UMW Celebrates 150 Years in Mission - 3 | Mission in Stitches - 6
Three Ways to Improve Your Social Media - 12
Communications Ministry Staff

Joe Harris | Director of Communications

Nyla Wallin | Media Production Manager

Andrew Himes | Multimedia and Web Ministry

Meagan Ewton | Editor of Publications

Tabitha Beckman | Communications Assistant
If anything at Oklahoma’s Annual Conference could symbolize the state’s United Methodist Women, it would be the cookies.

Long before the second day of annual conference was scheduled to start, tables and tables of cookies were set up around the voting floor. Silver trays of individually wrapped confections were placed atop festive tablecloths with six or more trays displayed on each table. Classic flavors like chocolate chip, snickerdoodle, oatmeal raisin, and peanut butter were abundant, and sugar-free and gluten-free options were labeled and easy to find. As the tables were covered with white cloths to prevent early consumption, volunteers placed wrapped cookies on the tables for voting youth members.

The countless hours United Methodist women spent baking, sorting, packaging, transporting and arranging cookies were summed up neatly on a chocolate chip cookie label from Okmulgee: “150 Years of United Methodist Women Showing a Heart for Service.”

United Methodists across the country are celebrating 150 years of Methodist women engaging in mission. What started as eight American women sending female missionaries to serve women in India has grown to include more than 800,000 members supporting missional and justice work in over 100 countries.

Oklahoma’s United Methodist women are also celebrating. More than 50 women attending the annual Spiritual Growth Retreat in March participated in a “Happy Birthday UMW” video message shared to the OKUMW Facebook Group. During Annual Conference, OKUMW leaders showed a video that shared the historic beginnings of the UMW and
encouraged giving to the Legacy Fund. That evening the OKUMW gathered for a celebratory dinner that featured Oklahoma City University President Martha Burger as the guest speaker. The OKUMW will even incorporate the celebration into this year’s Mission u event by including a study on the book “Women United for Change: 150 Years in Mission” by Dr. Ellen Blue, History & United Methodist Studies professor at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa.

Though there is cause for celebration, the OKUMW keeps its eye on their purpose to “be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.” This year, the OKUMW has included a tentative Social/Racial Justice Event in Oklahoma City in August. This event would be in addition to their annual Toole Tyme event at Cookson Hills Mission in November and Santa Operation at Neighborhood Services Organization (NSO) in December, making a busy end to a festive year.

One of the UMW’s most lasting legacies in Oklahoma is NSO, the only UMW National Mission Institute in Oklahoma.

NSO traces its roots to The Wesley Community House, founded by Methodist women in 1920. The mission focused on impacting post-WWI families in the Riverside neighborhood, at the time home to many immigrant families. The mission grew to include a public library, a music department, activity clubs for children, youth and mothers, and literary and citizenship classes. On average, staff members made an average of 2,500 connections with the community every month. In 1946, Wesley Community House helped found the Bethlehem Center in northeast Oklahoma City, and in 1969, both organizations joined Neighborhood Centers, Inc. to create the Neighborhood Services Organization.

Today, NSO continues to bring the love of Christ to the homeless and working poor and empowers them to break the cycle of poverty by offering housing solutions, dental care, a WIC clinic, and additional programs to some of the most vulnerable people in Oklahoma City. Stacey Ninness, president and CEO of NSO, said UMW groups she speaks with are always excited to hear NSO was started by Methodist women. “The UMW are such a huge part of what we do at NSO,” Ninness said. “They provide to us financially, through volunteering, but most importantly they provide continual prayer for our ministry, and I know for a fact that is the major reason for our success at NSO!”

According to Ninness, NSO is the only National Mission Institute of the UMW’s national office. The non-profit is in a covenant agreement with the national office of the UMW, from whom they receive an apportionment. That agreement also calls for certain UMW leaders, such as the UMW presidents of the Crossroads and Heartland Districts and the UMW president for the Oklahoma Conference, to serve as ex-officio board members. Ninness said this ensures the UMW will continue to be a part of the strategic direction of the ministry.

“I am eager to share our history with the UMW; that group of women have always been bold and truly dedicated to serving women, youth and children, and that is exactly what we do,” Ninness said. “The UMW started NSO, and I always want to make sure they will always be an important part of what we do here.”

A cookie made by UMW members at Okmulgee UMC for the Oklahoma Annual Conference. The plain white label captures the essence of the UMW: a heart for service. Photo by Meagan Ewton.

Glenda, president of the Oklahoma Conference UMW, encourages a young girl on the first day of Annual Conference. Photo by Meagan Ewton.
NSO is excited to announce that the 2019 NSO Good Samaritan Awards Luncheon was a huge success! Not only was the organization honored to recognize the time, talent and contributions of three outstanding Oklahoma philanthropists – Dr. J. Don Harris, Kim Henry and Dr. Bill Junk- it also well-exceeded it’s fundraising goal. Through so many generous donors and contributions, NSO raised over $180,000!

These critical funds will help NSO continue to create generational impacts and provide essential housing and health care programs to the community’s most vulnerable citizens. These donations help NSO give a hand up by restoring dignity and inspiring hope for those who need it most.

This year’s honorees have dedicated their careers to helping countless individuals and families. NSO is grateful for the opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate their dedication and impact on the entire Oklahoma community.

Dr. J. Don Harris, family and cosmetic Dentist, is recognized for his several decades of impactful community service that includes founding the NSO Dental Clinic in 1969, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. In 1986, Dr. Harris founded D-DENT, to fulfill an unmet need for the low-income, uninsured elderly and developmentally-disabled community in Oklahoma City.

Kim Henry, Executive Director of Sarkeys Foundation, is recognized for her lifelong dedication to educating Oklahoma children, serving our state as its First Lady for eight years, volunteering her time as a nonprofit board member and in her current role at Sarkeys. Her position at the Sarkeys Foundation, which she has held for ten years, allows her to interact with hundreds of nonprofit organizations that are focused on improving the lives of Oklahomans in sectors that include education, social services and the arts.

Dr. Bill A. Junk, President of the Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation, is recognized for his long commitment to United Methodist Church financial stewardship on the local, state and national level and major philanthropy in Oklahoma that positively impacts the lives of hundreds of thousands of citizens annually. Since coming on board at Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation in 1988, Dr. Junk has helped the organization’s assets grow tremendously.

NSO is thrilled that so many individuals were able to be a part of this wonderful event. The organization would like to thank everyone for helping honor three remarkable community leaders and celebrate NSO’s 99th anniversary and the NSO Dental Clinic’s 50th anniversary!
Ministry in Stitches
A glimpse at the ministry of sewing
At every Oklahoma Annual Conference, newly ordained clergy receive red stoles during the ordination ceremony. This year, those stoles were made by a member of the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM).

Rooted in prayer

Sheri Lashley, who spent up to 10 hours making each of the 10 ordination stoles, started making stoles because they were too expensive to buy. Over time, she made stoles as personal gifts for clergy friends and conference leaders, including Bishops Robert Hayes and James Nunn, but this year was the first time she was asked to make stoles for ordinands.

“I was very grateful to be able to do that,” Lashley said. “It was fun for me to be part of such a precious moment.”

When Emily Robnett’s stole was placed on her shoulders, she felt like her call to ministry was fully recognized and confirmed by the community.

“For people outside of the process, it’s just a piece of cloth, but for me, it’s a symbol of finally arriving at the goal that I’d had for so long,” Robnett said. “It really does feel like taking up the mantle.”

Trey Witzel said his stole is a reminder of the long faith tradition that extends beyond Methodism. He likened receiving his stole to the story of Elisha taking up Elijah’s cloak upon his master’s ascent to heaven.

“This was kind of the red ribbon that tied up the process,” Witzel said. “It says, ‘we’re with you, and we’re staying with you, and we support you and uphold you.’ It’s a symbolic and literal laying on of hands through the laying on of a stole.”

Both Robnett and Witzel wore their ordination stoles on the third day of Annual Conference. Witzel said he carried himself differently while he wore the stole.

“It’s just one of those kind of touchstone memories and objects that kind of mark a transition,” he said. “It’s similar going from adolescence to adulthood, from dating to married. It’s that final step. I’m not the Padawan; I’m a part of it now.”

Robnett said having a stole made by a board member is significant because they’ve witnessed each pastor’s growth during the ordination process.

“It’s important that someone who examined my call added that personal touch,” Robnett said. “That someone who had the responsibility of reading 55 pages of paperwork and do the things that go on in the examination room would take the time to make something for you—blessing you with a gift but also affirming your call in such a significant way—it’s really meaningful.”

Sewing as an expression of Christian ministry is a practice as old as Christian faith. The Book of Acts records the sewing ministry of Tabitha, known in Greek as Dorcas, a woman explicitly described as a disciple “devoted to good works and acts of charity” (Acts 9:36b, NRSV). Tabitha died from an illness, and her community called for Peter to come without delay. Upon his arrival, he was surrounded by widows “weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made” (Acts 9:39b, NRSV). In the moments before Peter raised Tabitha from the dead, her legacy was tangible in the items she had made for those in need.

Lashley, who was recently appointed to First UMC in Okmulgee, recognizes this sense of community that can be created through sewing, and she looks for some way to use crafts or sewing in ministry in every church she serves.

“It’s a lost art because we can get clothing and stoles so readily available,” Lashley said. “I try to make it something people can do.”

Sewing together

Women in the sewing group at Village UMC in Oklahoma City agree sewing is not as common as it once was, a fact they attribute in part to higher costs of fabric and thread.

“Fabrics have become so expensive that people can buy clothes cheaper than they can make them,” said Tish Bishop, a member of Village UMC’s sewing group.

“And I think people want instant gratification,” added Regina Wolfinger. “A quilt takes a long time to do, and I think people would rather go buy one already made at Walmart.”

Nancy Kendrick, who founded the sewing group in 2015 with donated machines, said her youngest daughter recently found a king-sized blue and white quilt in a thrift store for nine dollars.

“You couldn’t even buy the binding for that,” Kendrick lamented.

“You couldn’t even buy one yard of fabric for it,” Wolfinger responded.

Though they describe their sewing group as a fellowship ministry, they’ve helped sew and give away hundreds of items, including quilts, fleece blankets, receiving blankets, scarves, pajamas, needlepoint, pillows, bibs, calendars,

Tish Bishop, a member of Village UMC in Oklahoma City, sews bibs on one of the sewing ministry’s donated machines. Photo by Meagan Ewton.
children’s costumes, bears and a church flag. One of their quilts was given to Circle of Care for the Vera Mae Home in Alva.

“We’re just sort of a jack of all trades,” Kendrick said.

The women admitted it can be hard to get others to come help sew on a regular basis, even though all the materials and machines are provided, but they’re glad when people join them for even a brief time. Bishop recognizes that people often have several commitments, and it can be hard to add something new to a full schedule. No matter who’s there, Bishop said that they support and help each other when needed. She thinks that support keeps projects from becoming too frustrating.

“You learn by doing,” Kendrick said.

“If you never try, you don’t fail, but you don’t succeed, either,” Wolfinger said.

Even with the costs and time consumption, Bishop thinks sewing and crafting by hand is coming back into style. She thinks people like to make things with their hands, whether or not they think they’re skilled at the work.

“A lot of people knit now; it’s kind of surprising,” Bishop said. “I think people are getting to where they want to make things for themselves. They’re beginning to see that they can create.”


---

**Special project**

There isn’t a sewing group at Centenary UMC in Lawton, but that didn’t stop Linda Ashton from organizing a quilt project to benefit Family Promise, a non-profit whose mission is to “help homeless and low-income families achieve sustainable independence.”

Ashton “got a bee in (her) bonnet” to make quilts after seeing the handmade quilts in Hardt Lodge at Canyon Camp. She knew the church would be hosting Family Promise families in a few months, so she brought the idea to the Administrative Council, who approved. A church member donated 1,600 yards of fabric for quilts after her sewing shop closed. Ashton signed people up in September, thinking the project would be good to complete by Lent.

“Folks were interested in making the quilts, but preferred to work independently,” Ashton said. “We had quilts by December; there were enough to cover the beds of the number of guests we had.”

In total, 18 quilts were made for Family Promise. Though it was completed in the past, Ashton still remembers the ministry with fondness.

“Although it was short lived, there was a sense of community among the quilters,” Ashton said. “The best thing
ENJOY SPECIAL INCENTIVES for UMC CLERGY and SPOUSES:

Independent Living
Take an additional 10% off your entry fee (after all other specials have been applied).

Assisted Living
Take 50% off monthly rate of any Assisted Living/Memory Care apartment for 4 months.

At Epworth Villa, independence means you decide what you want to do and when you want to do it. Eat your meals and use our amenities when they’re convenient for you, not us. And choose from a wide selection of great living options you’ll enjoy coming home to after a day of exploring. Experience Epworth Villa for yourself and call us at (405) 543-0814 to plan a visit. At your convenience, of course.

EPWORTH VILLA
A Life Plan Community

14901 N. Pennsylvania Avenue | Oklahoma City, OK 73134 | epworthvilla.org
ever is seeing the beds with the quilts on them, ready for the families who are at Centenary for the week.”

Sewing as ministry

Lashley believes that sewing is ministry, so long as it is rooted in relationship and prayer. Like most ministry work, the stoles were covered in prayer from the first stitches to the final seams. She asked a friend to embroider and pray over cross and flames emblems in December – two for each stole – and she started measuring and cutting fabric in January. She sewed 12 stoles in all, choosing the best 10 for the ordians, and prayed over the fabric throughout the process.

“The hardest part is not the sewing; it’s the measuring, the cutting, and the ironing. It’s the preparation and the finishing that are the hardest parts,” Lashley said. “But it’s the praying that’s most important when you’re talking about fabrics in ministry.”

After the final details were complete, she hung the stoles and prayed over them one more time before adding the final touch: each person’s name and date of ordination.

“I’m on the Board and I’ve interviewed these people, and that made it more special to me; I hope it made it more special for them, too,” Lashley said. “I hope they felt the heavy mantle placed on their shoulders for ministry. I hope it was placed heavily, but heartily and invitingly.”

Robnett believes sewing has been a ministry to her and to others. She said she sees it in folks who receive a prayer shawl while in the hospital and cling to it like a tether, and she feels it when she wears her stole as a member of the clergy community.

“Anything that’s handmade is, I think, more special in some way,” Robnett said. “Anything that you make with your own two hands, that you create as the Creator would, is reflective of real love and real empathy. The fact that it’s been made by somebody for me, with me in mind, is not something I can really describe.”

Witzel agrees, saying stoles often represent a part of a clergy person’s faith journey.

“Buying them online is like a piece of attire you wear to work,” Witzel said. “When they’re made for you, it just feels different.”

In the end, Lashley hopes the stoles help new elders remember the gratefulness and humility that comes with being a pastor and an elder. She also hopes to get more people involved in the ministry of sewing.

“I’m hoping churches find a way to use sewing as a ministry or crafts as a ministry in any way possible,” Lashley said. “That’s what I try to do, and hopefully, thinking about that in another way, churches will, too.”
Vera Mae’s Dream

A PLACE FOR FOSTER SIBLINGS TO BE TOGETHER AND TO BE LOVED & POINTED TOWARD GOD

This community works together for good.

Vera Mae Eversole was a quaint woman with a huge heart—and a large amount of land. She had inherited the property and wanted to gift some of it to the First United Methodist Church in Alva. She also cared deeply for the needs of children. Through her gift and direction, an endowment was formed at the Foundation.

Circle of Care† and Alva FUMC worked together to begin addressing the needs of large sibling sets in foster care. After organizing a team to prayerfully work through the vision for the project, the Vera Mae Home was born. The church community was inspired by the initial gift from Vera Mae, and together, they quickly raised another $150,000 so construction could begin.

Over the next 9 months, the project quickly progressed. The Alva community also was a part of landscaping and decoration efforts. After a few short weeks, a host family moved in and there are children being surrounded by love in a home—together.

† www.circleofcare.org

You may think you can’t change the world because the need is so massive. Don’t be afraid to do something for good—just open a door.

For the full story and more, visit our website. You will be inspired to Invest in Lasting Good.

800-259-6863 | LASTINGGOOD.ORG

Invest in Lasting Good
OKLAHOMA METHODIST FOUNDATION
THREE WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA

Browse three ways to improve your social media presence. Get back to basics, learn from others, and discover advanced strategies with these three features.
Scaling the mountain of social media can look like an impossible task for churches who don't feel like they have the right resources to get the job done. Maybe they don’t have a social media budget, a staff person who can run media, or a clear understanding of how to use social media platforms. If that sounds like you or your church, you can still scale the mountain— you just need to approach the mountain in a different way.

Pick one social media platform and stick with it; it’s easy to give into the expectation of being present in every social media your congregants participate in, but there’s value in choosing one platform, learning the ins and outs, and using that platform well.

It might seem like you reach more people by having a presence on more social media platforms, but you create a larger impact and reach more people long-term by using one platform well. Don’t get caught being pulled in several directions; pick one social media platform and pour your time and energy into developing it as a ministry tool.

Developing a social media strategy can be a draining and laborious task for churches. The hardest step in developing a strategy is often deciding on the mission of your social media platform—the “why we’re here.”

Your social media mission should reflect the mission of your church. If your church is passionate about missions, show the world how great it is to engage in missions. If your church focuses on serving the needs of the community, celebrate how you accomplish that and what needs you meet. If you can capture the identity of your church and communicate that to the world, your social media strategy will fall right in place.

Keep in mind that your social media audience isn’t just one large group of people; like your congregation, your social media audience is made up of individual people.

• Who are they?
• What struggles or needs do they have?
• What does your church offer them?
• What hope can you speak into their lives?

Thinking about who you’re trying to reach on social media will help you invite them to church or to a relationship with Jesus in real and tangible ways.
SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS FROM OKLAHOMA LEADERS

We asked some church leaders around Oklahoma how they manage their social media. This is what they said.

Multiple channels

“We don’t use Facebook Events very often, but we do post about events pretty frequently. I think as long as we’re getting the word out in multiple ways in newsletters and word of mouth, that’s better than relying on Facebook Events alone. There’s probably someone in your church who has set up a Facebook Event before. You may be able to rely on that person’s know-how, but you would probably be just fine to set one up on your own.”

Rev. Lisa Beavers, Frederick UMC

Post frequency

“We try to post once a week on Facebook or Instagram. I feel our members respond and love to see posts they can share with others about activities in our church. A couple years ago we were able to connect with former church members with throwback Thursday posts. We are looking at doing that again since that was one of our biggest responses.”

Michael Smith, Pryor-First UMC

Facebook Groups

“I do believe that folks find it helpful. When a need should be filled, we can put it on there and it helps get the word out. I think the group helps keep everybody communicating and brings them together a little bit more. I think a lot of times things don’t work out because people don’t communicate with each other or can’t participate if they don’t know what’s going on. To me, it’s a communication tool that makes things more cohesive. Everybody’s getting out there, so we’re trying to stay with the times. I would say go for it if it helps your members feel like they belong.”

Nancy Kletecka, Hooker UMC
LEVEL UP

Take your social media presence to the next level with these advanced tips.

By Tabitha Beckman

1. Have a really strong Facebook Page? Try expanding your church’s presence to Instagram or Twitter.

2. Facebook Insights and Twitter Analytics offer great tools for understanding how people interact with your account. Study the data to see how you’re doing and where you can improve.

3. Encourage people to check-in at events or before worship to help expand your social media reach.

4. Try live-streaming weekly sermons with Facebook Live, Youtube or another live-streaming option.

5. Promote your posts. A little money goes a long way on Facebook, so promote your posts or page, especially around big events like Christmas, Easter and VBS.

6. Try doing a photo-a-day theme or photo contest for one week to get more people looking at your page everyday.

7. Think about what catches your eye and makes you read more when you’re using social media. Intentionally follow organizations and pages that inspire you, and find ideas that you can adapt to your ministry setting.

8. Be aware of photo usage and media rights. Make sure to acknowledge somewhere when a person’s photos could end up online, post a sign during events, or have a photo release included on registration forms.

9. Create a Social Media Policy. Outline rules for how often your administrators will post, how often they should monitor comments, determine do’s and don’ts of sharing, and write down what to do if there is an issue.

10. Come up with Hashtags for your church and for specific events. Make the hashtag short and logical so people will remember. Before you make it official, search potential hashtags on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to see if they are already in use for something not associated with your church.