



# We Are Oak Lawn

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## **How To Be The Church While Sheltering in Place**

I am supposed to be boarding a plane to Lebanon right now to go and spend some time working with our ministry partners and students at the Safe Spaces School for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. Instead, I find myself at home with EVERY member of my family- working, playing, "going" to school, eating, sewing, singing, dancing, cleaning and exercising- all from home together. This is not where I thought I would be 6 months ago when I booked my travel... but I am grateful to be here. I am grateful to have this gift of presence and unexpected time with my family. There are 10 members in my family including my husband, my four children, my parents and my husband's parents. Sometimes there are 3 or more worship service being produced, streamed, and planned at one time. There are four kids streaming Google classroom and doing school projects at the same time and adults on endless Zoom calls and meetings. It can certainly feel

chaotic! (Especially when the WiFi is “unstable”!)

In a time when we are creating new normals and learning how to thrive in a culture that is more digital than physical almost overnight, it can feel chaotic. When it feels like things are swirling out of my control, I try to create order from chaos by making lists. I make my way through difficult times by creating lists. This becomes a spiritual practice for me and in some ways a becomes a method of journaling. I make lists of all that there is to be grateful for. I make lists of those I am praying for. I make lists of people to reach out to by calling or texting. This has all become so important in my finding new ways to be a pastor to you and to love you well.

So, as I continue to look for ways to create community in the absence of physical presence, I began making lists to help us continue to feel each other’s presence. Ways we can continue to be Oak Lawn UMC in the ordinary moments of every day. Physical distance doesn’t mean we have a less connection. Quite the opposite. Instead, I have found ways to connect with more people and know more about what is going on with individuals in the congregation. My prayer life has become stronger as I have greater ability to guard time and space for dedicated prayer. A few days ago, my whole family decided to listen to worship service from the trampoline in the back yard. I will never forget the sweetness of the opportunity to sing hymns and pray together while laying on our backs on the trampoline with a soft breeze sweeping over us and the sound of birds chirping woven with the sound of my children praying. May we not miss the opportunities that this time of reset offers us to experience the goodness of God.

So... I have some lists I’d like to share with you! These are lists that I hope will spark an idea or two or ten for you to live out your life in these days in the fullness of who God has created you to be and calls all of us to be in community. When we join the church, we covenant to support the church, to uphold one another and the community around us through our prayers, presence, gifts, service and

witness. Here are some ways we can do just that as a digital church with real connection, authenticity, and love:

### **5 ways to pray in a digital church:**

1. Have prayer walks around your neighborhood. Pray over people that you pass by as you walk
2. Read the Prayer from Oak Lawn each morning on [Facebook](#)
3. Join Pastor Mara and Ryan Wager for Thursday's [Night of Prayer](#) service over Zoom
4. [Submit prayer concerns and joys](#) to our prayer team or maybe join the prayer team and pray for the needs of those in our community
5. Commit to 5 minutes a day to be in prayer silently

### **5 ways to be present in a digital church:**

1. Call someone each day
2. FaceTime a friend that you miss in church and hang out with them digitally
3. Send letters and cards to create a connection with someone you are praying for
4. Identify those who may be lonely and reach out to them
5. Send a text to 3 people to let them know that you thought of them today

### **5 Ways to keep giving in a digital church:**

1. Set up your [online giving at Oak Lawn UMC](#)
  - a. **Already giving? Consider adding \$1-\$2 more a week to help us meet our giving goals**
2. Purchase gift cards to local supermarkets, Walmart or Sam’s club, and send to the church for ministry program food needs
3. Help stock our food pantry by ordering from our [Amazon Wishlist](#)
4. Give a gift to the capital projects of Oak Lawn to help us enhance our space for ministry
5. Support global ministries (I.E. [Safe Spaces Lebanon](#), Sustaining Ministries in DRC)

### 5 ways to keep serving in a digital church:

1. Buy groceries on the Oak Lawn UMC Amazon wishlist to help us supply food for unsheltered families.
2. Create Blessing Bags at home and keep them in your car so that you can offer them to unsheltered neighbors when you see them on the streets. (Ideas to include: peanut butter crackers, meat sticks, ...)
3. Send or drop off care packages for essential workers
4. Sew masks for others in need
5. Support local businesses

### 5 ways to bear witness to the love of God in the world as a digital church:

1. Post about the ways you see God at work around you on Facebook and tag the church
2. Share what you have found to be life giving in the midst of this time of shelter in place
3. Submit a story and picture of Some Good News to be shared through the OLUMC Facebook page
4. Participate in a worship service and follow along with the liturgy at [olumc.org/worship](http://olumc.org/worship)
5. Join us for Zoom Grow Study on Sundays at 9:30am



## Going Digital with Pastor Mara

Interview by Chris Pillsbury



I'm a member of the Editorial Board, and in addition to all other meetings, our planning for this issue was also virtual. Mara put out the call for ideas and received crickets, not because the team didn't care, it was that all the bases had been covered. In a follow-up conversation, Mara asked me if I had any ideas. As it turns out, I did:

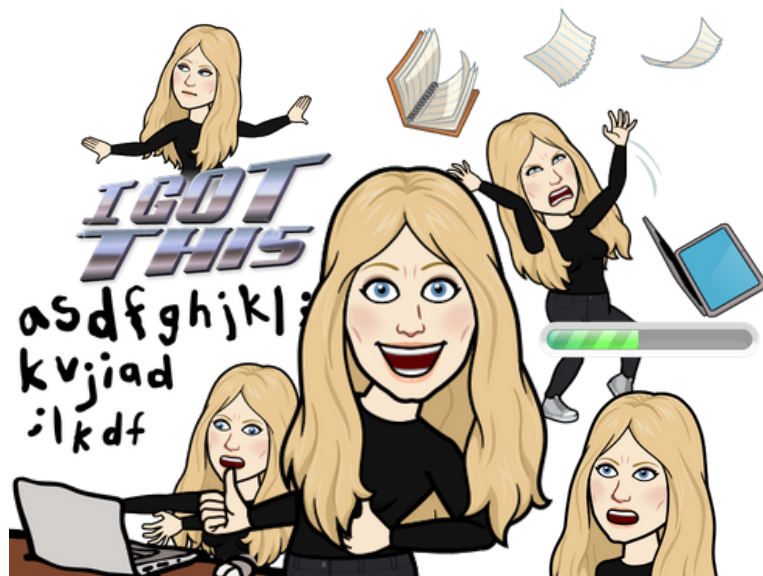
*"Mara, you are the story for this month - you've been doing website design, video editing, digital content and been working to put church online - we couldn't have done our church virtualization without you! I will interview you!"*

The following is a transcript of our conversation.

**At what point did the novelty of doing online stuff wear off?** *Actually, I've enjoyed all the new*

*ways I've been able to use of my creative energy. Sometimes, of course, there are aspects of working in the digital space that are tedious, but it comes with the territory. I'm learning how to be more efficient and disciplined with my time and I'm being challenged to create new ways to engage people. The excitement of that hasn't worn off yet!*

**How did you come up with the schedule of live feeds?** *Most folks have offered their ideas and content. I may have bribed a few. I've "voluntold" a few...but in the end, all seemed happy to participate and I think they've had fun doing it.*



**These past two months certainly fall into the #didn'tlearnthatinseminary category. What part of your training have you leaned on?** *It's funny you ask that...I've chuckled and whispered this to myself a few times in the last couple months. I was trained in classical theology at my seminary so while I love the academic perspective and deep thinking, seminary did not necessarily teach me how to transfer an entire worshipping community online in the midst of a pandemic. But God did! Long before my time in seminary, I used to record my own music and edit videos. Even if seminary didn't teach me the nuts and bolts of how to evolve in this time, God had prepared me just enough!*

**A while back you mentioned out-takes. What are some of the funny ones you've seen?** *I may or may not be collecting bloopers for a reel. My own bloopers may or may not comprise 95% of the reel...*

**You and I have spoken about the “no makeup” and authenticity seen in the world of live feed. Instead of meeting in person, meetings, concerts and conversations are happening with a backdrop of everyone’s private living space, and the people in them. Normally, only close friends see these spaces, and now in many ways, the whole world is seeing them.**

**How do you think this will change our relationships when we begin to meet again in person?** *Well, I certainly feel more known after filming sermons and devotionals from my bedroom! In a way, there is a great sense of “loosening boundaries” that I've experienced in this time and it's been a mostly positive experience for me. I have felt a deepening of relationships with church members, but for more reasons than just revealing the inside of my condo. I have been shown patience, grace, kindness, and encouragement – and that has*

*been so needed in this digital space. It's kind of funny, maybe a little silly, but I think about it in terms of this analogy: a dog rolls over for a belly rub, exposing a very vulnerable part of itself. In return, we gently and happily rub their belly. Doggo is happy, we're happy, and guess what? We are bonding! It's the same thing for me in online church: I show my house and reveal my make-up less face. I'm doing my job from a very very very vulnerable (and different) space...and the church has responded in love. I think that's happening EVERYWHERE – not just with clergy! We're surviving together and invited into each other's survival spaces which is real and raw. I think we're all a bit surprised to receive belly rubs instead of attacks in this time; and that's something beautiful to hang onto! How could you not love one another more deeply after that?*

**How do you think our church & culture will be different after this?** *I wonder about this daily, especially from a pastoral care perspective. I think we're going to see a lot of people overcoming trauma they've experienced in this time. Varying kinds of trauma. I think there will be an adjustment period especially in terms of social habits and self-care; introverts might feel the burden of re-entering society whereas extroverts will need to beware of overscheduling and overextending. Yet still, I can see life picking up at a rapid pace and throwing us unknowingly back into the day-to-day winds. So I ask: how do we keep alive the desire to explore instead of being consumed with tradition and merely maintenance? How do we stay innovative and not just busy? Then, in terms of self-care: what are we learning about ourselves that we need to listen to when the country opens again? I've stopped asking, “How can I slow down” and I've started asking, “how can I resist the urge to speed up again?” I hope that our church and culture will be full of grace, peace and understanding for one another when we join together in person again. I also hope that where necessity mothered invention in each of our lives, that the very same innovative spirit*

*translates into our new church.*

**The painful irony of the timing of COVID 19 is that our sanctuary was scheduled to be completed last month and now we've all been forced to be/have church without walls. How has your view of our church & ministry shifted in this season? How will this change ministry/your job after we come back?** *I think for Oak Lawn UMC, our church building is the ruby in our crown. But the crown itself is the people. The people uphold the church and because of the people, the church shines like the gem it is. That said, I am excited to return to the sanctuary and see it fully restored. But I am ALSO excited about the state of the art technology we will have for recording services, the screens for displaying digital content, and the ways we have gone digital now that will translate well even back to a brick and mortar context.*

*I hope we will continue to explore the digital worship space and experiment with ways to connect to the Church outside our walls; maybe we can attract folks with contemporary worship? 😊 Who knows! But if there's ever a time to try, it'll be now! How can people help you - what do you need more of? I'm always looking for good content: positive news, videos for the noonday devotional, pictures to celebrate, etc. Or, if you like writing prayers, our 7:00 AM prayer over social media is open to contributors! And if none of those work, just a "belly rub" will do.*



## Update from Lay Leader Ryan

by Ryan Wager



Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Happy Easter! In these unusual times, we continue to pray for the health, well-being and safety of the Oak Lawn family! In

this Easter season, it's also my prayer that you can find a renewed sense of hope in the story of the Resurrection. I find comfort and optimism in Charles Wesley's fourth verse of "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" where we sing: "Soar we now where Christ has led! Following our exalted Head, made like Him, like Him we rise! Ours the cross, the grave, the skies!" Alleluia!

## Our Church Programs Continue

Are you following us on social media? I hope so, as all our OLUMC programs are in full swing digitally while the Church building itself remains closed during the Dallas shelter-in-place order. I invite you to partake in our weekly Sunday worship and grow study options; our daily Facebook Live devotional time and prayers published daily on Facebook and Instagram.

Pastor Mara and I kicked off the second of our most recent Membership classes on Sunday.

We have an amazing group of beautiful people who will join the Church when we return to the Sanctuary!

I would also like to extend a special invitation to our Thursday evening "Night of Prayer". This has been a particularly special time for many of us who need to get through the mid-week

stretch and come together with our Church family in prayer and devotion. We meet each Thursday at 7:30 p.m. on Zoom. Check out [www.olumc.org/prayer](http://www.olumc.org/prayer) for more details. Please come and pray with us, live! Prayer requests can be made with our Church-wide Prayer Team here.

### **Your Offering continues to be important**

Giving has been impacted by our Church building closure; overall giving at Oak Lawn UMC has decreased. This is largely because we are not able to pass a physical offering plate each Sunday morning. Our work continues though, and your monetary support of our Church ministries is important. If regular giving is not part of your relationship with Oak Lawn UMC, please prayerfully considering supporting the Church in this way. If you are already giving, please prayerfully consider giving extra. If each of our regular contributors gave \$1-2 more a week, that would realize an additional \$10K of annual revenue to do the important work of our Church. Visit our giving page at <https://olumc.churchcenter.com/giving>. You can also send your offerings via check to the Church; our address is on the cover of this magazine.

### **Thank you to our gifted and talented members, clergy & staff!**

As Pastor Rachel mentions, digital worship is new to us and delivery of meaningful services week after week is uncharted territory for congregations throughout the world. I'd like to thank our gifted and talented members, musicians, clergy and staff for their willingness to lead, learn and persevere in bringing us this meaningful content. Our Pastors (Rachel, Chuck, Mara, Isabel and Justin) preach, our musicians (Thiago, Chris, John) sing; our liturgists speak the word and offer prayer – and then Pastor Mara pulls it all together each Sunday. They do

all of this to help us connect, find hope and worship together as Oak Lawn UMC. And we are grateful!

A special thanks also to our Outreach volunteers and our staff for continuing to feed our homeless neighbors during the pandemic; whether it's our Community Meal that's moved to the picnic tables outside or making or providing food for those families in temporary housing, we have an amazing group of dedicated family members making it all happen! THANK YOU!



Oak Lawn is here for you! Our clergy and staff are working to connect with those in our family that need them – so if you need someone to talk to, text us at 214-441-6647.

Love and Easter Blessings,  
Ryan

# Outreach During the Pandemic

by Cathy Bryan



**Supporting Family Gateway Clients** Oak Lawn UMC showed up once again to help families of Family Gateway Shelter. Due to a surge in need for shelter

space for families, Family Gateway is having to house some of their clients in local hotels.

Housing in a hotel means the families do not get the hot meals provided at the Family Gateway shelter. A few of these families specifically requested assistance with food due to financial burden. Oak Lawn stepped up and has been providing groceries, sack lunches (from The Stewpot), and hot meals twice weekly. Initially the families were staying in a hotel with only a microwave and small fridge, so we were challenged to provide some groceries that could be prepared in with limited options to cook. Next week the families are being moved to an extended stay hotel which will have a kitchenette to allow them the ability to cook their meals!

Thanks to our Family Gateway team of Jeff Green, Brenda Cowley, Joel Farrell, Cathy Bryan and Cliff Bohaker for making this happen! The families have been incredibly grateful for the support we have been able to provide as they deal with both COVID-19 and a lack of housing.

## Face Masks for Front Line Staff

Cathy Bryan has been actively involved with a grassroots organization, DFW Sewing Relief (<https://dfwsewingrelief.weebly.com/>) which is on track to create over 100,000 cloth masks for many of our front line staff that lack adequate

personal protective equipment (PPE).

As you have heard in the news, many front line staff outside of our large hospital systems are lacking adequate PPE. Nursing homes, clinics and surgery centers, individual healthcare workers, and Dallas Fire and Rescue have all requested cloth masks from DFW Sewing Relief.

DFW Sewing Relief is working in conjunction with Health Hacking Crisis Network (<https://healthhackingcrisisnetwork.com/>), UT Southwestern and city leaders to provide cloth masks in a variety of healthcare settings. We know that cloth masks are not a substitute for the more protective N95 or surgical masks, but these cloth masks can be worn over the more protective masks to extend the life of the masks, by patients to minimize droplet transmission, and in some cases, but front line staff when there are no medical grade masks available.

DFW Sewing Relief needs LOTS of volunteers to pull off this effort! Donated fabric and supplies allows the group to provide Mask Kits, so all you need is a sewing machine and basic sewing knowledge! They also need volunteers to drive, assemble mask kits and help with kit supply prep. To volunteer and learn more, go to <https://dfwsewingrelief.weebly.com/> and sign up to Volunteer! And please pass this along to anyone you know that DOES sew!

Also, if you know of front line healthcare workers that need masks, requests can be made on the same website.

# Stay Close, Even If Far Away

by Sammantha Bennett



It's snowing hard today. While y'all in Texas are living in the height of spring, here in Colorado we just entered a four-day snowstorm. Twelve inches of

heavy snow have fallen in the last twelve hours, resting softly on barren tree branches and piling in mounds outside my window. But life at 9,000 feet marches on. It was never the plan to return to Aspen. The last time I was here, I was working for a family as their nanny, caring for their daughter, who was two at the time. Four months into the job, I had to leave it. I spent 11 days in the hospital after my antidepressants had failed me. I spent the next year recovering, including five months in intensive therapy. During that year, I moved to Dallas and I found Oak Lawn.

Discovering Oak Lawn was truly a gift from God. For the first time in my adult life, potentially my entire life, I found a place where I was welcomed for who I am, encouraged to grow and stretch my faith, and asked to be part of something. It has become a family to me, supporting me, showing up for me, inviting me in. When I was in the hospital in January and subsequently lost my job, Mara sat with me in the ER, Rachel and Cathy came to visit, and so many people sat with me in the week after my discharge. I had never felt so secure in my standing with a group of people.

A month ago, my ex-nanny-family came to me with a proposal. I could come and live with them, work on their current nanny's days off, and work at the small preschool their now four-year-old

daughter attends. This was not the plan. I wanted to stay in Dallas. Life had forced my hand to move a couple times before, but I never really had enough attachments for it to matter. This time, I'd be leaving behind a whole family, a best friend, a city I was growing to love. I couldn't do it.

Leaving Dallas was one of the most tortured decisions I've ever had to make. I feared a repeat of last time: isolation; loneliness; depression. I couldn't risk that again. This time, however, I wasn't alone. I had a launching pad, a place where I was secure and supported. Between Oak Lawn and my best friend, I was assured that it didn't have to be forever and that last time a chemical imbalance brought me low, and this time I would be better equipped. So I conceded. I took the opportunity, even though it wasn't (and some days still isn't) what I wanted. I try to remember that there must be something I can't see.

During this time of uncertainty and crisis, many of us have experienced a change in plans. We have had to sacrifice comforts and conveniences, and our routines, jobs, and lives have been disrupted. I have no idea what this season in Colorado is going to look like, no idea what God has in store. It's terrifying, honestly. Most of us thrive on consistency and we like to know what the plan is. We don't have that luxury



right now. We can't see what lies ahead. And we don't have a choice in the matter.

This season, however, is a chance for us to see God's hand at work. To learn to wait on the Lord and their great plans. Remember the word of God to the prophet Isaiah: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." (Isaiah 43:19) Aspen and quarantine feel like a wasteland. This time feels barren and empty and full of unknown dangers. I don't know how long I'll be here, how I'll get out, how I'll survive it. But I am trying to remember that God is before me and beside me and behind me.



And joining God is Oak Lawn UMC. The love and support of this body, the investment and connection, has been a reflection of God's faithfulness and the call of the church to love one another. Remember your community, and know that we are with you. In the midst of the storm, we greet each other in the waves, showing up how we can, reminding each other of our communion in Christ. Keep the faith dear

ones. One day we will be reunited in body, but know that, now, we are united in Spirit. "So encourage each other, and build each other up, just as you are already doing." (1 Thessalonians 5:11) Join us in worship. Text your churchmates. Leave notes on our Facebook page. Let us use this time to grow closer to each other.



# The Ultimate Reschedule

by Kate Sander



For those who don't know me, my name is Kate Sander. I moved to Dallas in August and found Oak Lawn UMC shortly thereafter. I'm currently in

school, pursuing a master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology at UT Dallas. My classes normally take place at the Callier Center in Dallas, and I have had practicum placements at both a private practice and a private school in the area. Currently, classes have been moved online, and practicum placements have been cancelled entirely.

The last time I saw my classmates and attended a class in person was the Thursday before spring break, March 12th. During that last class, we all simultaneously received an email telling us that spring break had been extended by one week and to watch for more updates. I'm sure you can imagine the chaos that ensued the moment class was dismissed. Afterward, we all bumped elbows to say goodbye, since we were wary of hugs, but no social distancing had yet been encouraged. We left hopeful to see each other in two weeks, but, worst case scenario, I hoped to see my friends at my early May wedding.

Oh, how quickly things changed. That weekend, my fiancé, Matthew, and I spent the weekend in my hometown in Oklahoma for a wedding shower. There were no confirmed cases in western Oklahoma yet, but we still tried not to hug everyone who came to support us! On

Sunday, Matthew and I both received the news that our classes would be online indefinitely. Later on that week, we postponed our next wedding shower scheduled for the following weekend at his home church in Texas and began thinking about postponing our wedding.

Since then, I have spent the majority of my days at home staring at my computer screen. In my graduate program, our classes are offered in the afternoon so we can use the mornings for various clinic placements and therapies. Now, mornings are spent logged in to Webex with 100 or so of my classmates as we work through online case studies together. Afternoons are still for class, and each professor is presenting material over different platform and communicating with us in different ways. I crossed out the fun trips and events in my 2020 planner, but I need my planner now more than ever to keep all my classes straight!

At the end of each live online session, everyone turns on their cameras and unmutes their microphones to wave to each other and show each other cute dogs and kids at home! I think we all look forward to that greatly. We run into a few technical difficulties occasionally: on separate and multiple occasions we have crashed both the website on which we work through the case studies and the platform on which we video chat. When that happens, we all start texting each other and wait for the email to tell us what's going on and the next time we'll meet.

I was concerned that during this time I would lose touch with all the new friends I've made in the program, but I think many of us have grown even closer. I'm interacting with my classmates daily, and we check in with each other via text, zoom, FaceTime, or even social media. We need each other to help keep up with what is due,

when, and how to submit different assignments.

We've had to get really creative with some projects since we haven't had access to all the materials offered at school. We're also learning how to conduct virtual therapy, which is a challenge I never expected, but it will likely turn out to be a valuable skill. Ultimately, I think we will all be better clinicians for it.

While I am committed to following the guidelines set out for us in order to keep us all safe, I truly cannot wait until it is safe for them to be lifted. I can't wait to come to church again, to see my classmates again, and to have in-person therapy sessions with my clients again. I can't wait to hopefully see all my friends and family at my now August wedding. Until then, I am doing my very best to stay on top of assignments and show grace to professors struggling with online learning. Our classes have also been moved online for the summer, so I'm getting mentally prepared to do this for at least the next few months. I'm grateful that I'll be able to do so and that I have a safe place to work, understanding professors, and friends who check in.



## Bento Box Moment

*Amanda Cooper is a recent addition to the Oak Lawn UMC family, but she's not hesitated a wink to jump in and help during this pandemic! As such, we're highlighting her generosity as our Bento Box moment because she's Going and Giving of her resources and time to make sure folks have protection! Thank you Amanda for embodying that OLUMC spirit so naturally. We love you and are so grateful for you!*



# Oak Lawn United Methodist Church

**Sunday Morning Grow Study** 9:30 AM via ZOOM (see [www.olumc.org/GrowStudy](http://www.olumc.org/GrowStudy))  
**Sunday Morning Worship** 11:00 AM via Facebook LIVE (see [www.olumc.org/Worship](http://www.olumc.org/Worship))  
**Thursday Night of Prayer** 7:30 PM via ZOOM (see [www.olumc.org/Prayer](http://www.olumc.org/Prayer))  
**Mañanas de Domingos de Adoración** 12:30 PM via Facebook LIVE  
**Daily Devotional** 12:00 PM Monday - Friday via Facebook LIVE

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Oak Lawn UMC exists to be a hub of transformative Christian community that is inclusive, expansive, and entrepreneurial.

## **We are inclusive**

Welcoming and caring for all, particularly those on the margins.

## **We are expansive**

Connecting with new people beyond the walls of our church.

## **We are entrepreneurial**

Willing to be courageous and take risks in faithfulness to God's call.

