AU scholarship named to honor Stroud UMC pastor

A scholarship at Africa University has been named in honor of a graduate currently serving the United Methodist church in Stroud.

Gérard Nsabimana, who earned a bachelor's degree in agriculture in 2002, said the honor was very humbling.

“I could not imagine when I was sharing my story with other people I met, that somebody would find it appropriate to go ahead and establish a scholarship in my honor,” Nsabimana said. “I am so grateful and humbled that somebody else heard my story—and that it might be a story from someone else you might get to know—that they wanted to see how they could get more students to achieve their educational goals.”

James and Lou Ann McKimmy, neighbors of the family who helped arrange for Nsabimana to come to the United States to pursue graduate studies, endowed a scholarship in his honor in 2017. The following year he was inducted into the university’s legacy society, the first graduate to receive the honor.

Nsabimana fled warfare in his native country of Burundi in 1995 before enrolling in AU in 1997. He believes the scholarships he received as a student made his education possible.

“Without a scholarship, there’s no way I would have been able to graduate from Africa University,” he said.

Albright UMW makes 172 Christmas stockings

BY ROYCE CALDRON

The United Methodist Women’s group from Albright have sewed and decorated 172 Christmas stockings by hand to give out during the Christmas season.

The completed stockings will be taken to the Cookson Hills Center in eastern Oklahoma where they will be “stuffed” at the UMW Toole Tyme event. Stockings will be given to clients when they shop at the Cookson Hills Center Christmas store in December.

The Cookson Hills Center has been a significant part of the mission work of the UMW in Oklahoma since 1948. The primary target groups for their services are rural low-income people in Northeastern Oklahoma, primarily Native Americans of the Cherokee tribe.

In addition to the ladies of the church, the girls of local Girl Scout troop 2170 assisted in helping decorate the stockings. The local troop is under the leadership of Sara Palmer.

OKUMC announces emergency health insurance contribution increase for local churches

The Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church has announced an emergency increase of local church contributions for health insurance coverage.

Without immediate increases, the conference’s self-funded health insurance reserves could become insolvent in 2019.

“In other words, we might not be able to pay claims,” said Charla Gwartney, who chairs the Board of Pension and Health Benefits for the OKUMC. “It could result in immediate loss of coverage for all participants.”

SEE HEALTH INSURANCE ON PAGE 8

Lay nominations to General Conference 2020 open in January!

SEE PAGE 7
By Bishop Jimmy Nunn

One of the bishops from the Congo shared the story of how he met and married his wife. He believed that God had a purpose for his life. So, he studied the Bible every day. He met a young lady and quickly fell in love. He became her Bible teacher. He was always quoting scripture, praying, encouraging her to be more godly. It was the perfect match. Or so he thought. One day she informed him that she did not want to marry the Bible.

He did not give up so easily, however. He began to pray and felt God was pulling the two of them together. He learned to relate better and things progressed. When he asked her father for the hand of his bride, he was overjoyed. The father-in-law had not specified what kind of goats. So, he set out for the journey. He knocked at the door, presented the money, the food, and the dowry. The response was swift. "You want skinny goats? She is worth more than that."

The essential ingredient of preparation is hope.

He left feeling dejected. And as he left he prayed. "God, I feel I have heard your voice telling me that this woman is to be my wife. Show me the goats."

To make a much longer story short, he found two goats that were well fed, plump goats, worthy of being part of a dowry. And he married his wife.

At first glance, this story reveals the deep cultural differences of United Methodists around the world. But it is also a story of faith, with insights that bridge cultural divides.

This season of Advent, it is easy to focus on the "skinny goats." Jesus gave us a mission to make disciples of all people. We have received a wonderful inheritance through our Methodist tradition. Yet, we worry about personal and family problems, rising costs, division within the church, and the increasing secular society around us. Those worries are skinny goats not worthy of our calling.

The word Advent means "coming." Our job is to prepare for that coming of Jesus Christ. The essential ingredient of preparation is hope.

When my colleague left his future father in law, he left dejected. But he had depended on someone else to find the goats. This was really his job. And when he shook off dejection and began to look around, he found what he needed.

Have we sent someone else to look for our "goats"? Are we dejected because others have failed to do what we were tasked to do?

We are people of hope! Now let's find the worthy goats!

Bishop Scholar Application Now Open

High school seniors who feel called to ministry and who are interested in studying in the Oklahoma City University Wimberly School of Religion are encouraged to apply for the prestigious Bishop Scholar Award.

This full-tuition scholarship is awarded to up to three applicants each year and is good for four years of undergraduate studies at OCU. All students who apply for the Bishop Scholar Award and qualify for admittance are awarded scholarships ranging from 60-80% of tuition. Application information and forms can be found at www.okcu.edu/bishopsscholar. The deadline for all materials is Feb. 1.

OCU holiday shows make the season bright

The fall semester at OCU will come to a close with some fun holiday performances.

The American Spirit Dance Company’s annual “Home for the Holidays” showcases the school’s world-renown program with a high-energy show filled with holiday spirit.

The theatre department is performing “Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley,” a sequel to Jane Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice” set two years after the novel and centered on middle sister Mary and the family’s Christmas gathering at Pemberley.

And the music department is offering two performances of their annual Vespers concert featuring more than 250 singers and orchestral musicians, scripture reading, poetry, and congregational singing of favorite carols.

The performances run Thursday, Dec. 6 through Sunday, Dec. 9 with evening and afternoon matinees. Tickets for these shows and all of the spring offerings are available for purchase through the OCU online box office at www.okcu.edu/tickets.
Canyon Camp raising funds for nurse’s station

David Combs, director of Canyon Camp, stands near the concrete foundation where the new nurse’s station will be built. The camp has raised nearly half of the $40,000 they need to complete the project.

BY MEAGAN EWTON

Canyon Camp is raising $40,000 for a new nurse’s station that they hope to build in time for the summer season, according to Director David Combs.

The camp began to focus on fundraising for the cabin this fall by reaching out to churches and individuals in western Oklahoma. Combs said the camp has seen gifts ranging from $100 to $1,000, so far totaling nearly half of the needed funds.

“Out of the last two months, we’ve raised close to $20,000,” he said. “The response has been great.”

The new station will be adjacent to the dean’s cabin, centralizing leadership and medical services for camp-goes. The former station was torn down to allow for construction of Milburn Cabin, which was dedicated in 2015. Since that time, the nurse’s station has operated out of the dean’s cabin, requiring schedule adjustments and alternate accommodations for camp deans. Combs said nurses who serve on the camp site’s advisory board and have volunteered as camp nurses have helped provide input for the new cabin, including feedback on materials and layout.

“It’ll be a nicer facility for nurses to administer first aid,” Combs said.

In addition to raising funds, the camp is inviting volunteers to help construct the cabin. The work will be supervised by board members who have volunteered their construction experience for the project. Combs said a few groups already have committed to the work, though final dates have not yet been set.

“We are currently looking at having several weekends in the spring that volunteer work groups can come spend the day if they want to or spend the night,” he said. “But what we’re really hoping is whether it is a youth group, a men’s group, or a women’s group, just come and enjoy a nice spring day, and think a little bit about missions and help us out.”

How to donate to the nurse’s station project

- Mail donations directly to the camp at 31600 Camp Rd, Hinton, OK 73047
- Make checks out to Canyon Camp
- Include “Nurse’s Station Project” in the memo line

For more information or to get involved, call the camp at 405-542-6967 or email canyoncamp@okumc.org.

Contact goes digital in January

BY DR. JOE HARRIS, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY

In the November 2018 issue we informed you about the changes that will occur in the new year related to the printed edition of Contact newspaper.

To summarize, next month we will discontinue the printed edition of the Contact and expand a new digital edition, reinventing how we offer news and information to the annual conference. The digital newspaper will be emailed to all United Methodists in Oklahoma, and if you do not receive a copy in January, please contact the communications office. We are also working toward the goal of having the Contact available on our annual conference app, which you can download free from iTunes or the Google Play store.

One new feature of the digital Contact will be submitted book reviews. Submissions should be between 250-500 words and include a brief synopsis of the book. Reviews must be submitted to the editor; deadlines are available upon request. As always, we reserve the right to accept, decline and edit submitted reviews.

We will also launch a quarterly printed magazine in 2019 which will be sent to designated local church leaders. Both the magazine and the Contact will be available to download as a PDF on the conference website; the PDF may be printed at the reader’s discretion.

Your Communications Ministry’s mission is to follow the example of Christ Jesus in all we do. We seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ by informing, communicating, resourcing, researching, training and educating in media relations and crisis communications. We continue to be in dynamic relationship with conference entities, local churches, individual United Methodists and civic leaders. We pray that these new resources will help every local church in its mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Book reviews may be submitted by email to editor@okumc.org.

CALLING ALL SANTAS!

This Christmas season, help Oklahomans in need with your end-of-year contributions.

Any donation made to NSO will support our multiple housing programs for women and children, mentally ill adults, and young men who have aged out of foster care. There are so many individuals and families relying on us to deliver hope. Can you help? Please make a difference today!

Donations can be sent to
431 SW 11th Street Oklahoma City, OK 73109
or online at nsookc.org
Celebrating the holidays with Thanksgiving giving

How United Methodist churches in Oklahoma shared Thanksgiving with their communities

BY TABITHA BECKMAN

Oklahoma City

In the fellowship hall at OKC-Wesley, a large group of current and former residents of Exodus House and their families gathered for a Thanksgiving meal.

Exodus House is a residential re-entry program for people coming out of incarceration operated by Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries. CJAMM operates the temporary housing program in Oklahoma City and in Tulsa.

Members of OKC-Wesley and Exodus House sponsors provided the food, set out the meal, and donated Christmas decorations for the residents to take home. After the meal, residents and their families will choose which decorations they want to decorate their apartments for Christmas; every resident gets a Christmas tree.

Robin Wertz, the Oklahoma City site director for Exodus House, says it all started when a program graduate set up a Christmas gathering for the residents.

Over time, a celebration for Thanksgiving was added, and the gathering moved to OKC-Wesley to better accommodate everyone.

“At Exodus house we have 18 people in a little room, so that wasn’t working for us,” Wertz said. “Wesley has always been so gracious.”

Epworth Villa

The residents of Epworth Villa, a continuing care retirement community in Oklahoma City, have a strong commitment to giving back to their community. Each year the Sunday School Class at Epworth Villa continues a tradition of donating the overage of funds from their account to local organizations. This year, the class decided to donate $3,000 in $1,000 increments to three local nonprofits:

- Alzheimer’s Association (Oklahoma Chapter) to continue their work on the fight against Alzheimer’s Disease;
- Circle of Care—to continue providing resources for children in foster care;
- Skyline Urban Ministries—to continue impacting lives, restoring dignity, and empowering those in need.

Lawton

Every year Lawton-Centenary’s United Methodist Men collect items for holiday baskets. They put out boxes around the church to collect food items from the congregation, and the UMM donates the turkeys. They put together 50 boxes for Thanksgiving and 50 for Christmas, delivering them to people in the community, including families from the local elementary school where church members help with tutoring.

Tulsa

On the day before Thanksgiving, dozens of community volunteers joined together at Restore Hope Ministries in Tulsa to prepare and distribute over 668 Thanksgiving baskets to families in crisis. Volunteers of all ages and from diverse backgrounds come together and stood shoulder-to-shoulder to pack the baskets and place them in the hands of their neighbors in need.

“Many of the families we help are working hard, low to middle income families who are getting by, but just need a little extra help when unexpected events or expenses arise,” said Executive Director Jeff Jaynes. “We are here to give them a hand up when they’ve fallen on hard times, to restore hope that a better day is possible.”

Thanks to the generosity of Tulsa community sponsors, Restore Hope Ministries has provided Thanksgiving baskets to families in crisis for almost 30 years. The 21-ingredient baskets include a turkey and all the trimmings, from fresh produce to dessert.

Ponca City

Ponca City-First’s M&M kids delivered 947 pounds of food to their local food bank for Thanksgiving.

Children from Ponca City-First help deliver 947 pounds of food to their local food bank for Thanksgiving.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CATHE GILLILAND

Exodus House family members gather around a table at OKC-Wesley to enjoy a homemade Thanksgiving feast. After the meal, Exodus House residents selected Christmas decorations for their apartments.

PHOTO BY TABITHA BECKMAN
Moved to **SERVE**

Our response to God’s call continues.

The foundation of The United Methodist Church has always been to follow God’s call of making disciples of Jesus Christ. We do that in many ways and many places. Yesterday. Today. Forever.

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Learn more at umc.org/movement
Epworth Villa was founded by and is affiliated with the Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church.

**In January, the Contact goes digital!**

There are three ways to make sure you can access the latest news from the Oklahoma Conference by following these easy steps:

- **Subscribe to the Contact Digest** at okumc-reg.brapp.com/ContactDigest
- **Download the Oklahoma UMC App** on the Apple Store or on Google Play
- **Browse stories online** at www.okumc.org/newsarchive

**Submit your event or job post to editor@okumc.org.**

Submission deadline for the Jan. 11 issue is Dec. 20.

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**Challenge grant matches up to $25,000 for independent living program**

Circle of Care is raising $25,000 to match a $25,000 challenge grant from the Paul Milburn Gift Fund at the Oklahoma City Community Foundation. This grant will benefit the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Program, an independent living program for disadvantaged youth age 16-25.

“IF DHS can’t find a foster home, they have to take you to a shelter,” said PAL participant Jonathan. “You feel like no one wants you because people don’t want broken.”

After leaving his last foster home, Jonathan applied for the PAL program to prevent him from shelter hopping. Doing so also helped him move past his heartache and focus on personal and professional goals. “They have helped me so much,” he said. “There are people here you can talk to.”

Jonathan graduated in May 2017 as an honor student in high school, and now is in his second year at the University of Oklahoma working toward a Bachelors in Mechanical Engineering.

To help Circle of Care meet this challenge, contact Sarah Steffes at 405-215-1400 or visit circleofcare.org/ministries/pal.

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**Employment**

- Director of Christian Formation and Education. Bartlesville-First, full-time. Please contact greg.tener@bartlesvillefirstchurch.com.
- Director of Youth Ministries. Bartlesville-First, part-time. Contact greg.tener@bartlesvillefirstchurch.com.
- Foster Care Recruiter/Trainer. Circle of Care, Oklahoma City, full-time. Description and requirements at circleofcare.org/careers. Send resume, cover letter and application with references to careers@circleofcare.org.
- Support Specialist. Circle of Care, Oklahoma City, full-time. Description and requirements found online at circleofcare.org/careers. Send resume, cover letter and application with references to careers@circleofcare.org.
- Director of Financial Services. Tulsa-Boston Avenue, full-time. Bachelor’s degree and five years’ experience in accounting required; non-profit or church experience preferred. Please email resume and cover letter to angelyndale@bostonavenue.org.
- Children’s Director. OKC-Lakeside, part-time. For more information or to apply, contact Rev. Randy McGuire at lakesideumc.pastor@coxinet.net or call 405-843-5777.
- Bass and Tenor Section Leaders for Choir. Moore-First, part-time, paid college internships. For more information, please contact Ginny Pass at 405-794-6751.
- Administrative Assistant. Tulsa-Memorial, part-time. Send resume to pastor.mdmuc@tulsacoxmail.com.
- Director of Music Ministries. Tulsa-Memorial, part-time. Send resume to pastor.mdmuc@tulsacoxmail.com.

**Save the Date**

**Circle of Care Sunday**

Dec. 16

**Ministry Center Closed for Christmas and New Year Holidays**

Dec. 24-25 and Jan. 1

Self-nominations open for 2020 General Conference

Jan. 14

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**Passages**

Rev. William (Bill) Moss passed away on Nov. 10. Moss served as an OKUMC pastor for 35 years. A service was held at Claremore-First on Nov. 16.
Blue Christmas honors grief and loss during the holidays

BY MEAGAN EWTON

“I’ve not the most wonderful time of the year for everyone.”

For pastors like Nathan Mattox, this statement is more than a casual acknowledgement; it’s a call to care for those who have experienced loss during the holidays with a special kind of worship service: Blue Christmas.

Blue Christmas services offer people who have experienced loss during the holidays a safe place to grieve. Tulsa-University, the church Mattox pastors, uses the phrases to acknowledge that the holiday season feels painful or empty for a lot of people.

“Whatever the case may be, the holidays can be grief-ridden for some,” Mattox said. “This is the church’s attempt to minister to those people when we, too, are gearing up for the holidays.”

At Tulsa-University, the service is called The Longest Night and is held on the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. Mattox said meeting together on the longest night of the year to acknowledge the darkness people feel is something attendees find meaningful.

Blue Christmas service styles vary by church. While Mattox prefers to hold the special service in the narthex to represent the emotional distance people may feel during the holidays, Mark Whitley prefers to host “A Service of Long Shadows” in a darkly-lit sanctuary the Sunday evening before Christmas. Whitley, who pastors Collinsville-Meadowcreek, said he kept the sanctuary open for an hour after the service last year and was surprised at how many people chose to stay and sit quietly after the service was over.

“Nobody came forward; those who did went to the altar, not in the back of the sanctuary with the pastor to pray,” Whitley said. “We don’t use the sanctuary as a place of refuge as often as we could to allow the church, unencumbered by worship and preaching, just to be a place of refuge to encounter the holy spirit.”

Jeni Markham Clewell, associate pastor at OKC-Mosaic, said spending Christmas at a hospital while her son was sick made her more aware of how differently people can experience the holiday season.

“There’s a need for people to have an alternative experience when they’re not feeling happy and jolly, and to give them that opportunity in church just makes sense,” Markham Clewell said. “I think it takes courage to go counter to everything about the holidays and say ‘I’m feeling lost’ or ‘I’m feeling sad.’”

The pastors believe there’s a real need for Blue Christmas services to provide safety, encouragement and hope during the holiday season. However, they caution against using the service as an evangelistic or connectional opportunity.

“Create the space and let the liturgy and the silence allow people to encounter the holy spirit and the holy spirit to encounter them,” said Whitley. “It’s not about us being the vessels for healing; it’s about creating the space for the healing to happen, even without us.”

“It’s hard for us as pastors,” Markham Clewell said. “We want to ‘fix’ people who are feeling sad or people who are feeling depressed; just to honor it and acknowledge it is a harder path.”

“Think of this service as a stand-alone gift to the community, not as an entree to get people to get involved in Christmas Eve or the church,” Mattox said. “It’s not a welcome mat; it’s a source for strength in the midst of the season.”

Resource to develop a Blue Christmas service can be found on the UMC Discipleship website at www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/blue-christmas.

Blue Christmas services offer those who have experienced loss during the holidays a safe and holy place to grieve. “What that service does, and what I try to do, is try to create a space of safety so they can be vulnerable to the workings of the holy spirit as they need it,” said Whitley.

Self-nominations for GC 2020 lay delegates opens Jan. 14

Lay church members who wish to represent the Oklahoma Conference in 2020 are invited to nominate themselves for election as Lay Delegates.

The nomination process will open online beginning Jan. 14, 2019. Those wishing to place their names in nomination are asked to complete the Oklahoma Lay Nominee Profile Form by midnight on March 10.

Chuck Stewart, the current Lay Leader for the conference, describes a delegate’s call as helping the church stay focused on the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

“You participation as a delegate,” Stewart wrote, “will afford you the opportunity not only to worship and fellowship with your global United Methodist family, but also to establish and afirm the polity and principles that guide our church as we seek the Kingdom of God.”

The Oklahoma Conference will elect seven lay and seven clergy delegates to the 2020 General Conference during the 2019 Annual Conference. An additional seven lay and seven clergy delegates also will be elected to serve as alternates to General Conference and as members of the Jurisdictional Conference.

Tradition holds that the “First Elected” delegate will serve as the point person for the entire General Conference delegation; at this election, that person will be a lay delegate.

The Book of Discipline states that lay nominees must be professing United Methodist Church members for at least two years and have participated in the UMC for at least four years by the time of their election; there are no age restrictions.

Stewart encourages lay persons to nominate themselves to serve, warning nominees of the serious work lay delegates must do.

The entire delegation will meet many times to review and educate themselves regarding issues facing the denomination both before and after General Conference, involving significant study and preparation. At General Conference, delegates will meet in committees and as an entire body; alternates will fill in for the main delegates as designated by the leader of the delegation.

“Accepting the call as a delegate representing our annual conference is not something to be taken lightly,” Stewart stated in a letter. “It is my hope that you fully understand the commitment that will be expected from you before you nominate yourself for election.”
There are a number of charitable planning strategies that can help you lower your income and taxes this year. Here are some ways you can shift tax dollars to charitable dollars and support your church or favorite ministry.

**IRA CHARITABLE ROLLOVER**

Congress made permanent the law that allows people age 70½ or older who own an IRA to make cash gifts directly from their IRA to charity. For many people, this is the best tax-wise way to give. An IRA rollover gift will not be included in your taxable income and will qualify for your required minimum distribution.

**OUTRIGHT GIFT OF AN ASSET**

If you wish to make a gift to support your church this year, but are concerned about preserving your cash resources, consider a gift of an appreciated asset. A gift of securities, business interests or real estate can provide you with significant income and capital gains tax savings, often exceeding the benefits of a cash gift.

**DONOR ADVISED FUND (DAF)**

If you are looking for an end-of-year deduction but want more time to make thoughtful giving decisions, consider a donor advised fund (DAF). The Foundation can use your tax deductible gift to establish a DAF in your name. You can make grants from your DAF now and in the future to support the work of your church or chosen ministry.

**ZERO-TAX GIFT AND SALE**

If you are planning to sell an asset like securities, real estate or a business, before you sell, consider a “zero-tax” charitable gift and sale. By making a gift of part of the asset before the sale, you can use a tax-saving charitable deduction to significantly lower or eliminate the capital gains tax on the sale.

**MAY WE HELP?**

If you would like further information on these end-of-year planning strategies, please contact us. We can help you create a plan that meets your needs and goals. Contact David Battles at dbattles@okumf.org or 800-259-6863.