This is an issue about connection.

It’s not often that there is a theme to an issue of this magazine. Overall, the theme of Say So: OKUMC Spirit in Action is the story of Christian faith played out among the United Methodists in Oklahoma. Our goal with this magazine is to always speak to the theme of faith in our conference, whether that be in a ministry setting, at a sewing machine, through having a hard discussion, or through faithful service over a lifetime.

As I said when the magazine was new, this magazine is named for the call in Psalm 107:2 to "let the redeemed of the Lord say so!" But sometimes, our individual call to say so must give way to the beautiful story of connection we feel with each other and with other Christians around the globe.

The United Methodist system is one of interconnection. Churches are able to call on each other as siblings in Christ to help put on events, reach communities effectively, or even swap pulpits between pastors. This connection is a special way we participate in the mission of the world. Because we give, someone across the world can receive what they need.

Sometimes that interconnection is smaller, though. Sometimes it’s in the faith to trust God to bless what you have to offer, even when it feels like it’s not enough to provide for the people who are depending on you.

Sometimes that connection is in the ability to find what we need through our general agencies, as we are able to share freely with one another.

Sometimes that connection is in the faithful prayer that says, "I believe you are able, God. What would you have me do next?" and hearing those prayers answered in the form of friends and strangers coming together to bless the request.

I must admit, when I started on this issue, I was overwhelmed by the state of the world in summer 2020: a global pandemic, an economic crisis, a sense of unease in the world of politics, a growing divide within a denomination that is hopefully waking up to the racial crises taking place within its walls. And yet, within that overwhelming feeling is a sense of hope: hope for a peace that I know is not yet but is sure to come. Each story in this issue weaves that hope together for me, and I hope it will do the same for you.

As I said last May when the magazine launched, the stories in these pages are meant to be read over and over again. I hope you find a little inspiration and maybe even some hope within these pages, and when you do, I hope you will share these stories with those around you.

For that is how we make the connection grow.

May the peace of the Lord Christ be with you.

Meagan Ewton
Editor of Publications
Kevin Kellet (left) and Ryan Cottrell sit in the common area of the Central Oklahoma Adult & Teen Challenge residential center while they wait for evening Bible study. Kellet has been in the program for four months, and Cottrell has been in for 10 months.
When COVID-19 forced his nonprofit’s top two revenue streams to cease operations, Todd Adams took a chance and swerved into a new method of fundraising to keep his recovery ministry afloat.

Adams is the executive director of Central Oklahoma Adult & Teen Challenge (COATC) in Stillwater, a 13-month faith-based recovery program that he lovingly refers to as “Christian drug rehab.” State closures of non-essential businesses forced SuperThrift, COATC’s primary source of income, to close, displacing an average of 14 student workers and four staff members daily. With stores closed, their second revenue stream – craft sales in front of high-volume stores – was also immediately halted. Because COATC does not use government funding, the closures left Adams scrambling for a solution.

He found it in one of the ministry’s side projects: handyman services.

“We’ve just been overwhelmed and still are with calls,” Adams said. “It’s a lot of ministry for our guys, too. They’re getting to not only go out and help folks and do it at a good price and do great work, but there’s also lots of prayer and ministry and testimony, so it kind of goes hand in hand. The guys love doing it and, we’ve been able to help a lot of people in need and those that are less fortunate.”

Handyman Service For a Cause takes a cue from Jesus’ work as a carpenter and uses odd jobs to develop work skills, raise scholarship funds and meet a need in the community. Adams said the program has been a success from day one when they hosted a car wash outside a grocery store. He said they do work for disabled veterans for free.

“We’re really big on the life skills part, teaching them how to do an interview, how you should dress,” Adams said. “Teen Challenge prides itself on this (program’s foundation) being the Jesus factor, and that’s true. But if you don’t teach them life skills and they go back to that same mess they were in, they’re probably not gonna make it long.”

COATC is part of Adult & Teen Challenge USA, a nonprofit addiction recovery program started by Pentecostal preacher David Wilkerson, author of “The Cross and the
A student of Central Oklahoma Adult & Teen Challenge who formerly worked in the rehab program thrift store until it closed as a non-essential business in Stillwater now works on the First UMC South Campus building as the program introduces the new Handyman Service For A Cause program to raise money to pay student tuition. Photo submitted by Glen Hyden.

Left: The Oklahoma Central Adult & Teen Program volunteered to deliver groceries for a couple of local grocery stores when the pandemic hit Oklahoma. The nonprofit ministry also uses the vans to provide transportation for its handyman workers and to make pickup and donation deliveries for the thrift store.

Right: Todd Adams (left) stands with Melvin Poper, who’s been in the program for 10 months, and Robert McClafflin, who’s been in the program for six months.
Switchblade.” The organization has more than 200 residential centers in the United States and more than 1,000 around the world. They’ve been in operation for more than 60 years.

Adams has been involved with the organization for more than 20 years, first as a participant, then as a staff member. He said all 12 staff members at COATC have graduated from the program, including his wife, whom he met while serving in Pensacola.

Though the national program has Pentecostal roots, COATC in Stillwater is closely connected with First UMC in town. Adams and wife Angie are members of the church, as are some of the nonprofit’s board members, and the couple regularly took between 20 and 25 residents to worship with them on Sundays before the pandemic forced churches to temporarily stop hosting in-person services. He said the majority of the handyman clients have been from the church, and the organization is often called to meet the needs of those in the community.

“When someone comes to their church and is in need or something, the associate pastor will call my wife,” Adams said. “We just really believe the more we give away the more we’ve been blessed, and that’s something we really try to teach our men, too; it just seems to work well.”

After the thrift store closed on March 26, the nonprofit scrambled to reposition its students and staff to new work programs like the handyman service. Angie Adams, who manages the thrift store and works as Todd’s assistant, said the store was closed for about three weeks. She said everything the thrift store gets is completely donated.

“We sent a letter to the governor, and they deemed us an essential business because we do help so many people in need,” Angie Adams said. “We were able to reopen after only three weeks, which was huge.”

The handyman work was able to help keep the ministry funded to ensure people currently enrolled in the program could stay and new people who needed to enter the program could do so without being responsible for the tuition. For the first five weeks after the thrift store reopened, it did twice as much business as before it had to close, which Todd Adams attributes to the government sending out stimulus checks and tax refunds people may have received. The money from the service and the store helps pay for things like workman’s compensation insurance and costs associated with keeping the ministry’s vans running. Adams is grateful for the support of his church and the Stillwater community, but he gives the credit for the ministry’s success to God.

“We know it was a total God thing. We were praying, we were desperate,” Adams said. “We really believe the Lord just had his hand on us during that time. When others were struggling we kind of flourished.”
Top Tips from ResourceUMC.org

The best tips from ResourceUMC.org on how to improve your online worship and outreach

Churches across Oklahoma have had to dramatically rethink how to be the church since the outbreak of COVID-19. Churches are returning to in-person worship services after several weeks of gathering online, but online connections between churches and members will likely continue to serve vital functions. ResourceUMC.org has several resources available to help ministry leaders strengthen their online presence and outreach efforts as the church continues working together to be the hands and feet of Jesus. Find these and other resources at ResourceUMC.org.

Local Church Learning Session:

Learn about copyrights and licenses for livestreaming in this 20-minute presentation by United Methodist Communications and Discipleship Ministries. Topics include why licenses are important, basic licenses and costs, restrictions or copyrights on versions of the Bible, understanding public domain and copyright.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xN77ycvJk0Y

Local Church Learning Session:

“Livestreaming has become the new front door of the church.” Learn about four aspects of starting or improving your livestream services: equipment, camera placement, good wifi and congregational engagement.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1h3GgNIjJU

Fast-track training to use technology

United Methodist Communications has launched free trainings for ministry leaders to “use the most helpful technology as you lead worship, conduct meetings or classes, receive offerings, meet in small groups or offer pastoral care.” There are four courses available: “Zoom for Churches,” “Ministry through Facebook Groups,” “Adobe Rush” and “iMovie.” Additional courses will be listed as they are made available.

https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/fast-track-training-to-use-technology
How to host Sunday school and small groups during displacement

https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/how-to-host-sunday-school-and-small-groups-during-displacement

Need to know about hosting a small group online? These six tips will answer some of your most important questions, such as how to launch a group, how to structure discussions and how to choose the right platform.

Communication tips for increasing online giving

https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/communication-tips-for-increasing-online-giving

COVID-19 affected the financial well-being of many churches. Get tips on how to talk about online giving, including addressing security fears, being honest about the financial state of the church and focusing on the mission of the church.

Connecting with the plugged in during COVID-19


Connection during COVID-19 doesn’t end with streaming worship services. Where many tips focus on congregational connection, these 20 tips will help ministry leaders connect with individual members.

Connecting with the unplugged

https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/connecting-with-the-unplugged

Zoom FAQs

https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/zoom-faq

One of the most popular online platforms for group meetings is Zoom, a video chat software that allows multiple people to see each other at once. Whether you want to learn how to get started, how to keep your meeting secure, or how to include church members who don’t have internet access, this page will help you take your Zoom ministry to the next level.

For additional pandemic resources, visit the Oklahoma Conference’s resource page at www.okumc.org/PandemicResources.
When residents moved to Epworth Villa, promises were made to them and their families.

And today, we’ve kept them.

Through the times—even the uncertain ones—Epworth Villa residents and their families have always known one thing’s for certain: We keep our promises. The promises of peace of mind, an invigorating lifestyle, great food, a comfortable residence to come home to, long-term care if ever needed. And an expert, compassionate team always by their side. These are the promises we made yesterday—the same ones we’ll continue to make—and keep—today and tomorrow.
So You Want to Be a Pastor?

THE PASTOR EDUCATION FUND

Empowering New Clergy

How It All Got Started
The Pastor Education Fund was born out of the problem of seminary debt for many young pastors. We decided to create this fund as a way to carry some of the burden for those called into ministry. For most, seminary debt exceeds $50,000 once completed. We recognized how difficult this burden is to bear at the beginning of ministry.

Once we established the terms and function of the Pastor Education Fund, we began to raise funds to fulfill our goal. Initially, two individuals offered to support this fundraising effort, each with a $1 million matching gift. Their generosity paired with the gifts of so many individuals and church communities, we kicked off the fund with a $3 million endowment. Further contributions have raised the fund to over $5 million.

Investing in Leadership
To date, we have funded 14 scholars. In 2019 alone, we relieved over $120,000 in debt from the beginning of their ministry. We recently reached out to many of these pastors to check in, and the freedom and energy to do ministry is so inspiring (their images fill these pages). The Pastor Education fund is well funded, and it is doing exactly what was envisioned when it began. The cost of pastoral education will continue to rise, therefore the need for future contributions is real.

Looking Forward
We continue to pursue the empowerment of emerging leadership for our churches. Regardless of any uncertainty the future holds, we are working hard to ensure those in a position to guide our churches are equipped and supported to serve, burden-free.
By Lamarla Cook

“God is able” are not just words to Rev. Moses Maina Kariuki; he lives by them. Rev. Moses is an independent missionary in Kenya and district superintendent for the Gilgil District in the Kenya-Ethiopia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. His depth of faith and trust in God continue to inspire me. I am thankful and blessed to be a part of something bigger than I could ever imagine.

I met Rev. Moses in 2011 on a trip to Kenya that has forever changed my life. Many pastors in Kenya and other countries in Africa make very little if any salary. They rely on support from others to help them live so they can do ministry. When I returned, my husband and I made a commitment to help our friend with his ministry. Over the past nine years, we have consistently remained in contact. Every month we share challenges we are facing, give encouragement and pray for each other. One of Rev. Moses’ on-going challenges has been his heart condition.

In 2009, Rev. Moses had open-heart surgery to repair a hole in his heart. The doctor discovered a leak in the mitral heart valve about a year later. His doctor said it would be very risky for him to have another open-heart surgery and advised him to seek another procedure that doctors in Kenya could not perform. The doctor continued to monitor his
condition over the next several years until it became apparent his condition was getting worse. His family, friends and congregations prayed for God to help him, and they raised money for his future surgery.

In July of 2019, Rev. Moses informed me he would be coming to visit me and my husband. He also hoped to see a cardiologist and get a second opinion concerning his heart valve. After obtaining a visa and coordinating dates, the trip was set for four to six weeks in mid-September. We were excited about him coming to the United States, making new friends, and sharing what mighty things God is doing in Kikopey, Kenya. I also felt God speaking to my heart that we needed to help Rev. Moses see a cardiologist and possibly get his heart valve repaired. I spoke with my husband, but I had no idea where to start or the obstacles that we would face. So, what did we do first? Pray!

The search began. I called some cardiologists in Oklahoma City, but Rev. Moses needed a referral by a primary care doctor. I also contacted Emory Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, where a friend of Rev. Moses thought he could go and see a cardiologist. Again, more obstacles. My husband contacted a friend who works for Mercy and asked if he could assist with getting Rev. Moses a doctor and financial assistance since he had no insurance. He agreed to check out possible resources and get back with him.

Rev. Moses’ arrival was drawing near and nothing was materializing. We were running out of options and I began to have doubts. My husband and I began to pray, “Lord, please help us find a primary care doctor.” Our prayers were answered when Rev. Wendi Neal shared Rev. Moses’ need with Dr. Jonathan Bryan, a primary care physician and member of McFarlin UMC in Norman. Dr. Bryan agreed to see Rev. Moses and sent me an e-mail outlining some information and suggestions concerning Rev. Moses’ condition. One important suggestion from Dr. Bryan was that Rev. Moses stay in the same city from beginning to the end of the process. I knew Rev. Moses would need to make this decision for himself, because he has friends around Atlanta, Georgia, that shared with me he could possibly be seen by a cardiologist there.

I remember vividly sharing this information with Rev. Moses on my backyard patio. Rev. Moses sat down and became very silent. I could tell he was deep in thought and silently praying. I began to pace and pray also. After a few minutes, I asked him what he thought, or if he needed more time to pray. He said, “stay here.” I asked him if he was sure, and he said, “I will stay here in Oklahoma.” That is when I began to pray even harder, “Lord, my husband and I need your help and we are relying on your guidance. Please continue to show Rev. Moses your mercy and grace through this process. Your Will be done. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

I knew time was not on our side. Many things had to fall into place for Rev. Moses to see a primary care doctor, get an appointment with a cardiologist and see a surgeon for a possible procedure to repair the mitral valve. There was also the issue of money. Rev. Moses did not have international insurance. He would need to apply for financial assistance, or we needed to raise
some money quick! All of this needed to take place within 5 ½ weeks. Well, God did it in 3 ½ weeks! Yes, in 3 ½ weeks, Rev. Moses saw Dr. Jonathan Bryan, who then reached out to cardiologists at Oklahoma Heart Hospital. Dr. Blake Morris saw Rev. Moses and decided he needed additional tests, because he thought Rev. Moses would need his mitral valve replaced, that meant open-heart surgery. During this time, we applied for financial assistance for Rev. Moses, but he did not qualify. However, God was making a way.

Throughout this journey, there were wonderful people advocating on Rev. Moses’ behalf, including Greg Dial, ShyAnn Milner and Mark Klakulak. Blessings continued as funds were raised to pay for the surgery at Oklahoma Heart Hospital. The Oklahoma Methodist Foundation gave a $5,000 gift for the surgery, including discussions of a mechanical valve versus tissue valve, and his recommendations. Dr. Garrett talked with Rev. Moses and those who were there for support, including Dr. Victor McCullough, for over an hour.

I will never forget when Dr. Garrett said, “Well, are you ready for surgery? I have slotted time in the morning to do your surgery, because I understand we are under a time crunch.” You could have heard a pin drop in the room. Rev. Moses was silent. Again, it was obvious to me he was thinking and praying. Then, with a smile, Rev. Moses said, “Yes, I am ready.”

God is able!

Surgery went very well! Rev. Moses got his return flight extended and he stayed with us a total of eight weeks so he could recover from the surgery and get his heart medicine regulated before returning home to Kenya. This was nothing short of a miracle! Every step was supported by prayer and trust in God.

Rev. Moses, his family, friends and congregations have been praying since he first found out he needed his heart valve repaired in 2010, and that prayer was supported by what has become Rev. Moses’ mantra: “God is able.”

My husband later asked Rev. Moses why he chose Oklahoma to have his surgery. He said before the doctor suggested he stay in the same city throughout the process, God had already told him to come and stay in Oklahoma.

Thank you for every person who prayed, donated, or showed Rev. Moses’ hospitality, and thank you, God, for your mercy and grace!

“And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work. As it is written, ‘He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever’” (2 Cor. 9:8–9, NRSV). §
NSO is thrilled to report that we were able to meet our goal of $100,000 for 100 years!

Did you miss the program? You can still view the video and give to support NSO's vital programs at nsookc.org/luncheon

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