

## Cross Connection – May 12, 2016

### Communication Contest Yields Creative Ideas, Trainings and Resources

*When churches of all sizes share ideas and communication success stories, everyone wins. Read about several real-life examples from the 2016 contest and check out a new resource forum designed to continue the conversation.*

*Goodbye long boring hallway, hello blank canvas for creativity.* This winning idea was submitted in the TAC 2016 Best Idea Contest as one of many communication strategies that are enhancing communication and improving audience engagement. In fact, since churches of all sizes submitted a variety of ideas, the TAC Communication Advisory Committee named seven winners this year.

#### Winner Idea #1: Beyond Bulletin Boards

**Westbury UMC** transformed a once-empty wall into an opportunity for seasonal, gallery-like communication exhibits that became a popular information center almost immediately. “One of our main hallways opposite the church office is now a prime spot for storytelling, ministry engagement and more,” says Communication Director Kelsey Johnson. The inaugural exhibit took advantage of the space from floor to ceiling to promote a congregation-wide, multigenerational initiative called Table Groups. “Our display was inspired by the museum exhibit approach incorporating home décor touches like burlap strips suspended from the ceiling like curtains. Large format photos and FAQs were easily mounted with double stick tape and a clipboard hung with rustic twine from a screw on the wall, bearing the sign up list. “Artwork reinforced the spiritual purpose behind this small group initiative,” adds Kelsey, “and the results far outweighed the attention that would have resulted from a hodge podge of bulletin boards.” Additionally, supply costs were kept under \$100 and materials remain largely recyclable for altar use or other displays.

According to Kelsey, the biggest benefit to this communication solution was the level of engagement that members of **Westbury UMC** demonstrated when passing by. “Table Group organizers had hoped for 50 to enroll in the project,” she says, “but the display helped garner almost double that!” Other ministry leaders are now asking to reserve the space for their messaging and stories of impact.

“I would encourage other church leaders to walk through their campus and look for areas that could be repurposed for something bigger and bolder,” adds Kelsey. “The options are endless and the displays are engaging for members and visitors alike!”

#### Winner Ideas 2&3: Lenten Campaigns;

Instead of encouraging the congregation to *give up* something for Lent, **St. Luke’s UMC, Houston** promoted the *addition* of a new spiritual practice for 40 days leading up to Easter – that of reading – and sharing -- daily devotionals that arrived by text. The “You can do anything for 40 days” campaign texts were clear, bold, brief and sized to share. Messages included a scripture, thought and an added action to encourage engagement. The campaign was promoted via posters, the monthly magazine, an opt-in widget on the website homepage, two “business card” size invitations to share with others, a lawn banner and via social media. According to

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Sally Penning, **SLUMC** Communications ministry, previous text campaigns reached approximately 500 participants, yet the “40” campaign had over 1500 opt in.

**St. Mark’s UMC Pecore, Houston** also had great success with a social media campaign during Lent using Nadia Boltz-Weber’s *40 Ideas for Keeping Lent Holy*, published in *Sojourners*. Results: Facebook posts engaged considerably more people than typically attend worship. To cover all the bases, organizers printed a paper version for members that are not on Facebook. **St. Mark’s Pecore, Houston** also uses a series of posters to communicate church news and opportunities to members and the many guests that come through the facility while attending meetings with community groups.

### Winner Idea #4: Creative Use of Social Media

Committee member Lisa Martinson says, “Communications is always evolving, and a basic component of ministry. We have to communicate to invite others to participate.” Rev. David Dorn from **Marvin UMC** realizes Facebook and cell phones are a big part of our lives and can thus be a big part of sharing our church life with others. His contest submission illustrates how powerful it can be to encourage your congregation to check-in, as the ‘new evangelism.’ Reminding folks to do that in worship is just as important to outreach as is the passing the peace.”

Indeed, as the video link below attests, the contemporary worship service (“CORE”) for **Marvin UMC** is creatively utilizing Facebook to communicate and reach new people in Tyler. Rev. David Dorn shares that their “Facebook story” began at the early part of 2016 with encouraging attendees to “check in” on Facebook at the beginning of the service. “I was shocked after looking at the analytics the first week, that the simple process of checking in reached some 14,000 of our digital neighbors with the awareness that we were in church. I can’t help but think that when some of those people are searching for more in life they will know where you are finding it,” he suggested to the congregation. CORE members now check in as a part of the service each week and have since added sermon point graphics and ministry results to their social media posts. Adds David, “We have also had some fun along the way by posting music for our audiences, including a special song performed with child size toy instruments.” The feedback and metrics have been strong and David anticipates additional success, admitting, “We have just gotten started!”

See the details at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ru9s0vt6mh6m89e/Core%20Facebook%20Story.mp4?dl=0>

### Winner Idea #5: An App for Youth/Kids

Using the Subsplash Platform (a paid program) Churchapp division, Rev. Lisa Michelle Wilson, associate pastor to children, youth and families of **Chapelwood UMC-Lake Jackson** set out to develop an app that could be used by church families, volunteers and youth. The goal was to increase communication and resource the

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users with scripture, event registration, media and a way for them to share with others what is going on at church. “It is not a plug and play,” she shares. “It requires you use their platform to design the app and then you put in content. It took about a month to design and fill with content.

Results have been immediate. Notes Lisa, “Those who use the app are appreciating the ease of knowing what is going on, registering for events and receiving push notification with scripture and reminders about deadlines/events. I no longer have parents, volunteers or teens wondering what is going on even though most information is communicated in seven other ways.” The app also demonstrates that participants have started listening to Christian music, reading the devotionals and sharing events with others. “The parents and volunteers love how it is organized and the teens just think it’s cool that their church has an app. We also have flash cards for catechism and Bible knowledge so that wherever our families go they can plug in to faith forming activities. We have a prayer request section as well as a media section for commercials, music videos and other items that go along with our current series.” According to Lisa, the app has increased overall communication and engagement. **The APP is available for download on smartphones at: <http://get.theapp.co/75dc/>**

### Winning Idea #6: Creative Use of Video

Mark Eaves - Director of Media Ministries for **Good Shepherd UMC**, is sharing a [video project here](#) that was designed to help recruit male singers to join the choir. “Our traditional worship choir has more women than men members and the music ministry was wishing to balance it out more,” shares Mark. “At the time this was shown, our pastor was preaching a sports-themed sermon series entitled *We Came to Play*. As a compliment to that, this video was produced with the intention of being a humorous way to make it seem more manly to sing in the choir.” With strong visuals, no dialogue and bold, brief scenarios, the video was shown in worship during the sports theme sermon series. Notes Mark, “The congregation seemed to love the funny approach to drawing men into the choir, and sure enough a few more men had the courage to join!”

### Winning Idea #7: The Power of Visual Consistency

Kristen Hilliard of **FUMC Lindale** helped recreate the church “brand” as a result of the Vibrant Church Initiative coaching and a related ministry and communication audit. “We were inspired to recreate our logo, slogan, website, signage, online presence and printed material to appeal to visitors and the unchurched, as well as more consistently describe our church vision,” she explains. The logo, designed as a series of four “Ls” in sync with the Lindale name, forms a cross and symbolically mirrors the large stained glass window in the sanctuary. “This all led to re-imagining our website to feature key values of Connect, Serve, and Grow, as well as redesigning a new bulletin format that was streamlined to save costs while appealing to readers.” Leaders strategically designed a connection card to welcome and engage visitors and added a QR Quick Response code on printed materials as a short cut to more information as they worked to build new relationships with

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newcomers and increase the number of volunteers. Notes Kristen, “VCI and these improvements have helped increase every vital sign of our church. Worship attendance has jumped from 250 to 350 and giving has increased by about 9%. More professions of faith and first-time guests are being celebrated and membership has increased by 88 members in recent months.”

### **Announcing: A New Facebook Page for Communication Resources and Ideas**

At the recommendation of The Texas Annual Conference Communication Committee, the conference has launched the UMC Church Communicators group on Facebook – where these contest idea links will also be posted. According to Paula Arnold, Conference Communication Director, “While this is a private group in terms of social media, it is open to all that wish to discuss communications and share ideas within our conference – whether they are pastors looking for ideas, church secretaries curious how other churches design their bulletins, or tech arts personnel or volunteers seeking new ways to enhance worship.” Adds Paula, “If you work or volunteer to help your church communicate more effectively, please join the conversation [here.](#)”

Irv White, **Windsor Village UMC, Houston** is energized by the ideas gleaned through the second annual contest, and to share them with others in the conference. “One of the greatest discoveries in ministry is finding how to connect with and engage the people you are called to serve. As a member of the TAC Communications Committee and an associate pastor, when I see the many creative ways our churches are inviting non believers to Christ and encouraging greater involvement in ministry for those already in Christ, I get excited,” he says. “Filling the empty space on a wall can resurrect productivity in the under used areas of your church. Pointing out that barbecuing for the masses and singing in the choir are equally “macho” can add numbers to your male chorus. And enhancing the look and feel of your major publications will strengthen the credibility of your message. I encourage churches leaders to visit our new [Facebook resource](#) page, borrow ideas and customize them to work for your congregation.”

### **Behind the Scenes with the Worship Leaders for Annual Conference**

*Working with consultant Dr. Marcia McFee has been an uplifting experience for worship leaders Lindsay Smith and Michael Vaughn as they add special touches to the upcoming Annual Conference.*

Inspired by many of Bishop Janice Huie’s favorite scriptures, the 2016 Annual Conference promises many unforgettable moments, including the special worship services designed by [Dr. Marcia McFee’s](#) worship planning team. [Michael Vaughn](#), director of music and worship arts for **Wildwood UMC** and [Lindsay Smith](#), music director at **St. Stephen’s UMC**. [\(link to videos\)](#) Michael has thoroughly enjoyed

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working with a team of amazing musical talent and passions, and getting to choose music and define logistics using his many resources.

### Special Touches

According to the team, the organic theme this year will be evident through rich imagery and references to planting, the harvest, and seeds of faith that are lived out in a vibrant church and personal spiritual journey. Opening worship, “Falling on Good Earth” will be later followed by the “Tree of Life” service of memorial and communion, the “Sending out Branches” service of retiree recognition and blessing, “The Root Command” commissioning and ordination service and “Planted by God” closing worship.

According to Lindsay and Michael, the team has re-designed the worship space and one of the new elements is a central platform where rituals will take place throughout the conference. “In this new format, we will celebrate communion, hear readings, and gather around the central table as one body,” adds Michael.

### Special Music

“During the Commissioning Service, attendees will be blessed by the choir and orchestra from **Memorial Drive, UMC,**” Lindsay shares. The worship team has recruited other amazing musicians including:

- Stephen Distad, organist, and Justin Langham, trumpeteer who make up, "Deux Voix" - a very successful touring duo
- Grace Tice, oboist
- Glen Ackerman, jazz guitarist
- Hallie Chapman, a very talented high school student who will be pursuing musical theater and has grown up singing gospel and R&B in church
- A chamber choir made up of great choral and solo artists from around the Houston community

At the close of the conference, special guest Ken Medema will bring his unique musical style to inspire many through his impromptu songwriting skills based on sermon topics, audience input or speaker stories. Ken, who was nearly blind at birth, has become an accomplished musician through lessons in braille music, playing by ear and improvising for four decades. Adds Michael, “Attendees are sure to leave inspired and ready to go back to their home churches to serve with energy and enthusiasm! We can’t wait to celebrate each of these poignant services with you!”

### Up Close with the Worship Committee Leaders

Before coming to St. Stephens, Lindsay served as the choir director at Dayton FUMC

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for five years. During that time, she earned a Masters of Sacred Music from Perkins School of Theology in Dallas and began pursuing ordination as a Deacon in the United Methodist Church. She is a member of the Hymn Society of the United States and Canada, and she enjoys writing hymns and tunes.

Michael received his Master's degree from The University of Houston in Voice and dual Bachelor's degrees in Voice Performance and Music Education from Ithaca College. Currently, he is working towards a D.M.A. in choral conducting and has served on several college faculties. In addition to his church work, he is the director of the High school division of the Houston Boys choir and director of the Houston Revels - a production company that produces a community Christmas production each year downtown. Michael, a former soloist with the Houston Symphony, will be teaching at the Texas Conference Choir Clinic at Lakeview Retreat Center.

### **Methodists and Muslims Host Meet and Greet Events in Sugar Land**

*Parkway UMC recently hosted the first of two faith conversations between Muslims and church members to foster new relationships among Sugar Land neighbors.*

The San Bernardino shootings in California last fall inspired an important conversation between Methodists and Muslims in the Sugar Land area. “I had heard reports of Muslims in our country saying that their fear was higher than right after 9/11 and I felt called to do something,” shares Rev. Matt Neely, **Parkway UMC** of Sugar Land. “One day that week, I drove past the Maryam Islamic Center mosque and their American flag was flying at half mast and I decided to contact the Imam.”

Imam Shah and Pastor Matt had lunch together and decided to invite leaders from each other's congregation to a time of introduction, snacks, fellowship, and interfaith dialogue, concluding with a time of Q&A.

On May 1, **Parkway UMC** hosted the first informal gathering and in a few weeks, the mosque will do the same. Adds Matt, “When they were here, I made a presentation of the basic tenants of the Christian faith and they had a chance to ask any questions. When we go there, they will return the favor and we will ask questions.”

“We believe these conversations will help to reduce fear and increase understanding among Christians and Muslims in our neighborhood,” he adds. “My favorite part was that there was no compromising or watering down of what either group believes. This is about people, who deeply disagree on some pretty important things, deciding to be friends and neighbors. It was about getting to know our neighbors as people so we will be less fearful. It is about seeing people as humans instead of as categories.”

“I thought it was a very worthwhile session and I look forward to going to their gathering soon,” says **Parkway UMC** member Charles Burch. Vince Cordova left the meeting with new insight and a few lingering questions. Shares Vince, “While I am not surprised our Muslim friends consider Jesus a prophet, I did find it heartwarming that they said they are taught to love Jesus. They were warm, kind people that seem to align with our

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hopes and wishes for the most part.” Although curious about the Quran and what it may say about people that do not follow Islam, he adds, “This meeting exchange with our neighbors was absolutely the right thing to do and I am very happy that our pastor reached out to them and they responded. It is an example for the world to follow.”

According to Matt, This was an opportunity for the church to accomplish the mission of **Parkway: 'Demonstrating God's Grace to inspire a hope-filled journey with Jesus.'** “We enjoyed the privilege of making new friends, sharing the gospel and extending friendship to people in our community,” he shares. “With all of the fear and misunderstanding in our world today, we wanted to demonstrate grace. I know that I don't want to be judged by some horrific things that Christians do in Jesus' name. And I know they don't want to be judged by what some people do in the name of Islam.”

### **Lakeview Launches Adopt-a-Camp-Staffer Opportunity This Summer**

*Support the impactful summer camp ministry in a meaningful way by adopting a summer staffer via prayer, encouraging notes or occasional care packages.*

For over 65 years, Lakeview Methodist Conference Center, has been hosting the Texas Annual Conference district youth camps and Texas A&M University's Fish Camp during the summer season – which is completely dependent on the support, dedication, and hard work of summer staff.

Beginning in June, over 60 staff members, both local and statewide, will make Lakeview their home for the summer. According to President/CEO Matt Idom, these dedicated young adults, which make up the program staff, maintenance, housekeeping and kitchen crew, travel far from family and friends to be in ministry. “A week at camp pulls campers from the craziness of their regular routine and many social pressures allowing them to think about their future, to evaluate unhealthy patterns, and build quality relationships,” notes Bradley Doherty, Lakeview's Director for Program and Ministry. “This is only achieved with the help of quality staff.”

Statistically, kids spend on average less than 40 minutes in meaningful conversation with their parents each week. However, during summer camp, campers are given the time and guidance that allows them to consider some of the most important issues of life. “At Lakeview, our summer staff takes the time to help campers think through decisions and experiences in a way that will prepare them for their future,” he adds. “Doing so leaves our staff mentally and physically exhausted. The adopt-a-staff program is a way for them to be encouraged throughout the summer and helps them feel appreciated.”

Individuals or congregations can support Lakeview's Summer Camp Ministry in a meaningful way by adopting a summer staff person. By doing so, each commits to three things:

1. Pray for this adopted staff member daily.
2. Send notes and cards of encouragement or a fun care package.

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“During the course of a summer, these staffers will invest in the campers in very meaningful ways,” shares Bradley. “This program is ideal for individuals, local organizations and church groups. We’d absolutely love to see all 60 of our summer staff members adopted.”

### **Fun Facts About Lakeview:**

- Lakeview Methodist Conference Center, recognized as one of the "Camps that Change the World" by the Huffington Post, sits on 1,300 acres in the Piney Woods of East Texas.
- Lakeview was established in 1947 as the site for a camping ministry of the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and has been hosting life-changing camps for more than 65 years.
- Lakeview offers the same fun-filled, life-changing experiences for adults of all ages through retreats, conferences, outdoor education, team building programs, and other venues, accommodating over 20,000 visitors and campers each year.

For more information regarding the Adopt-A-Staff Program at Lakeview Methodist Conference Center, visit [www.lakeviewmcc.org](http://www.lakeviewmcc.org) or contact Bradley Doherty, Director of Program & Ministry, at [bradley@lakeviewmcc.org](mailto:bradley@lakeviewmcc.org).

### **Preschoolers Help with Outreach While Learning to Garden**

*The community garden teaches life lessons to students at the Children’s Development Center at St. Mark’s (Pecore) in Houston.*

Beginning as an Eagle Scout project in 2009, the community garden hosted by **St. Mark’s United Methodist Church** in the Houston Heights has long born the fingerprints of area youth. The garden benefits from the generous support of the Boy Scouts, the Girls Scouts, Urban Harvest, residents and church members but the cutest weekly volunteers come from St. Mark’s Children’s Development Center.

In fact, in the last seven years, the children, along with more than 70 volunteers who have donated 4,000+ hours have collectively produced 4,000 pounds (two tons) of fruits and vegetables for Heights Interfaith Ministry Food Pantry. Pastor Emily Chapman says, “At **St. Mark’s** Children’s Development Center we serve 50 families with 75 children. Only a few of the families are members of the church. Our members work with the children in the garden once a week to give them lessons about real food, by tasting, planting, weeding, picking, and by digging in the dirt. They also learn that the garden serves others.” Adds Emily, “Vance Neatherly and Nicole Wyman are among the kids’ favorite volunteers. Vance sends great stories and photos from the garden to the parents by email, which is a great outreach to the families since most are not church members.”

### **Bible Lessons in the Garden**

Earlier in the year, “Mr. Vance” explained the parable of the mustard seed to the youngsters. With the bag of seeds he purchased, he made enough mustard to allow the

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children to taste it, and he supervised them planting the rest to see what happened. “Some of the kids had never heard this Bible story,” he shares, “and they were all excited to plant the seeds – so much so that they dropped piles of them into the dirt instead of spreading them around as I had suggested.”

Vance, who began gardening with his father at age seven, is retired and has spent time with each class each week for the last six years. “We have a big time together, and I can see several results that follow this garden endeavor – from the children gaining a love of vegetables to the children gaining a love of helping other children who are hungry in Houston through the food pantry.” According to Vance, 40,000 children go to bed hungry every night in the city of Houston. “I have several parents astounded that their child ate raw broccoli or green beans during school, and several who have reported having to plant a garden at home after their child was into elementary school and wanting to continue this hobby.”

Adds Vance, “Many strawberries get consumed on the spot by the kids, the helpers, and the birds, but somehow we managed to donate five pounds of them to the pantry in March.” Other crops include cucumbers, squash, tomato plants, beans, and a couple of kinds of melons. One of the latest editions is the herb garden featuring the basil, dill, cilantro, and sage. Nicole Wyman is a loyal volunteer alongside Vance because she “loves watching how the children start out a little hesitant in the garden but then embrace eating fresh fruits and veggies plucked from plants and vines. I hope it becomes a lifelong attachment to eating healthy foods. It is a thrill to see a child latch onto his or her favorite vegetable in the garden. Harry loves green beans, Stella munches on onion tops, and Asher can’t wait for sugar snap peas. We have a blast!”

Vance has observed that the children particularly love the sweet potato harvest. “At first, they did not believe me that the potatoes grew underground. When I unearthed one for the first time they could not wait to play hide and seek for the others. Their 15-minute attention span quickly darts to racing about and playing, or veggie snack time but they explain gardening to me, from their funny perspective, on a regular basis - now that they are experts.”

### **Bountiful Outreach**

“The garden team members were having a meeting out in the garden awhile back,” shares Vance, “and a bicyclist stopped and asked if she could help us. She’s now a new member of the church.” Others in the neighborhood wander over to help, or come sit at the picnic tables to enjoy the park-like environment, he adds. “We produce about 130 pounds of fresh produce a month which helps feed the 50-80 families that come to the pantry each week, so the garden has many benefits for everyone involved.”

### **A Dozen Churches Join the “Serve-olution” to Impact Lives in Galveston**

*Twelve churches and over 1200 volunteers worked to lift the name of Jesus throughout Galveston Island through a combined “Serve-olution” event.*

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Creativity has been one of the core values at **Galveston Central Church** in Galveston since it's inception as a revitalization project connected with **The Watershed UMC** in League City, the South District, and the Texas Annual Conference. That creativity is inspired in part by Michael Gienger, who preaches barefooted on Sundays amidst sanctuary pews surrounded by sofas and other casual chairs.

Notes Michael, "We serve a creative God, so we want all aspects of our lives to mirror that creativity whether it be through the arts or through creative problem solving. We've operated with three guiding questions: *What if old and new weren't opposites? What if tradition and innovation weren't necessarily exclusive? What if the church reclaimed her position as the cultural center of creativity?*

Adds Michael, "We've developed our own smartphone app that can be downloaded to communicate with our congregants," he shares. Congregants never know what to expect. For example, **Central** did a balloon drop on Easter, and is currently doing a coloring book sermon series where folks are handed a coloring sheet and crayons at the beginning of service." **Central** also posts video answers to questions placed in the "ask it basket" each week.

There's often dancing and poetry and art. According to Michael, there are married couples, Baby Boomers, and a few folks in their '70s. "Some have homes while others are homeless. Other than that, it's mostly folks who are between the ages of 22 and 42 and single," he notes. "It's pretty easy to look around on a Sunday morning and wonder, *what do all of these people have in common?*"

Creativity also motivates how **Central UMC** serves.

"We participated in Servolution for the first time this year on May 1," Michael explains. "Servolution is a Galveston-wide event where local congregations serve in the community during their typical Sunday morning worship time. We worked at Wright-Cuney Recreation Center, a city-operated park that serves one of the poorer neighborhoods on the island."

Volunteers cleaned the facilities, picked up trash, repaired playground equipment, and weeded the community garden. The dozen churches also included **Moody UMC** and a variety of other denominations helping at 22 different work sites for Servolution this year. Adds Michael, "We plan to participate again next year. Non-members definitely participate. We even had a large number of kids from the local apartment complex come out and work with us in the community garden."

Doug Bowen, one of **Central's** active volunteers, says that, "Servolution was a great opportunity to actually go out and be the Church. We were reminded that worship doesn't just take place inside the walls of the church building. I was grateful for the opportunity."

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Charity Trivia Night is another example of creativity-inspired outreach. It is designed as a fun way for people to get together, eat great food, and raise money for great local causes. He shares, “We rent out a local restaurant - Smooth Tony's - for the evening. Participants form teams with each person paying \$10 to play. After three rounds of 10 questions, the winning team gets to decide what local charity receives the money that was raised. “This year,” Michael adds, “we will be donating \$1,000 to the Galveston Humane Society.”

### **Creativity through Music**

Typically, worship at **Central** might include traditional hymns *and* top-40 pop songs. Worship leader Brandon Williams says, “One of the ways we strive for creativity in music here at **Central** is through the use of popular or “secular” music at the beginning of service. We recognize that God is the one that bestows talent on the Hillsongs as well as the Beyonces! At **Central**, we want to continue to blur the line between the sacred and the secular, reclaiming the message of popular music and using it to point people back to the gospel.”

According to Michael, each service begins with a ‘non-traditional’ worship song that fits with the theme of the day. Some of the most recent have been “Come Sail Away” by Styx for a sermon on Noah, “I Won't Back Down” by Tom Petty for the fiery furnace, “Fight Song” by Rachel Platten for David and Goliath. “I hope that whenever people hear the music that they're listening to in the course of their lives, they'll be reminded of something from a sermon message,” he says. Taking it one step further, the band will often record a short video after service of the opening song as an easy way for us to share what happens on Sundays with the Facebook community. The goal, he explains, is to help make folks feel comfortable about visiting for the first time.

While the church actually celebrated its 131 anniversary, the current congregation technically celebrated its first birthday as a revitalized family of Christ followers. Leaders continue to pursue the “divine” in the midst of unlikely intersections happening at **Central**. Says Michael, “We are seeing a blurring of the lines between the sacred and secular, between ancient and modern, between ages and races and our goal is to imagine more new points of intersection in the months and years ahead.”

### **Bellaire UMC Welcomes the Neighbors to “Food Truck Friday”**

*Leveraging the “food truck frenzy,” Bellaire UMC hosts a Friday fun night for families in Central Houston who might otherwise avoid visiting a church campus.*

A cool evening breeze, eats and treats from favorite local food trucks, kid-friendly activities and live music made for a successful “inaugural” Food Truck Friday at **Bellaire UMC** on May 6. Participants enjoyed a variety of delicious fare from four-wheel culinary experts from Pho-jita Fusion, Curbside Sliderz, and FríoHana.

“We chose the trucks based on staff and member recommendations,” shares Rev. Seann Duffin, “Bellaire Jazz provided live music on the front lawn and a bounce house, face painting and other activities beckoned children of all ages.” To get the word out, **Bellaire**

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UMC blitzed family-friendly community gathering spots like the YMCA, Whole Foods, and area restaurants with event posters and promoted it heavily on Facebook.

On Friday night, folks in the neighborhood walked over and the event even gleaned some “drive-by” participants. “The weather was breezy and we probably had 250-300 out on the lawn of the church which is exactly what we had hoped for,” he says. “We did have visitors in church the next day, but I am not sure if they had been at the Friday event or not.”

Adds Seann, “One lesson we learned was: to have one more food trucks next time to better serve the crowd. The idea was simply to provide a fun atmosphere and place for people from the neighborhood to gather, and Bellaire UMC certainly proved to be a lively gathering place for members and area residents of all ages.”

### **Disaster Response**

The Texas Annual Conference continues to experience severe weather. On the night of Monday, May 9, the Texarkana area in the North District experienced a severe storm that included at least one tornado that touched down in the area of Red Lick. The storm toppled trees and damaged several residences, including the home of Rev. Mike Akin of FUMC Texarkana. The damage was immediately reported through the North District office and, within hours, volunteers from the North District were mobilized, including an Early Response Team from FUMC Atlanta. The team offered assistance to Rev. Akin and began assessing damage to neighboring homes. The relief work was accomplished quickly using local volunteers and by the homeowners themselves.

TAC Disaster Ministries continues to work throughout the conference following our recent disasters including in the Caddo Lake area in the North District, the Jasper / Newton / Orange counties area in the Southeast District, Woodville in the East District, Wharton in the Southwest District, Palestine in the Northwest District, and several areas in the Central South and Central North Districts. Long-term Recovery Groups have been established or are in the process of being established in Palestine, Caddo Lakes Region, Tri-County (Southeast Texas), and Harris County. TAC Disaster Ministries is advising and providing resources for churches in the affected areas and actively participating in the recovery in each region.

Right now, all areas are transitioning out of immediate relief and moving into long-term recovery. This will last for months and years to come. Churches and individuals who wish to volunteer in the recovery effort can contact Rev. Scott Moore, [smoore@txcumc.org](mailto:smoore@txcumc.org) with the dates and locations they wish to work and any specifics

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regarding special skills or particular types of projects on which they wish to work. Rev. Moore will put you in contact with the coordinator in the requested area.

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“During the course of a summer, these staffers will invest in the campers in very meaningful ways,” shares Bradley. “This program is ideal for individuals, local organizations, and church groups. We'd absolutely love to see all 60 of our summer staff members adopted.”

### **Fun Facts About Lakeview:**

- Lakeview Methodist Conference Center, recognized as one of the "Camps that Change the World" by the Huffington Post, sits on 1,300 acres in the Piney Woods of East Texas.
- Lakeview was established in 1947 as the site for a camping ministry of the Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and has been hosting life-changing camps for more than 65 years.
- Lakeview offers the same fun-filled, life-changing experiences for adults of all ages through retreats, conferences, outdoor education, team building programs, and other venues, accommodating over 20,000 visitors and campers each year.

For more information regarding the Adopt-A-Staff Program at Lakeview Methodist Conference Center, visit [www.lakeviewmcc.org](http://www.lakeviewmcc.org) or contact Bradley Doherty, Director of Program & Ministry, at [bradley@lakeviewmcc.org](mailto:bradley@lakeviewmcc.org).