



MINISTRY

during Covid-19



SUMMER 2020

Ministry during COVID-19

By Rev. Robin C. Wilson

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Every June, many United Methodist clergy families learn to unpack quickly and begin ministry anew. Local pastors, elders, and deacons experience the joys and the trials of moving to new communities throughout their lifetime of service. I've had the honor of serving five churches in this conference, and each congregation certainly has its own personality and worship style. Effective clergy learn to move nimbly from high church to contemporary worship, from city life to a rural setting, from leading a youth retreat on the Florida coast to speaking at a United Methodist Women circle in west Alabama.

This truth supports my contention: there is no one better to lead the church during a pandemic, such as we find ourselves in now, than United Methodist clergy! No, we pastors didn't take a course on Pandemic Leadership 101, but everything that we have learned in our studies and in our ministry has equipped us to lead well during these challenging days. We have taken courses on theology and sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that our faith is sure and unshakable. We have also learned that the methods we use to worship can change to meet people where they are! After all, if John Wesley can preach outside by the mines and in the street, we can certainly adapt to holding online and drive-in church! Leadership during these turbulent times is all about clinging

tightly to the core of our faith while constantly adapting to the challenges before us.

Our United Methodist theology is about temporal needs as well as eternal concerns. Therefore, United Methodist clergy can take the lead today on safe food distribution in our communities, supporting healthcare workers with supplies and encouragement, and working with mission partners combatting the increases in domestic violence and abuse. Taking to heart the greatest commandments to love God and love our neighbor, we have shifted pastoral visits to phone trees, Zoom calls, and driveway visits. We have quietly paid power bills and rent for those whose needs are rising to the surface. We have reached out to connect with other churches to plan online Vacation Bible School, videoed Sunday school lessons, and learned how to apply for government loans to keep the staff of local churches employed.

Pastors have used adaptive leadership as we firmly focus on our shared mission "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." All the while, we have counseled with members of our church families for hours on the phone. We know those in our churches who have had the virus and were on respirators, because their family members tell us in pastoral confidence. Our hearts have hurt with workers and business owners who don't know how they will recover economically. We have heard the shame in the voices of those who are too embarrassed to admit that they need food. With compassion and grace, we have received the rants of those who think this is all a conspiracy. All the while, we wonder how we can ever use hymnals, pass offering plates, adequately disinfect nurseries, and so much more. Can we answer every question or concern? Of course not. But we continue to proclaim the Good News and empower the church to be God's instrument in this world.

Even in our moments of doubt and fear, we lead forward with the wisdom passed down to us from all of the faithful who have invested in us. As the Gaither hymn reminds us, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living, just because He lives." That kind of faith, nurtured by the Stegall Foundation and its generous supporters, empowers the clergy of our conference to lead without fear into God's future, constantly adapting our ministry to share the Good News with the world. After all, we are United Methodist pastors! We are called to love God and love our neighbor wherever we are appointed and whatever may come our way.

Pictured on the front cover: The sanctuary of First United Methodist Church in Opelika, Ala. is set up for remote worship. Picture courtesy of Rev. Patrick Hitchman-Craig, Stegall Foundation alumnus and Opelika FUMC Associate Pastor.

The Stegall Seminary Scholarship Foundation is a 501(C)(3) non-profit foundation, and all gifts are tax deductible. Gifts for our Seminary students should be mailed to Dr. Karl K. Stegall, Seminary Scholarship Foundation, P. O. Box 241661, Montgomery, Alabama 36124-1661.

Students Share Ministry Experiences During Pandemic



During this season of online worship, our church services have had tremendous viewership. Pastors have been using technology to shine the light of Christ through new methods and means. In spite of this pandemic, we have the opportunity for church historians to look back years from now and see this as a time when the Gospel spread like never before. Let us continue to preach boldly, teach humbly, and give pastoral care to all of our people. Thank you to all of the foundation donors for helping us be prepared to serve in such a time as this. God's faithfulness to His people is shown through your care and support.

- Matt Jordan, Director of Youth Ministries at First United Methodist Church of Enterprise, Ala. and student at Asbury Theological Seminary



Although the current pandemic has made a lot of changes to my life in seminary, I've been reminded of the importance of family and community. My family constantly reminds me of how loved I am, and the different communities in which I'm involved remind me that there is never a time when I'm alone. The changes that have come because of COVID-19 have shown me that my studies are even more important right now because I'm



The Stegall Foundation has found new ways to connect with seminary students during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus far, two "Zoom" calls have been held where students are able to connect with each other, Dr. Stegall, and members of the foundation's board of directors. Bishop David Graves was even able to join a call held on May 21. The students would like to express how much it means to them to continue to be the recipients of your prayers and support, especially during these challenging times. Thank you!

learning things that are applicable to any context. I've learned that the Holy Spirit is actively inspiring and creating so that Christians are enabled to share Christ all over the world with those who need Him. Even though this time in quarantine is difficult, I've been shown that I have God-given strength and endurance that is helping me grow into a better future minister.

- Libby Varnum, student at Candler School of Theology at Emory University

Congratulations to our Graduates



JAKAELA DAVIS



HALLE DEEMER



NICK HUGHES



GENE ANN JIMMERSON*



MATT LANGFORD



KEVIN LAZARUS



STACIE LEE



CHRIS MCCAIN



WILSON NEWELL*



MARY ANN PICKARD



JOHN WILL RICE



RYAN RUNAGER



TOMMY SKEEN



ERIC TURNER

* Graduating this Summer



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Our Most Valuable Resource Sits 63 Feet Ahead!

I was driving down I-85 the other day when I pulled up behind a large 18 wheeler. I could not help but notice on the back of the shiny red truck an inscription printed in large letters, "OUR MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE SITS 63 FEET AHEAD!" Out of curiosity, I pulled up beside the truck and noticed that it was owned by Crete Carrier in Lincoln Nebraska. As I looked on the side of the truck there was a big arrow pointing to the driver with large letters, "THIS IS OUR MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE!" When I waved to the driver, a big smile came across his face. I could tell immediately that he was pleased that his company back home in Lincoln had let everyone know from Nebraska to Alabama that he was a person of great worth and genuinely appreciated.

As I read those two inscriptions on the back and sides of that shiny 18 wheeler, there were two things that immediately came to my mind in my role as the volunteer President of our Scholarship Foundation:

I. Encouragement of Our Seminary Students. Elton Trueblood, the late President of Yokefellows, always reminded his readers that one of the greatest gifts that any of us can give does not cost a solitary dime and that is the gift of encouragement. Trueblood reminded us that the word "encourage" containing the Latin word "cour" meaning "heart" literally means "to put heart into someone." One of the pleasant surprises that I have discovered in raising money for our seminary students is that, oftentimes, the money that our seminary students so gratefully receive is only half of the gift. When they are 500 miles away from home, they are equally touched that someone whom they may never know loves them, cares deeply about them, and wants to encourage them.



BRENDA AND KARL STEGALL

2. Importance of Effective Pastors Providing Leadership. Our sole mission is to encourage and provide support for our seminary students who are preparing to serve churches within our Alabama-West Florida Conference. I am sure that there are some rare exceptions, but I have personally never known a strong church filled with excitement and enthusiasm that did not have someone sitting in the driver's seat as an effective pastor. That effective pastor might be a Phi Beta Kappa graduate or a high school dropout. He/she might be an elder or a local pastor. However, if that pastor genuinely loves Jesus, loves others, and longs for the church to truly be the body of Jesus Christ in the world, that pastor will be effective. Our sole mission as a Foundation is to provide an opportunity for each of our recipients to be as effective as they can possibly be!

As you travel down the highway towards your church, just remember, "Our Most Valuable Resource Sits in The Pulpit Chair 63 Feet Ahead!"

Karl K. Stegall