

# Contact *Weekly*

Volume 6, Number 17 • April 24, 2024 • [www.okumc.org](http://www.okumc.org)



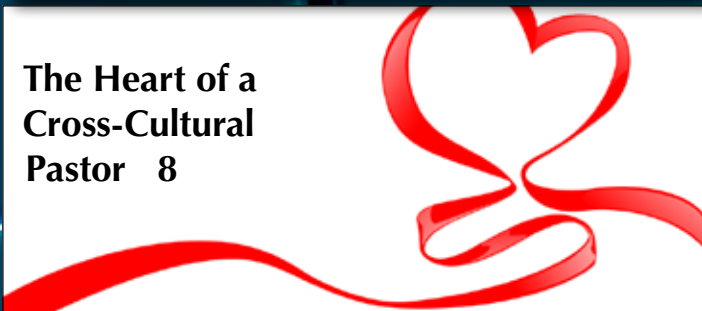
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Oklahoma Annual Conference 2024

*The World*  
**FOREVER**  
*Our Parish*

Thursday May 30 - Saturday June 1

## Preparing for Annual Conference 2024

Part 4  
 of our 8 part series

# Special Offering

## Let's Build a STEM Lab!

BY REV. DERREK BELASE

One of the wonderful traditions of the Oklahoma Conference is to receive an offering to further the missional outreach of our churches through the Annual Conference. This year, our annual conference offering will be taken in honor of the ministry of Bishop Jimmy Nunn, who will be retiring as our episcopal leader on September 1, 2024 after serving in ministry for 43 years. The last eight of those

years have been as our leader during unprecedented times in our world and in the life of the United Methodist Church.

The offering we take up will be used to fund a makerspace at Lydia Patterson Institute (“LPI”). LPI is a seventh through twelfth grade school in El Paso, on the border with Juarez, Mexico. Students make the trek across the international bridge every day to receive a high quality education at La Lydia.

For over 100 years, LPI has been dedicated to building bridges between two countries, two cities, and two cultures. As the only

United Methodist institution on the border, it is committed to form bilingual and bicultural leaders for the church and society.

A makerspace is a place in which people with shared interests, especially in computing or technology, can gather to work on projects while sharing ideas, equipment, and knowledge. At LPI, they are going to create a dynamic environment where the students can unleash their creativity, collaborate on projects, and solve real-world problems. It will include state-of-the-art amenities – 3D printers whirring to life, computer stations

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Send news to [editor@okumc.org](mailto:editor@okumc.org).  
 Submission deadline: **Each Monday**.  
 Next publication date: May 1.

Subscribe online at  
[www.okumc.org](http://www.okumc.org).

*Stories and photos by the editor unless otherwise noted.  
 Cover art and graphics by depositphotos.com.*



humming with research and design, workshop tables buzzing with activity, and TV screens illuminating presentations and demonstrations.

LPI's vision for this makerspace goes beyond mere renovation; it's about aligning with their educational mission. By repurposing this space, they will be able to create an environment that not only supports curriculum standards but also fosters hands-on learning through building.

The makerspace will serve as a catalyst for collaboration and growth. As students work together, they will not only enhance their academic skills but also practice English conversational skills, bridging language barriers and fostering inclusion. When you give to this offering, you are investing in tools and equipment; you are investing in the future of LPI's wonderful students.

Bishop Nunn has a particular fondness for LPI having served on the board there for many years. This will be a great way to honor him. You can give two

ways by taking up a special offering at your church and bringing a check to the conference session in May or you can give online anytime.

Because this is our way of honoring our Bishop, we pray that

each church makes a special effort to participate in this year's offering.

## Oklahoma United Methodist Conference 2024

# Special Offering in honor of Bishop Nunn New Makerspace at Lydia Patterson Institute

Taking an under-utilized library space and transforming it into a dynamic environment for creativity and collaboration. With 3D printers, computer stations, workshop tables and more. Supporting the robotics team and promoting computer science and other tech skills essential for the modern digital world. This offering also invests in the future of LPI's wonderful students.

Bring offerings to Annual Conference or  
Submit offerings on the conference website through  
<https://www.okumc.org/specialoffering> or mail it to our  
conference office at 1501 NW 24th Street, OKC, 73106.



# Pentecost decorating can add layers to worship experience

BY SHANNON RODENBERG

In my first appointment, a retired elder from the Virginia Annual Conference who relocated and retired to northeastern Oklahoma by way of the Missouri Annual Conference, Rev. Tracy Bair, told me that his favorite liturgical holiday was Pentecost.

He frequently lamented the fact that Pentecost didn't always get equal liturgical billing in churches. When I thought back to my childhood, the most I could remember the congregation doing was wearing red and saying "Happy birthday, Church!" on that day and hanging a dove banner.

After seeing Tracy light up with Pentecost joy, my mission became making the Pentecost celebration one of our largest Sundays of the liturgical calendar. When he passed away suddenly a few years later, my marking of Pentecost gained another layer of significance by becoming a remembrance of his ministry and impact on the world by his following the call of the Holy Spirit on his life.

You don't have to spend a lot of money for a lot of impact when celebrating Pentecost, and the suggestions in this article are adaptable based on congregational

size and worship space.

When you are planning your observance of Pentecost, you can find many online images of worship arts in sanctuaries of all shapes and sizes for inspiration.

Pentecost is a great time for employing multi-sensory worship, which is worship designed to create a memorable, holy experience that reaches people through a variety of methods, in order to draw the congregation into a deeper sense of worship by paying attention to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Some of these methods are visually, aurally, tactilely, experientially, virtually, and kinesthetically sensed.

Asking people to wear red, which is the color traditionally associated with the Holy Spirit, and orange or yellow is a fun way for everyone to participate. Having a birthday cake or cupcakes for the Church is another way for the atmosphere to feel like a party.

Balloons or signs or even party hats can remind everyone that we are marking the birth of Christ's Church, while remembering our calling to be the Church in the world. Pinwheels are a fun way to explain Pentecost to the children of the Church.

Besides party clothes, decorations, and snacks, dressing your worship space for Pentecost helps set the

stage for a wonderful Holy Spirit celebration. Crepe paper streamers strung across the sanctuary help draw attention upward.

Helium balloons taped to the pews or on the stage are another inexpensive way to bring vibrancy to your service. If you search for party decorations for a firefighter party, you can find flame-shaped balloons and other fun décor items.

Fabrics also help enliven multi-sensory worship. Satin-type fabrics flow well and add another visual texture for Communion tables. Tulle is fairly inexpensive by the bolt and can be used in a multitude of ways to draw focus and create an atmosphere of wonder. Tulle is lightweight and is sold in a variety of widths. It can be pinned, stapled, or hung in a myriad of places and ways.

Throughout scripture, doves have been a sign of the Holy Spirit. On Pentecost, you can fly dove balloons or find do-it-yourself dove crafts online. We use a paper plate template, staples, tape, and fishing line for our doves. We will experiment with poster board and larger visuals this year.

Twinkle lights, candles, and stage lighting are also ways to add flames or flame effects during worship. Worship banners, themed bulletin covers, and Holy Spirit-centered hymns or praise songs, in addition

to reading the Acts scripture and a well-planned, Spirit-inspired sermon, provide other touches for a well-rounded time of worship.

Asking non-English speakers if they would like to read part of the scripture or part of the service in their language also helps reinforce the beauty of people from diverse backgrounds and locations finding understanding and a home in Christ's Church.

Ultimately, Pentecost is a reminder for each of us that we are the Church together, made stronger by our diversity, joined together by the Holy Spirit.

It is a time to renew our commitment to paying attention to the ways the Holy Spirit is working in, around, and through us as we seek to live the love and grace of Christ out in the world. Pentecost is an exciting time when we are invited to continue reveling in both the mystery and the certainty of the Trinity. May God bless you as you celebrate this Pentecost!



Shannon Rodenberg

## *Watering the Earth:* **START WITH VISION AND A PURPOSE**

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# Third, do less harm

Much like the oft-repeated, pared-down version of the Hippocratic Oath, made famous in medical stories, one of the first rules of Christianity is to “First, do no harm.”

Though not nearly enough, the promise to not do harm is a good start. When congregations take further steps and choose to do good, as publicized by a quote usually attributed to John Wesley, they are on the road to becoming more like Jesus.

Reducing harm is a third way to put that Christ focus into practice.

## Harm Reduction

In today’s world, illegal or illicit drugs are often much easier to get and more affordable than medical or mental health care. This unhealthy coping strategy is the only place some feel they have to turn. That’s where harm reduction comes in.

According to SAMHSA - the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration - harm reduction is an evidence-based set of practices that engages people who use drugs and equips them with life-saving tools to improve their quality of life.

“Harm reduction emphasizes engaging directly with people who use drugs to prevent overdose and infectious disease transmission; improve physical, mental, and social wellbeing; and offer low barrier options for accessing health care services, including substance

use and mental health disorder treatment,” the organization wrote on its website.

## A Church Committed to Reducing Harm

Myriah Schrimsher recently came on board at Southern Hills UMC in Tulsa as the administrative assistant. She brought with her a passion for - and a connection to - the nonprofit organization [Light of Hope](#), which provides outreach for people affected by addiction and other difficulties.

Executive director Nancy Phelps reached out to Schrimsher to find out if the pastor would be willing to host a Fentanyl Awareness Town Hall meeting at the church.

“The church and I knew little about this three-decade-old epidemic,” stated pastor Tracey Ivy, “yet our church had encountered families that knew first hand the devastating effects of opioids.”

“Pastor Tracey immediately jumped at the opportunity to be able to partner with them,” said Schrimsher of Light of Hope’s proposal.

The town hall meeting was held April 9, at Southern Hills UMC. Light of Hope returned April 23 for



**Participants in Southern Hills UMC Tulsa's Fentanyl Awareness Town Hall asked questions of panelists and learned about the importance of reducing harm. Submitted photos.**

Narcan training. All who attended the training were given Narcan to keep on hand in case of an emergency.

“Narcan is the nasal spray that counteracts fentanyl’s deadly effects,” said Ivy.

“From this partnership came another connection. While Light of Hope has previously worked in Rogers County with that county’s police departments, this is the first foray into Tulsa County.

The new relationship makes it possible for Tulsa police to partner with the church.

“Our church members really enjoyed having this meeting with the different points of view from the panelists, and were excited to share the message with others in the community,” said Schrimsher.

It was covered by the news stations. See those videos [here](#) and [here](#).

According to Ivy, “SHUMC has

four licensed and credentials nurses that are committed to providing health education resources to the congregation; therefore, for us it was a no-brainer to say yes, we would host a town hall.

“The more we equip the church with health, opioid, and drug-related education, the better off we will be with understanding and helping friends, neighbors, families, and schools in our community that are affected by fentanyl.”

Ivy continued, “Statistics show that fentanyl-related overdose is linked to illegally made fentanyl which is distributed through illegal drug markets for its heroin-like effect.” She added that pharmaceutical fentanyl is also an opioid.



The panelist consisted of (NOT IN ORDER): Steve Kunzweiler, Tulsa County District Attorney. Matt Spencer, GRAND Mental Health; Steve Regier, Board President of Light of Hope; Steve Massey, Rogers County Emergency Management; Sean Love, Tulsa Police Officer; and Kenny Brand, a recovering addict and board member of Light of Hope.

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# The Heart of a Cross-Cultural Pastor

BY REV. ANGELA L. FLEMING

**A**s pastors, we accept the call to ministry because of our love for God and our desire to serve people. As a child, I learned that my name meant “messenger” and somehow, I knew that was what I was destined to be.

When I look back over my life, God prepared me to teach, preach

and to heal with words; words are crafted through my life experiences and pain. It is because of the truth of the gospel in my own life that I give to others that which was given to me. This letter is addressed to congregants who have pastors called to serve, coming to them with a background of a different culture.



Rev. Angela Fleming



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*Dear Congregation,*

*I consider it an honor and a privilege to be your pastor. I did not and do not take my call to provide spiritual guidance and to preach and teach God's Word lightly. Please understand that my pledge to serve does not come with the expectations you have in mind.*

*What I mean is, I did not choose the color of my skin or the heritage that I was born in. I did not choose my parents, whether they were married or not, whether they married within or outside of their culture, which was not my choice.*

*I know that the sound of my words may be a barrier to you at times, it is not my intention to frustrate you, I just happen to be using my God-given voice and speech marred by a hearing loss. Please remember that the English language for some of my colleagues may be their second or third one learned. Yes, accents may be strong at times, or words are pronounced wrong or funny, that doesn't mean what I or they have to say is not important, relevant, or untrue.*

*As a church, most of you know each other well, you may have grown up together or at least fellowship with each other for quite some time. I am only here for a little while. My heart grieves when I hear the whispers and the gossip about the way I do things, the way I talk or how I look or dress. I continue to smile and love you, while dealing with the trauma of uncaring remarks that look like scratches on the surface but feel like paper cuts to my soul. I hide them well so that you can't see them.*

*God calls me to look after, feed, and care for His sheep. I do this the best to my ability because I care. I care about your families, I care about your well-being, I care that you have a personal relationship with Christ even when it does not seem that important to you. I lose sleep when the Holy Spirit wakes me up to pray for you, at times, I sacrifice personal time with my own family to tend after yours.*

*This is not a complaint. This is not even a whine. What this is, is a plea for you to see me. Not as a person of color, a foreigner, a person to be feared, but as your sister in Christ. Please recognize the authority that has been given to me by the Bishop, through the power of the Holy Spirit to serve Christ the best that I know how. I gave twenty years of service to the military, and I did not always agree with or like those who were in leadership positions. But I always gave respect to the position they held. It is the right and ethical thing to do as a servant of the people and my country.*

*When respect is given, change happens for us all. I no longer feel like a fish in a bowl to be stared at because I am different. I am no longer considered as an outsider because I can be accepted as a believer just like you; with the same agenda striving to be the hands and feet of Christ to a dying and broken world.*

*I am tired of being tired of justifying my existence to those who feel I am not worthy, qualified, or intelligent enough to teach what had been imparted to me through my giftings from the Holy Spirit. I am not better than you, I am simply different.*

*It is my difference that challenges the biases that cause us to become un-Christlike. It is my difference that confronts fears that have been handed down to some of you by ignorance and by hate. Yet still, I will do right by you because Christ died so that we can all be free!*

*I am free to love, free to share His love with you because He loved us first. As your pastor, I will always give you respect and grace, I expect no less from you, because we are United Methodists.*

*I am grateful to be chosen to lead and share the grace of His love and compassion.*

*In His Service,  
Your Pastor*

# General Conference



# Are you heading to Charlotte for General Conference?

Whether you're going to volunteer, to support a cause, to watch the proceedings, or for some other purpose, we'd like to connect with you!

If you have ties to Oklahoma and will be present for any portion of General Conference, please reach out to us before you go!

Email us at [editor@okumc.org](mailto:editor@okumc.org).



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# Call to Action



Watch the livestream of General Conference [here](#).  
Find the schedule [here](#).

Sign up to volunteer at New Day Camp! The camp is June 2 - 7, at Cross Point Camp on Lake Texoma. Volunteers are vital to this camp serving children whose parents are impacted by incarceration. The camp is in desperate need of volunteers. Sign up [here](#).

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

*For consideration, email your listing to [editor@okumc.org](mailto:editor@okumc.org).*