timely, “Do not make hard and fast decisions over anything in the future … decide in whatever matters you have to reach a decision, but without fixing in your mind that you will not be moved to other things.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered our lives and most certainly our plans in ways we could have never imagined just a few months ago. As of this writing, nearly 6,350 of our friends and neighbors have been infected with this horrible virus and over 325 people have lost their lives. Our churches, communities and families are forever changed by the coronavirus.

This letter is to inform you of our most recent plans for conducting this year’s session of annual conference.

Theme

Based on Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi where he writes, “Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others,” Oklahomans will gather for the 177th time since Methodism was established in Oklahoma. This letter contains all the information you will need to get registered and prepared for the gathering.

A November meeting

It is now necessary to cancel the June meeting we announced a few weeks ago. There will be no conference business conducted on June 20.

We now plan to meet on Friday, Nov. 20 and Saturday, Nov. 21 at Church of the Servant in Oklahoma City. This decision was made in the best interest of all who might be attending conference. Please note, if you cannot attend the session, it will be livestreamed.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
Protests, cont.

Schedule

Friday, November 20
• Registration from 1 to 6 p.m.
• Clergy and laity sessions at 3 p.m.
• Retiree banquet at 4:30 p.m.
• Pre-worship concert at 6:30 p.m. followed by Retirement, Commissioning and Ordination Service

Saturday, November 21
• Registration from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m.
• Business Session from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
• Lunch not included on site
• Memorial Worship at 1 p.m.
• Business Session from 2:15 p.m. until conclusion

Worship

At the heart of United Methodism is worship and we will do that for sure! We will include Memorial Worship as well as Retirement, Commissioning and Ordination in our short weekend gathering. Bishop Nunn will preach at the Retirement, Commissioning and Ordination service. Northern Prairie District Superintendent Tish Malloy will be the memorial service preacher. Come ready to worship and sing. Due to the uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus situation, we will not have a service of Holy Communion at this year’s conference.

Children and Youth Care

Because of these unknowns, for this year only, we will not be offering child or youth care during the sessions. There will be a nursery available for the worship service on Friday evening.

Youth Members of Conference

We will continue to provide coordination for the youth members of our annual conference and celebrate their presence and leadership at our meeting.

Registration

Even though the meeting is not occurring until November, we need you to register as soon as possible. You can do that at the annual conference information hub – okumc.org/annual_conference.

Retirees

Retirees will receive a stipend for attending conference as is our usual custom. The annual retirement banquet will take place on the evening of and immediately prior to the retirement worship service. A separate letter will be sent to retirees.

Special Offering

This year’s Conference offering will go in support of our Disaster Response efforts currently working largely in the north-eastern quadrant of our state. The result of the extensive flooding events in 2019, plus a few tornadoes, Oklahoma is once again rising to the task of restoring some 1,200 families to dry and safe homes. UMCOR is supporting us as always, but the funding they are able to give is substantially down from previous disasters, due to many other events that require their assistance. Our staff is hard at work case managing the affected families and volunteers are already signing up to help. But, to help them all, it is estimated the combined efforts of all the supporting agencies are some $2 million short!

Churches are asked to take up a special offering in each church prior to Conference and to bring those gifts to add to the offering taken during the course of Conference.

Questions

We know you will have questions. Please direct those to the email address ac2020@okumc.org and we will get those answered as quickly as we can. As you might imagine, this is a changing situation and we will have to remain in contact with one another until we make our way through it.

Conference information hub

You will find every piece of information you need at our website – okumc.org/annual_conference. The draft agenda and the Pre-Conference Workbook have been uploaded for your viewing. Download the Conference materials and bring your digital device with you to Conference.

As we say in one of our creeds. “God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.”

Grace and peace,

Bishop Jimmy Nunn

Rev. Derrek Belase – Director of Connectional Ministries & Conference Agenda Secretary

Rev. Dr. Joe Harris – Director of Communication, Assistant to the Bishop, Conference Secretary & Statistician

Randy Compton – Interim Treasurer
You can provide for the people and causes important to you by taking simple steps now.

As we discussed in Part One, there are numerous reasons why Americans avoid preparing an estate plan. The good news is that you can provide for the people and causes important to you by taking simple steps now. Creating your plan for the future can be easy and even enjoyable. Almost everyone feels better with a plan. It is comforting to know that you have organized your life and plans in a way; that provides for and protects your loved ones and supports your favorite ministries.

First, organize your estate.
Request our Planning Your Legacy guide. This fill-in-the-blank guide walks you through the process of gathering information about what you own, your family, and your goals.

Second, write down your questions.
Who will be your Personal Representative or Successor Trustee? Who will be the guardian for your minor children or special needs children? Who will be your financial power of attorney? Who will be your health care proxy? How is your property titled? Should you consider a Revocable Living Trust? How are you going to distribute personal property – jewelry, silver, china, collectables, antique furniture, etc.? Should you make a gift to your favorite Methodist cause(s)?

Third, contact the Foundation.
We can assist you in achieving your goals and answering your questions. We can help you explore different options before you contact your attorney.

Fourth, contact your attorney.
Bring the information you have gathered and questions to your attorney. Your attorney can draft a will or trust that will achieve your goals. You complete the plan through a simply signing process.

Fifth, update your plan.
Update your estate plan as your life changes. Marriages, births, and deaths are all events that may be a reason to revise your plans.

Contact us today, Give your legacy a voice!
In response to hundreds of protests sparked by the death of George Floyd, a black man who took his last breath under the knee of a police officer, United Methodist pastors preached about the hallowed breath of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday.

“It was difficult to hear George Floyd gasping for breath,” said the Rev. Judy Zabel, pastor of Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church, Minneapolis.

“It was painful and horrific to watch.”

Protests were held in all 50 U.S. states after the death of Floyd and in remembrance of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and thousands of other black and brown people who have been killed. Peaceful in the daytime, many turned violent and ugly during the night, Zabel said.

“Breath is a gift and is precious and sacred. In John 20, Jesus breathed on the disciples and they received the Holy Spirit, which empowered them to move beyond their fear to become a church that is forgiven and is sent into the world to forgive others,” Zabel said.

Florida Conference Bishop Kenneth Carter drew a direct contrast between Floyd’s haunting words “I can’t breathe” and the hallowed breath the Holy Spirit instills.

“I want you to know that God’s spirit is in every person, that every person is a soul, and this is why racism is a sin and a heresy,” Carter preached in a sermon recorded online. “It is not of God. Racism is incompatible with Pentecost. Racism is incompatible with the Holy Spirit.”

Many United Methodists called for an end to police
brutality and participated in peaceful protests in support of Black Lives Matter.

“I do want us, particularly those of us who are the beneficiaries of white privilege, to understand that our African American sisters and brothers are gasping for breath. For 400 years, through slavery, lynching, apartheid (Jim Crow), the civil rights movement, institutionalized racism, and long-delayed police reform, the African American community has been crying out, ‘I can’t breathe.’ And yet, the knee of oppression, white supremacy, and inaction remains. If we see only riots and protests, we are not looking close enough,” said Bishop Bruce Ough, Dakotas-Minnesota Area.

The Council of Bishops said in a statement posted May 30 that the bishops support and embrace a statement by Ough in which he asked the church to address “a pandemic of racism, white supremacy, and white on black or brown violence.”

“As people of faith it is time to take a stand against any and all expressions of racism and white supremacy,” the council said.

The United Methodist Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew in Manhattan organized a “Spread the Flame” Facebook event May 31 that included online and in-person components.

Some members wore masks and spaced out along the sidewalks for a candlelight vigil in front of the church building while others posted photos of themselves holding candles and signs in their own neighborhoods or homes.

The action demonstrated both grief and rage over the death of George Floyd and “for every black life that is devalued, demeaned and desecrated by the white supremacy thriving in our country,” the church’s Facebook announcement said.

In Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a United Methodist minister was maced by a police officer May 31 during a protest that drew about 200 people.

“We formed a line to separate the entire crowd from the police … before it got uglier,” said the Rev. Jason Perkowski, pastor of Faith United Methodist Church and Oregon Community United Methodist Church, just north of Lancaster in Lititz, Pennsylvania.

While an arrest was being made, one of the police officers broke away and started threatening protesters with a can of mace.

“I turned around (and) the police officer sprayed me directly in the face for no reason,” Perkowski said. “It was deliberate. I was blind for about 35 or 40 minutes.”

It was worth paying the price, he said.

“I am a person of privilege,” he said. “I can take my collar off and go home and decide it’s too much of a cost. … But persons of color don’t have that right.”

According to news reports, police officers and National Guard soldiers killed a man while enforcing a curfew in Louisville, Kentucky, where Breonna Taylor was shot dead in her own home during a police raid. Two people were reported dead in Indianapolis, and deaths were recorded in Detroit and Minneapolis.

“I have little left but grief and heartache. Yet, with every ounce of my one hope, I pray we will learn that all cops are not bad, all black men are not thugs, and racism is a disease that must be admitted before it can be cured,” wrote Bishop Leonard E. Fairley, Kentucky Conference.

“Let us rise up and tell the world, the nation, every perpetrator spreading injustice, every perpetrator spreading hatred, death, and violence, that this is not
Protests, cont.

There is still a more excellent way to rise up and tell this divided world and nation that His name is Jesus, bringer of peace and healer with the power of reconciliation and redemptive sacrificial agape (love), as the only true light in darkness,” Fairley wrote.

The Rev. Dawn M. Hand said she participated in the Pittsburgh protests because she is a justice advocate.

“Advocating for justice is hard work. It’s dirty work. It’s exhausting work. It’s heart-wrenching work,” said Hand, the Pittsburgh District superintendent. “I cannot sit back and watch the horridness of continued brutality of my black and brown siblings. I just can’t and I won’t.”

The Rev. Jeremy Smith, pastor of First Church Seattle, said he spent Saturday night calling and praying with church members who live downtown, ensuring they were safe after peaceful protests became violent.

“As Christ-followers, we are called both to gather in worship, and be sent forth in benediction to stand with and advocate for those in harm’s way,” he said. Smith had recorded his service earlier in the week but added a new call to action in response to the weekend’s events. He ended by asking listeners to give to anti-racist efforts.

In Dallas, the Rev. Richie Butler said he was not on Pentecost because he is doing a series on the Beatitudes. This week was Beatitude 7, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

“If we don’t like what we see when there is injustice maybe that falls on us,” he said. “Jesus is not saying blessed are the peaceful but blessed are the peacemakers—that’s an active thing.”

THE STORY WAS COMPILED BY GILBERT, A UM NEWS REPORTER IN NASHVILLE, WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM UM NEWS TEAM MEMBERS LINDA BLOOM, JOEY BUTLER, HEATHER HAHN, SAM HODGES AND JIM PATTERSON.
Ministry in a Minute

Rev. Alan Nagel distributed free masks to the patrons of the Nicoma Park UMC Thrift Store. The masks were donated to the church by Volunteers in Missions. Seen receiving a mask is Cyndee Sampson, a regular thrift store customer. Photo submitted by Catherine Jones.

Rev. Margo Vestal, pastor of Weatherford-First, hands Fire Chief Mike Karlin a copy of “Strength for Service to God and Community,” a book of daily devotions for first responders. The congregation distributed 156 copies to local first responders and health workers in April. Photo by Torrey Curtis.

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The Rev. Tweedy Sombrero began her move to Shiprock, New Mexico, in early May to fill her new appointment at The United Methodist Church’s Four Corners Native American Ministry, which serves the Navajo Nation.

She described her drive across the northern region of the reservation, which has been hit hard with COVID-19 cases, like driving through a ghost town.

“It’s just incredible all that is happening,” said Sombrero, a member of the Navajo Nation.

She said the reservation has been enacting curfews from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. to stop the spread of the coronavirus. “You see everybody start running to their homes around that time.”

Residents face a $1,000 fine for breaking curfew, she said.

The number of positive COVID-19 cases for the Navajo Nation has reached 4,071 and there have been 142 deaths, according to a May 18 press release from the tribe. The Navajo Nation has surpassed New York and New Jersey for the highest per-capita coronavirus infection rate in the United States, according to the most recent data. With an estimated 174,000 residents, it is the largest Indian reservation in the U.S., spanning portions of Arizona, Utah and New Mexico. The fact that a third of the households on the reservations do not have access to running water, combined with cultural practices of shaking hands and multigenerational and extended families living together, has contributed to the spread of the virus, Sombrero said.

The Rev. Shirley Montoya has been serving as interim director of Four Corners, a ministry of the New Mexico Conference, for the past two years. She also is a member of the Navajo Nation.

“They ought to give medals out for COVID survivors,” she said.

Montoya’s sister works for the Indian Health Services hospital in Shiprock and tested positive for the virus. “She had to quarantine herself and she had her grandson and two of her kids living under the same roof.”

Montoya said her sister locked herself in her room for a month. “They would fix food for her and leave it at her door,” Montoya said. “It was really awful.”

Montoya was with her sister the week she tested positive. Although Montoya tested negative, she still self-quarantined for two weeks.
Navajo, cont.

Her sister has recovered and is already back working at the hospital.

The Four Corners Ministry has focused on services to support the volunteer health workers who have come to help the community. Housing has been difficult and there are not a lot of places for workers to get food.

“We started to provide sack lunches to the volunteers, frontline workers, the Navajo Nation police, the fire department and first responders once a week,” said Montoya. “Once the IHS (hospital) workers report to work, they can’t leave, and the cafeteria is usually closed.”

In addition, the Four Corners Ministry is working with the regional emergency relief committee to coordinate the distributions of masks and other essential items, such as water and firewood, to tribal members living in the surrounding communities.

According to Sombrero, many of the Navajo elders living in the hills choose to live in a traditional way and do not have running water or electricity. She said they use wood-burning stoves to keep warm. The weather is still cool overnight and there has been a shortage of wood.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief is providing an $8,000 grant to the ministry to help support ongoing needs. The grant is one of six solidarity grants issued by the relief agency to assist Native American communities with food security and water needs.

“I’m hoping with the funding coming in that we can pay for gas so volunteers can take supplies into the surrounding communities,” Montoya said.

Many of the volunteers are currently unemployed and have minimal income. In addition to food, water, masks and sanitizers, Montoya is asking for games and outdoor activities for the children.

“The areas that are hit the hardest are the rural reservation areas and the children don’t have internet,” she said. “Just some outlet for creativity, I think, is good as they try to keep themselves busy.”

The New Mexico Conference put out a call to church members on Native American Ministry Sunday, April 26, for handmade face masks. The conference has shipped 500 so far.

“We’ve gathered approximately $1,000 in donations specifically for the ministry in April,” said Allie Newsom, communications director for the conference.

In addition, the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference has been receiving monetary donations, masks and supplies to send to the Four Corners Ministry. The needs of the ministry will be part of the focus for the conference’s Memorial Day Facebook service on May 24.

“We certainly keep the members of the Navajo Nation in our prayers,” said the Rev. David Wilson. “We understand the cultural complexities that exist among our Native communities and the challenges they were already facing even before the pandemic made its way onto the reservation.”

Montoya said she is grateful for the immediate support coming into the Navajo Nation, but she fears the worst is yet to come.

“When people really feel their unemployment and this frenzy to come out and help is over, maybe six months from now, people are going to really be suffering with a lack of food and things like that,” she said.

Montoya is seeking funds and grants to help people pay their utility bills and buy cell phones, especially for elders in case they get sick, gas and burial assistance.

“There’s not much burial assistance right now,” she said. “These are the kinds of areas I’d like to collect money for when the need really kicks in. I think it’s just a matter of time.”

She anticipates being in a lockdown mode until at least mid-June.

“I just ask people to pray, pray for the Nation,” Sombrero said.

Members of OKC-Mosaic donated supplies to send to the Navajo Nation. Supplies were delivered the week of June 8. Photo submitted by Ginny Underwood.
Global Ministries offers grants through the UM Voluntary Services program

Global Ministries is offering grants to United Methodist annual conferences to stand in solidarity with those who are voicing their opposition to racial injustice, as well as stand in the gap for communities that have been adversely affected by the demonstrations.

The United Methodist Voluntary Services solidarity grants, funded by the Human Relations Day Offering, can be used to provide resources for peaceful demonstrations. UMVS solidarity grants can also be used for food, access to medication and rebuilding efforts for communities impacted by negative acts.

The UMVS program seeks to be in relationship with community groups and organizations that work with “the least of these.” It addresses unjust political, social and economic systems that continue to drain the energy and resources of the poor, always aware that local struggles are also global struggles.

For information about solidarity grants, please contact Dana Lyles, dlyles@umcmission.org.

OCU religion professor honored with posthumous COSROW award

The Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) announced Dr. John Starkey as the recipient of the 2020 Francis E. Willard Award.

Starkey, who died after a battle with cancer on Jan. 11, was a religion professor at Oklahoma City University.

The award is given every year to an individual who has made a distinguished contribution to the advancement of women in ministry in the Oklahoma Conference. The video announcement can be seen at www.okumc.org/WillardAward.

“COME THRIVE WITH US HERE!!”

Marsha Purtell | Chaplain | Epworth Villa

At Epworth Villa, there are plenty of enthusiasts, including Marsha Purtell. As Epworth’s newly appointed Chaplain, she knows firsthand about all the great things this community has to offer. “There are awesome living opportunities here, and you will be amazed! We have to dispel the myth it’s expensive to move here when, in reality, it’s quite affordable and offers so much.”

Add visiting Marsha Purtell at Epworth Villa to your to-do list and call us today at (405) 367-1134.
Save the Date

Project Transformation Oklahoma
Summer 2020 | Online Reading Program
Cost: Free | Open to all K-12 students in Oklahoma
Registration required online at forms.gle/575JYtdu3YGMdaBJ7.
Contact Kelsey Ricks at kricks@okumc.org

Leading in Crisis: Feeling like you didn’t sign up for this, and other pastoral realities of 2020
GBHEM webinar | June 17 | 11 a.m.
Featuring Bishop Grant Hagiyaa of the California-Pacific Conference
and Bishop Ken Carter of the Florida Conference
Streaming online at www.facebook.com/gbhem and www.youtube.com/gbhem

Employment

• Director of Families with Youth. Moore-First, part-time. Prefer two years of college or
equivalent experience. Please contact Tom Matejka at matejkatom717@gmail.com for more
details.

• Director of Facilities. Moore-First, full-time. For details, please contact Tom Matejka at
matejkatom717@gmail.com.

Passages

Rev. David E. Parker passed away on May 2. The retired pastored several churches in the
Oklahoma Conference between 1961 and 1992, including Ada-Asbury, Tecumseh, Guthrie-First,
Hooker, Blackwell, Chickasha-Epworth, Mannford, Hollis and Prague. Parker also served as a
chaplain at the Texoma Lake Ministry. No service was planned.

Mary Anna Price passed away on May 8. Her husband, Rev. Don Price, served in the
Oklahoma Conference between 1956 and 2000, though he retired in 1998. They were living in
Maine at the time of Mary Anna’s death, and her ashes will be brought to Stillwater for interment
at a later date.
Share your event or job opportunity in the Contact.

For consideration, email your listing to editor@okumc.org.
Deadline for the July issue is June 25.