

Say So

OKUMC SPIRIT IN ACTION



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Oklahoma Conference
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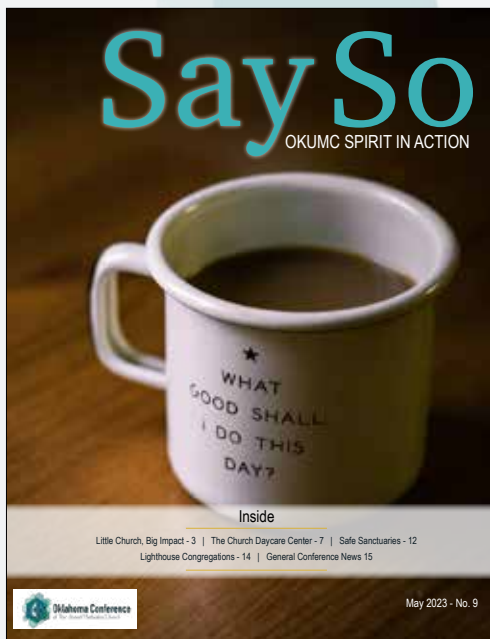
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Little Church Big Impact





Churches and small groups can do great things with a small but mighty group of dedicated volunteers whose passion is service to community. Following are a few examples of churches that make real, lasting differences in the everyday lives of their neighbors.

SAVING THE HOLIDAYS

Lambuth Memorial Church is a small, unassuming church in the southern part of Oklahoma City. With a weekly attendance of between 30 and 40, the church has every excuse to be insular, claiming a lack of resources and too few people to do much more than serve itself. It could keep its doors locked and tell the community to “go ask the Salvation Army.”

Lambuth is having none of that.

Lambuth Memorial, though small, is a thriving congregation of mission-minded people with a collective heart for service.

For years, Lambuth partnered with Skyline Urban Ministries to sponsor families and provide them with Thanksgiving and Christmas blessings. When Covid-19 hit and everything came to a standstill, Skyline made the difficult decision to suspend the program. Lambuth still wanted to serve, and they realized that they had a perfect opportunity to step in and help.

Richard Giles, a district lay speaker and member of Lambuth Memorial, has ties to an organization filled with families who can use not only the material aid, but also the grace and confidence implied by that aid. Giles is the transportation and maintenance manager at The Education and Employment Ministry (TEEM), which serves Oklahomans impacted by the criminal justice system - and, in most cases, poverty.

For the third year in a row, Giles conferred with case managers on TEEM’s staff to identify families with great need. Then Heather Wevers, another member of the church, reached out to the families to find out what their ideal Thanksgiving and Christmas meals would look like. She also asked about children in the home - clothing sizes, toy wishes, and other needs.

Then the church got to work.

Members went shopping to get all the fixings that would provide them with the ideal holiday meals. They also began the process of purchasing gifts and clothing for the children. “We spend about \$500 on each family,” said Giles.

The Monday before Thanksgiving, families were invited to meet representatives from the church at

TEEM, which is centrally located and on bus lines, to pick up their meal boxes. Items may include protein, fresh veggies, potatoes, bread, and more. Pie is also a central item. If ingredients are needed to create a special dish, the church provides them. “We make sure they get everything the Monday before the holiday so they have plenty of time to thaw a turkey or a ham,” said Giles.

The week before Christmas, the whole process is repeated, but this time the church group

doesn’t just provide a meal, but also a whole Santa’s bag full of gifts.

This year, six families were identified, which included a total of 24 children.

Of those families, five showed up for Thanksgiving, and four for Christmas. This time of year can be a hardship, and some clients might be triggered to backslide, or they might become



Lambuth pastor Josue Araujo and Richard Giles surprise grandmother Gwendolyn Brown with holiday goodies.

depressed and uncommunicative. “It can definitely be hard this time of year,” said Stacy Kastner, Pretrial case manager at TEEM.

The crew at Lambuth is prepared for these eventualities. As they realized two families were not going to show up, they quickly identified another family who needed help during the holidays. Grandmother Gwendolyn Brown has two grandchildren living with her. Heather and Gwendolyn went through wrapped gifts and found some that would be a good fit for her young ones, and the team loaded up a meal and lots of gifts, and sent them home with Brown.

Kastner, whose case management load is always large, immediately thought of her client Trevone Spicer. He and his partner, Chyann White, have two little girls, ages five and one.

White and Spicer organized transportation - which can be difficult for many TEEM participants - and headed over to pick up their unexpected blessings.

With everyone taken care of, the crew of the church headed to meetings, doctor’s appointments, and went about their day.

Six families were deeply affected by the work of Lambuth Memorial. Joshua Armitage and his wife have been a success story for TEEM for a while now. Through years of hardship, the couple have weathered the storms and kicked their addictions together. The couple celebrates over a year of sobriety.

With eight children between them, the Armitages gratefully accepted help providing Christmas for six of the children.

Phillip Addy is spending his first Christmas at home after three long years of incarceration. He’s working full time, and he’s humbled by the help his family has received from Lambuth. “They saved our family’s Christmas,” he noted. “I am so thankful for them.”

“When we did it before, we got families, but it wasn’t as intimate,” said Giles. “With this, we get to know the families. We talk to them, we listen to them.”

The risk of serving families impacted by incarceration, addiction,

and poverty, includes the possibility of not seeing a quick success story. The possibility might even include having families not show up to pick up gifts and meals lovingly put together by church members. Members at Lambuth are aware of the risk and gladly accept it, because they know the payoff is greater than the fear.

MAKING REAL COMMUNITY

Eden Chapel UMC is a small rural church located just outside Perkins. At the height of the Covid outbreak in 2020, members noticed neighbors in nursing homes and assisted living centers were not thriving. They were motivated to find a way to bring sunshine into those lives.

They began a ministry they called Drive to Thrive.

At first, the plan was to give each resident a monthly gift to let them know the congregation was thinking of them and praying for them. Gifts consisted of lotion, hand sanitizer, and tissues. They had a good response, so the congregation approached the assisted living center to see if they could do more.

Eden Chapel congregants began leading craft time each month, making artwork that could be displayed in residents’ rooms or on personal items.

They also began to take donations of gently-used books in order to restock the library at the center. The brainstorm kept coming.

Members delivered popcorn for movie nights and prizes for game night. Members dropped in to sing, play, and read the Bible. They celebrate holidays like Christmas, Independence Day, and Easter. They host a tea party in spring and an ice cream social in summer.

The staff aren’t left out. Members of Eden Chapel’s congregation treat the staff to boxes of chocolates at Christmas. Congregants send cards and cupcakes to residents on their birthdays.

Lucille Petermann, whose mission is to share this wonderful ministry with other



Eden Chapel volunteers prepare Easter baskets for assisted living and nursing home residents.

congregations, said,
 “We have enjoyed including our assisted living center neighbors in the types of fellowship activities we would ordinarily do on our own as a church.”

They began reaching out to businesses to partner in their endeavor. “One of our members reached out to Braum’s to see if they would like to partner with us, and as a result, they send coupons for ice cream cones each quarter for the residents,” Petermann said. “After a simple invitation, the local florist donates a flower for each table in the dining area every week; the touch of fresh flowers in the dining room brightens everyone’s day and makes meals all the more pleasant!”

She continued, “Our homebound folks have also benefited from Drive to Thrive. Our sewing group regularly sews tote bags and Drive to Thrive fills them with a mug, hot chocolate mix, lotion, pen and paper, socks, a cloth napkin, hand sanitizer, word search book, snack pack, and more depending on the season. We also include the most recent bulletin and church calendar to help our homebound feel remembered and included in the worshiping community. Tote bags are taken to homes during visits from caring laity.”

Petermann hopes other congregations will be inspired by this little church’s big impact.

“We hope other congregations will take inspiration from this “little engine that could” ministry and start small, building as you go. Use this type of ministry in your own setting, making changes to fit your community and their needs. There is no limit to what we can do to lift each other up, even if just for a moment.”

Petermann concluded, “You cannot spread sunshine without getting some on yourself!”

“Friends, if there are people at your church who think they can’t, it is our responsibility to show them they can.”

THE PEOPLE ARE THE MISSION

Imagine for a moment: You’re a church mission group heading from a smallish town to the big city. As you ride in the church van, you pass trees, cows, gas stations, tall buildings – and a place with a mural of Jesus breaking an assault rifle over his knee. The cross is painted in rainbow colors. Where you stop. And pull in.

This is going to be interesting.

Even more interesting is the fact that the group in question was the last mission trip for Claremore First as a United Methodist Church. Once the group returned, the church would no longer be part of

the denomination. Helping to lead the mission trip, and ready to take up the mantle of these incredible trips, is Tim McHugh, pastor of Grace United Methodist in Claremore.

After six years of planning by Kristal McHugh, wife of Tim, the church group had set out with five adults with special needs, so that they might experience serving on a mission trip.

In the 1990s, Copps Adult Residential Center was destroyed by a fire. They reached out to the church, and the church gave them a place to live until their home could be repaired. This started a relationship that would last for decades.

As the church provided bus service for residents to continue their relationship by coming to worship services, the McHughs found a way to get to know the residents even better. They began serving meals at Copps. Then they began taking the residents on local adventures like bowling and movies.

“The love of Jesus began to spill from Kristal into our friends and the church began to see them because they began to see the church,” explains Tim McHugh. “They wanted to give back to the God that has given them new life and new purpose.”

**What does your small church (or small group) do to make a difference? Do you have an innovative way to share the love of God with your neighbors?
 Please share it with us!**

The Cops residents began asking about serving in mission. Kristal found a way to make jump ropes out of old t-shirts, and the group set about making hundreds of jump ropes to send to children in Mexico, Costa Rica, and the Philippines. They took the group out to feed homeless neighbors.

After a long hiatus from Covid restrictions, the group got a budget and a solution to logistical concerns, like medication and safety. The McHughs reached out to Bo Ireland of the Lazarus Community.

As is expected for all mission workers, every participant did Volunteers in Mission training, paperwork, and background checks. They shopped for snacks, got their mission t-shirts, and set out – stopping along the way at Route 66 attractions – to spend three days serving at Lazarus Community at Clark Memorial UMC.

The participants prayed and led devotions. They painted 25 crosses, each representing a person on death row in Oklahoma, which led to the group being labeled as anti-death penalty activists by a news channel.

The group built three dressers and two grills, bought with funds they raised. They put together 180 care packages for people experiencing homelessness. They participated in Lectio Yoga. They worshiped and spent time getting to know people from other walks of life.

Tim McHugh said, “We are all called to serve. It is who we authentically are and who we are created to be. It is what fills our souls and connects us to our true purpose. This is everybody.”

He lamented, “Four years ago, I doubted and tried to delay out of blind ignorance, thinking we could never lead a team of adults with special needs on a mission trip.”

Now, he sees it differently. “Friends, if there are people at your church who think they can’t, it is our responsibility to show them they can.”



Volunteers build a dresser at Lazarus Community while on a mission trip with a group of nine.

10 things your small group can do to make a huge difference

- 1 Adopt a family (or more) through an organization like TEEM or Cops.
- 2 Partner with a non-profit organization to do good.
- 3 Host a community meal once a week (or once a month).
- 4 Open your doors to serve as a warming or cooling station for homeless individuals and families.
- 5 Sponsor school supplies for children in a low-income school district.
- 6 Help at a summer program like Project Transformation hosted at another church.
- 7 Host a community indoor yard sale or flea market.
- 8 Collect food items for weekend backpack programs or a food pantry.
- 9 Create hygiene kits or snack packs for homeless neighbors.
- 10 Tip your service staff well.

The Church Daycare Center

In Oklahoma's child care deserts, can churches help?

It seems like a match made in heaven. A spacious church, filled with rooms tailor-made for children, uses its huge building facility a few days a week, usually at times when most people are off work, is just begging to be made over into a daycare center to serve working families.

Churches are populated with people ready and willing to serve, and one service opportunity is to help shorten the sometimes hundreds-of-names-long waiting lists at many care centers in the state.

On top of that, communities in Oklahoma are much more likely to trust churches than they are to trust commercial daycare centers. As stated in The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, 2016 (Resolutions), "Any time a child enters a childcare ministry program housed in a church, expectations are raised regarding quality of the program, behavior of the childcare staff and church

staff, and adherence to the Christian doctrines of love and justice."

The need is there, like at Bartlesville First UMC, where the waiting list at Kids First, its full-time daycare center, nearly matches its enrollment. According to Lisa Mackie, director, the center has 60 on the waiting list, and 66 kids enrolled. Across Bartlesville, which has a population around 40,000, East Cross UMC has an early childhood center enrolling between 55 and 60 children in its part-time program.

"We've had this as a ministry since 1985," said Coleen Williams, director at East Cross Early Childhood Center. "We're a part time program, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. We're a luxury; parents don't need us five days a week like they do at Kids First." Even so, East Cross has at least 10 kids

on its waiting list.

Williams added, “DHS is doing commercials and ads, trying to promote child care businesses. There are grant monies in child care deserts.” She clarified, “There’s money to start; it’s just finding the workers.” It’s not always easy to find experienced caregivers who can afford to work part-time.

First UMC Enid has two part-time daycare programs. It hosts the Learning Tree, a licensed facility operating 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Over 160 children are enrolled, and there is a waiting list. The program grew by leaps and bounds, with only 50 children five years ago. The church offers an after-school program that steps in to help during after-school hours when children are out of school but parents are still working.

“The rent is a mission of the church,” said Ginger Diel, director of the Learning Tree. In fact, the daycare and children’s programs grew so fast, the church opened a large, colorful new playground in January.

In Oklahoma, religious child care facilities don’t receive any special exemptions with regard to licensing. Exemptions only apply when a facility operates for a short period of time, like a summer program, or has shortened hours, with 15 or fewer hours per week.

In some states, daycare centers situated inside churches are exempt from licensing requirements, but Oklahoma holds its religious daycare centers to the same standards as others - as it should. According to Resolutions, “Congregations should strive to meet and surpass licensing standards in their state.” Many churches also expect their daycare centers to adhere to Safe Sanctuaries policies, which are often more strict than state licensing policies.

Most churches enter into daycare programs with the intention of serving their communities, but they must first weigh the pros and cons. While daycare centers seem like a way to get young families to join, Mackie doesn’t see that as a large impact on enrollment. “We have a few families that go to church here,” she intoned, “but most of them are outside the church.” This means that churches should consider, as their first reason to start a daycare, fulfilling a need in the community.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Child care is an expensive business. Being inside



First UMC Enid grew its daycare and children’s ministry so fast, it needed a new playground. The congregation raised funds, built a playground, and celebrated with a grand opening.

a church, according to Mackie, is cost-effective. “Being in the church benefits us, due to the fact that we don’t have to pay for the space or the utilities. That doesn’t come out of the daycare’s profit,” she said. Without that rent-free space, the center would not be able to offer such high-quality care.

With the increased building traffic, utilities use, and maintenance, churches should expect increased expenses. In order to be a service to the community, churches often strive to provide low-cost care to children.

Staff, however, is a large expense. Kids First in Bartlesville, according to Mackie, employs 17 teachers, two directors, and a cook. The math suggests a ratio of nearly one adult to every three children, though not all adults are on the premises at the same time. The expense is worth the increased level of care to precious children in the Bartlesville community.

McFarlin United Methodist Church in Norman hosts both a full-time child care program and a Children’s Day Out program, serving 205 children total, with nine to 12-month waiting lists..

If a church wishes to help child care in the community but doesn’t have space or budget to host a daycare center, they can consider “adopting” a daycare, a classroom, or a child. Scholarships are a substantial help for families who can’t meet the gap between the cost of child care and available wages.

SHARING SPACE

Some churches are awash with space, even having wings that are no longer in use. But others, especially churches whose new buildings were

planned in phases before the Covid pandemic was a reality, have minimal space available for ministry involving children.

When that happens, children's ministry and daycare programs are forced to share space. This can work for some programs, but can be problematic for others. When daycare classes meet daily throughout the year, they naturally make the classrooms their own. This leaves Sunday School classes in a difficult position. Do they put their coat on hooks named for other children? Do fourth graders sit in tiny chairs made for preschool children? Are they allowed to use the toys and supplies in the room? These questions were further complicated with the pandemic, when virus could be lurking on every surface.

Most churches have found ways to work around different needs regarding the use of shared space. Whether that workaround is a permanent solution or a make-do situation, it's not always ideal. The grace that is central to United Methodist doctrine is vital to sharing space, even in church settings.

First UMC Enid's dedication to the daycare is influenced by its leadership. Pastor Devon Krause, senior pastor, visits children for chapel each month in his Batman suit. "One little boy came home from school and his dad asked him what he learned about Jesus," Diel said. "Nothing," said the boy. "Batman wasn't there." The running joke is that you can only learn about Jesus when Batman is there.

The funny but effective way to inject Jesus into children's daily lives is just one way First UMC Enid makes the church-daycare relationship a partnership and a common mission.

"Having the childcare programs at McFarlin provides an amazing opportunity for community connection, involvement and engagement, as well as church growth," said Justine Martin, director. "For us, we're investing in what we hope is going to be the change that goes out into the world and makes it better for us all."



First UMC Enid's new playground was too enticing for some little ones.

LIABILITY

Churches hosting daycare centers or drop-in programs are required to fulfill state licensing requirements. They are also expected to carry liability insurance policies. Resolutions states that a church "cannot divorce itself, either morally or legally, from what takes place in its building through childcare ministry programs." Therefore, the actions of a church-hosted daycare center are reflections of the church itself.

United Methodist churches require background checks, reference checks, and training for all staff and volunteers working with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults. The training, through Safe Sanctuaries and MinistrySafe, is an ideal way to prevent child abuse or allegations of child abuse in churches. Even exempt programs, like summer or short-week programs, should meet this requirement for staff. Additionally, the state requires a more extensive background check for non-exempt daycare staff.

THE FUTURE

Children are the most important resource on earth. This is especially true in children's ministry



and a child care setting. To take the best possible care of children, communities have to be prepared by offering quality care with well-trained staff, clean facilities, and manageable costs. Churches must see child care as an extended ministry of the church and not a funnel for young families to join the church, a way to make revenue, or a job that someone has to do.

Churches with daycares should plan to advocate for children and childcare in the community, the state, the nation, and the world. According to Resolutions, “Going beyond the congregation, United Methodists should be diligent advocates for childcare nationwide.” This includes staying informed on public policies regarding children and advocating for children within all levels of government.



Children and families came together at McFarlin for its fall family event. Two little girls dance on the lawn.

HOW TO HELP

According to the Center for American Progress (CAP), child care deserts are “areas in which licensed child care supply is far short of the population of children.”

CAP performed a study on infant and toddler care across the country, finding that there are four children under age three for every licensed child care slot, meaning that only 23 percent of the population in need of child care has a provider.

Additionally, infant care costs approximately the same as college tuition, with subsidies available

for only a fraction of those who can’t afford that expense.

Child care centers struggle to find and keep workers. That workforce often accepts a much lower wage, since there is very little profit in childcare, and centers struggle to balance their tuition versus paying livable wages, not to mention benefits.

Churches with the capacity to start daycare centers can help keep costs down by offering child care on their premises. Another option for churches is to offer low-cost rent or free rent to individuals interested in opening child care centers.

Oklahoma DHS offers startup grants for licensed daycare centers (see box, page 11). Other grants, loans, and funding sources can be found through CAP, DHS, Small Business Administration, and other funding sources.

Of course, these proposals should not be taken lightly; prayer and discussion should be very serious, as it is a large undertaking. Congregations that make the decision to start a daycare center will have many added responsibilities, liabilities, and hard work.

The reward for such work is stewardship of the greatest resource on earth, God’s children.

“The way I look at it,” said Diel, “is you have to pay the bills either way. You can keep it empty, or you can fill it with 160 kids.”

Child Care Desert Startup Grants Available from DHS

Applications are available for startup funding for new child care centers serving families in identified child care desert counties. At the time of this article, 34 counties in Oklahoma are considered child care deserts.

For more information, email Casey White at Casey.White@okdhs.org or call 405-313-8215. The deadline for application is July 31, 2023, or when funds are depleted.



Safe Sanctuaries

Policies to help churches thrive

Churches want to keep children safe. There is no denying that fact. Church leadership and congregations are dedicated to making young disciples into happy, healthy adults. No church is in the business of putting children in harm's way.

Unfortunately, good intentions don't always lead to good outcomes. Children can be exposed to people and situations that are unsafe, and church staff and volunteers can't always tell which is which.

It's a reality that some people, whether intentionally or not, are not suited to working with children. Those same people sometimes seek out children. And a lack of a criminal record - or a gut feeling - is not the best indicator of whether a person might harm a child.

While church leaders are in the business of giving grace and trust freely, there needs to be more than a pinch of caution packaged with that gift.

Safe Sanctuaries is the best way to protect children from abuse. It's also in place to protect workers and volunteers from false allegations. Every church should have a policy on file that reflects its practice of Safe Sanctuaries. Actually, every church must.

According to Rev. Derrek Belase, "It is vitally important that churches review their process every year as a part of their charge conference paperwork." This means that a Safe Sanctuaries policy isn't just a box to tick off, but a necessary part of every United Methodist church's identity.

Belase continued, "You have heard me say this before, 'If you're local church doesn't have a Safe Sanctuary policy, you don't have one.' In other words, each local church needs to know and implement their policies." If a church isn't sure about its policy, or what steps to take to implement it, the conference is glad to provide assistance.



In the wake of the change to MinistrySafe for Safe Sanctuaries training, there has been some confusion about what churches should do and whether they need to change their Safe Sanctuaries policies.

"We have certainly made some adjustments to our policies in light of the settlement with the Boy Scouts, but these policies are vital regardless. We need to do our best to protect children, youth and vulnerable adults," intoned Belase.

Churches should continue to strive to perfect their Safe Sanctuaries policies. MinistrySafe is a tool to aid in training staff and volunteers in the way to implement Safe Sanctuaries policies, and is also a way to easily do background and reference checks.

To learn more about MinistrySafe, and to see sample Safe Sanctuaries policies, go to okumc.org/safe_sanctuary.

To get assistance with creating and implementing your policy, contact dbelase@okumc.org.



**“WE LOOKED AROUND BUT KEPT COMING BACK.
EPWORTH WAS IN OUR HEARTS.”**

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EPWORTH VILLA
A Life Plan Community



A Port in a Storm

Twelve Oklahoma United Methodist churches have officially trained and voted to serve as lighthouse congregations.

These congregations have adopted a resolution to serve members whose churches disaffiliated. In an effort to ensure members don't have to suffer a second disaffiliation, these churches have committed to staying with the UMC.

The list will grow as more church leaders are trained.

For more information about Lighthouse congregations, or to learn how to become a Lighthouse congregation, contact Roger Parker at rparker@okumc.org or 405-530-2083.

Oklahoma Official Lighthouse Congregations

Norman St. Stephens UMC

Norman, OK
Heartland District

OKC Putnam City UMC

Putnam City
Crossroads District

OKC Village UMC

Oklahoma City
Crossroads District

OKC Wesley UMC

Oklahoma City
Crossroads District

Panhandle Centenary UMC

Goodwell
Cimarron District

Ponca City First UMC

Ponca City
Northern Prairie District

Quail Springs UMC

Oklahoma City
Crossroads District

Tulsa Community Brookside UMC

Tulsa
Council Oak District

Tulsa St. Paul's UMC

Tulsa
Council Oak District

Verdigris UMC

Verdigris
Green Country District

Woodward Faith UMC

Woodward
Cimarron District

Woodward New Horizon UMC

Woodward
Cimarron District

Oklahoma Annual Conference News

ANNUAL CONFERENCE | MAY 22-25

Hosted by Boston Avenue United Methodist Church for the first time in six years, this year's conference is a form of homecoming.

The theme is One in Christ, in Ministry to the World, based on 1st Corinthians 12:12-13.

The special offering is for Manos Juntas, which provides safety, education, and enrichment for children living on the border of Mexico and the United States.

This year's education opportunity will educate participants on the story of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.

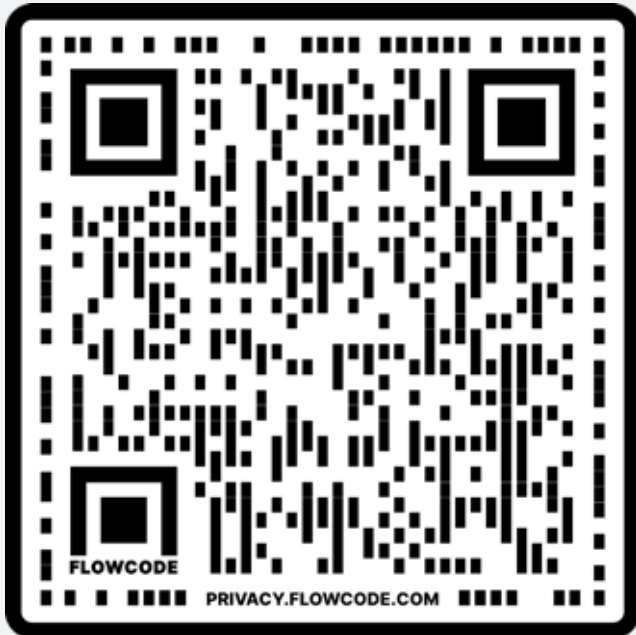
Greenwood Rising is a museum dedicated to bringing light to the horrors of the destruction of Black Wall Street. After 100 years of silence on the issue, history has been exposed, which allows for reconciliation and acknowledgment of

CALLED CONFERENCE | OCTOBER 13-14

This conference location is still to be determined. Voters will be required to pre-register and vote in person.

The business of the October conference is to vote on the 2024 budget and disaffiliations.

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