

FYI...

Survey Ranks UM's

United Methodists rank highest in favorability among five different faith groups in a new survey conducted by the Southern Baptist Convention's research arm.

The research shows United Methodists are held in more favorable regard by the U.S. public than Catholics, Southern Baptists, Mormons or Muslims, according to LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Methodists are well liked — and there is great opportunity if Methodist churches will seize the opportunity that this positive perception provides," said Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research. "If they will show and share the gospel with their neighbors and plant evangelistic churches ... they can turn a good reputation into a gospel opportunity."

The study was conducted in September after the president of the Southern Baptist Convention appointed a task force to consider a possible name change for his denomination.

It's Happening at Choctaw UMC!**Leadership Retreat January 7**

All leaders elected for 2012 are invited to our annual Leadership Retreat held at the church.

This will be an important start to the new year as we get to know each other better, commit ourselves to God's vision for our church, and plan for the coming year.

We'll begin with a meal at 6 p.m. The Gwartneys will keep an Epiphany tradition by preparing waffles for all attending.

Participants can bring an accompanying dish if they wish, but it is not necessary. Childcare is available by reservation.

The evening will conclude by 9 p.m. Contact Pastor Charla to RSVP.

January 22: Discovery Begins

Discover a deeper understanding of faith, what it means to be United Methodist, and how you can belong to Choctaw UMC.

For six Sundays beginning Jan. 22, Pastor Charla will lead this discovery. We'll meet from 10–10:35 a.m. each Sunday morning, Jan. 22–Feb. 26.

Childcare is available during each session. Participants are encouraged to attend all six sessions.

You can register online (choctawumc.com) or on your Connection Card in worship.

Meeting Night, Jan. 8

Our first meeting night of 2012 will include many important items of business, including organization for the coming year and introduction of new committee members.

SPR, Trustees and Children's Council meet at 5 p.m. Finance and the Program Team meet at 6 p.m. Ad Council will meet at 7 p.m.

If you are beginning a term on any of the above committees, please join them for the first meeting of the year.

UMW Meets Jan. 10

The United Methodist Women will have its first meeting of the year Jan. 10 at 7 p.m.

All ladies are invited to this special meeting where our programs will be decided for the coming year and plans will be made on which projects and missions to support.

Light refreshments and childcare will be provided.

We also want to thank everyone for helping with our Angel Tree and Child Share gifts.

Forty-five children received presents from our congregation. You also helped make the coat drive a success with almost 50 coats donated.

Confirmation Jan. 22

Confirmands and mentors, we'll meet right after the second service on Jan. 22. The topic is, "Worship and Prayer." You won't want to miss this special time together.

Worship Services Return to 8:30 & 10:45 a.m. Jan. 8

2012 Budget Update

We begin the New Year with a smaller budget than last year, smaller by \$23,000. Our leadership has long been committed to a balanced budget, which means our expected income has to equal our expected expenses.

This year, our pledged income remained flat and our fixed costs rose, so we had to make painful cuts to other areas of our budget.

As 2012 begins, we will lose two staff positions.

We bid farewell to Ms. Martha Lane who has served as our accompanist for almost two decades.

We also lost the position of nursery coordinator. Ms. Carol Ryan has filled this position since its inception.

Carol has graciously agreed to continue this position as a volunteer. Our church is indebted to her for continuing to give her gifts to our youngest members.

In addition to these staff positions, we had to cut financial support for the Mother's Day Out program, cut anticipated raises for remaining staff, cut support for many program areas, including our annual outreach event, PumpkinFest.

Cutting costs is current reality for many households and businesses in our community and in our nation.

It is hard to face that reality, but the leadership of our church didn't want to delay a decision and face a bigger crisis in six months.

A spirit of prayer pervaded the discussions and continues to pervade the seeking of God's vision and direction for 2012.

Church Website Offers Sermons

Audio from each Sunday's sermon is ready to listen to by the time you get home from worship.

The sermon is an MP3 file that can be played by most computers and mobile devices.

The Choctaw UMC website, choctawumc.com, also is a mobile enabled site. This means smartphones, like iPhones or Android devices, get a view of the homepage made for easy reading.

Mobile users can also get to the sermons by selecting that category while visting the church homepage.

Sharing a link to a sermon is also easy. There are buttons for many social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter. Sharing a sermon with a friend is a great way to introduce them to the church.

LIFE'S NOTICINGS

BY REV. CHARLA GWARTNEY, PASTOR

pastor@choctawumc.com

The last two months of 2011 held many difficult decisions. As your pastor, I've felt the weight of facing these decisions.

It has not been easy for me and I know it has not been easy for the elected leaders of our church either.

Back in March, we pushed ahead with plans to add three services to our Sunday morning schedule because we believed it provided a path for continued growth.

We could accommodate more people in worship, and add much needed Sunday school classes during the 11:00 hour. It was hard to watch our 9:40 service falter and the second Sunday school hour not take off.

Back in October, we pushed ahead with a budget that incorporated rising fixed costs and still planned for growth. The leadership and I knew it was a step of faith, but one we felt we had to take.

It was hard to cut next year's budget, including cutting staff positions, when it was clear we couldn't financially support it.

I'm writing this just a few days before the dawning of a New Year. This morning I was praying about the struggle I've felt, particularly in the last month of 2011.

I must admit, my prayer included some complaining, but it was mostly a petition. God, show us the way! Point us in the right direction. Where we've strayed, put us back on track.

The response came loud and clear for me, "Charla, what ever made you think this was supposed to be easy?" I argued a bit, "But things have gone so well. Did I miss something?"

Still, the response was firm, "Let me say this again—what ever made you think this was supposed to be easy? Don't you think Jesus faced significant challenges? Don't you think his disciples faced the same as they built the Church?"

I wish I could offer you, my brothers and sisters in the faith, the assurance that things will be easier in 2012. I cannot.

I can offer you the final word I heard from God in my prayer this morning, "Even when it is hard, there is no better cause to be sold out for than mine!"

events

JANUARY 2011

SAVE THE DATE:

Valentine's Dinner – Save the Date

The youth will host a special Valentine's Dinner on Feb. 12 for couples and families in our church. Save the date.



Jan. 1 10:00 a.m. Covenant Renewal Service	Jan. 8 5:00 p.m. Meeting Night	Jan. 19 1:00 p.m. Staff Meeting
Jan. 3 7:00 p.m. Scout Leaders' Meeting	Jan. 9 9:00 p.m. Piece Makers	Jan. 22 12:15 p.m. Confirmation Class
Jan. 4 7:00 p.m. Youth Worship & Band Rehearsal	Jan. 10 7:00 p.m. UMW	Jan. 23 9:00 p.m. Piece Makers
Jan. 6 6:00 p.m. Leadership Retreat	Jan. 17 6:30 p.m. UMM	Jan. 24 6:30 p.m. Circle of Grace
Jan. 8 12:15 p.m. Education Team Meeting	Jan. 19 12:00 p.m. Young at Heart	Jan. 28 8:00 a.m. Re-ignite/LCLW at St. Luke's

SUNDAY

8:30 a.m. Worship
9:45 a.m. Sunday School
10:45 a.m. Worship
4 p.m. UMY (begins 1/15)

MONDAY

3:30 p.m. After School Tutoring (begins Jan. 23)

TUESDAY

9 a.m. Tuesday Morning Group

9:30 a.m. Mother's Day Out (begins Jan. 10)

WEDNESDAY

9:30 a.m. Mother's Day Out
11 a.m. Mobile Meals
3:30 p.m. After School Tutoring
5:30 p.m. Pre-K Choir (starts Jan. 18)

5:45 p.m. Handbell Practice (starts Jan. 18)
6:45 p.m. Choir Rehearsal

7:45 p.m. Band Rehearsal

THURSDAY

9:30 a.m. Mother's Day Out
6:45 p.m. Exercise Your Faith

FRIDAY

6:30 p.m. Cub Scouts (start Jan. 13)

THE LOVE LETTER

CHOCTAW UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

www.choctawumc.com

New Focus: Local Church Leaders' Workshop

Although the long-established Local Church Leaders' Workshops have been open to any interested persons, many classes sought to train laity in specific leadership posts.

For 2012, "we are being more intentional; we want people to know the workshops are open to all," said Aly Shahan, Conference coordinator of Re-Ignite.

"The training will have more of a rally feel. We are even being intentional about organized, energized worship. We understand these events are the face of the Conference to many people."

Re-Ignite, for North and South Oklahoma City district participants, will be held Saturday, Jan. 28 at St. Luke's United Methodist Church. Bishop Hayes will be preaching and leading worship at the Oklahoma City event.

All persons holding a leadership position for 2012 are encouraged to attend. Registrations will be available at the Leadership Retreat and through Pastor Charla.

New Year Brings New Look at the Bible

Beginning Jan. 22, we'll start a journey through 100 essential passages of scripture. Fifty passages from the Old Testament begin the journey, and 50 passages from the New Testament lead us through the end of May 2012.

Each week, we'll read five key passages together. Then, Pastor Charla will focus her sermon on the overarching themes of the readings, considering the specifics of one passage in particular.

There are many ways to follow this plan of 100 essential passages. You can read them online, or on paper.

You can track your progress in your Sunday school class or on your own. Reading guides will be available for everyone at church.

If you've never read all the way through the Bible, this is a great opportunity to join your church family and dig in to the scriptures.

January through May might seem like a long-time, but it is less than the blink of an eye when it comes to the scriptures. Commit with us to E100 as the New Year begins.



Worship Schedule Changes Jan. 8

Our worship times will change on Jan. 8 as we go back to two services on Sunday morning.

The early worship service will feature traditional hymns and Holy Communion each week with a start time, 8:30 a.m.

The late worship service will feature both hymns and praise music, with Holy Communion once a month.

The late service will start at 10:45 a.m. Sunday School will be offered at 9:45 a.m.

Youth to Lead Jan. 8 Services

Have you ever wanted to ask God a really hard question? The theme for Youth Sunday, Jan. 8, is "Tough Questions."

Both 8:30 and 10:45 a.m. services will be led by our youth. They will bring us some new ideas and incorporate

meaningful traditions like Holy Communion.

The youth are passionate about this theme and they invite you to come with your questions. We will experience worship together in a new way.

Committed, Caring Christians



Choctaw United Methodist Church

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