

Welcome, citizen Carlos

'I saw how much they care for me and how proud they are of their country — now mine, too'

BY CARLOS RAMIREZ
LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION,
THE OKLAHOMA CONFERENCE

In January, I became a U.S. citizen. I have been asked to write about my experiences as I went through that process.

In this brief telling, I won't address the complexities, the bad and the ugly, of my story as an immigrant in the United States.

Because we live in an evermore polarized society, I want to emphasize the parts of my story that are full of love and hope. I believe there still is a place to come together, regardless of political or theological perspectives, to be witnesses to the love of Jesus Christ and to celebrate the highest ideals this country was founded upon.

My journey began in 2004. I am a native of Mexico. Twice that year, I applied through the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City to travel to the United States, to visit my fiancée, Wendi Neal of Oklahoma, and to explore enrolling in Perkins School of Theology at Dallas. Both times, I was denied.

At the time, my income was a modest stipend to help with my expenses as a Methodist clergyman serving two rural churches in the Mexican state of Puebla. I did not have any property in my name — no car, house, or bank account — that deemed me worthy of entering the USA.

The failed attempts led to an application for a fiancée visa. As a U.S. citizen, Wendi could seek that type of visa, for a foreign spouse or fiancée.

That succeeded, and I entered the USA on Oct. 25, 2004. The limited fiancée visa required that Wendi and I get married within three months. Officiating at our wedding was Linda Harker, who is now senior pastor of Norman-McFarlin United Methodist Church.

Next step was to file for a Green Card, permitting me to live and work in this country for two years.

Those years were marked by my first U.S. encounters with people who received me with arms wide open, beginning with the Harker and Neal families. And I was appointed to pastor Heavener Hispanic Fellowship and



PHOTO BY LINDA HARKER

At the Homeland Security Office in Oklahoma City, Miguel and Lali join their dad, Carlos Ramirez, for a special occasion photo.

Howe United Methodist Churches.

My work at Heavener impacted me profoundly. I heard many stories from fellow Spanish-speaking immigrants — of experiences good, bad, and ugly — that deepened my understanding of God and of ministry.

Howe UMC, my first cross-cultural appointment, was a joy. The people of that little country church were patient with me as I learned how to preach in English, how

SEE CITIZENSHIP, PAGE 8

3 finalists named for OCU presidency

Oklahoma City University named three finalists on March 13 in its presidential search. The candidates are Martha Burger, Myron Pope and Thom Chesney.

The university's search committee is recommending the finalists for consideration by OCU's Board of Trustees Executive Committee, which in turn plans to recommend a final candidate for confirmation by the full board at the board's next meeting, scheduled for April 25. Ronald Norick chairs the trustees.

OCU President Robert Henry will retire in June after eight years leading the United Methodist-affiliated liberal arts college.

Enrollment totals about 2,500 students from almost every U.S. state and more than 40 other nations, according to the school's website.

■ Burger is a former executive in the energy industry. Most recently she was senior vice president of human and corporate resources at Chesapeake Energy Corp.

She has a long history with OCU, receiving her MBA in 1992 and an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters in 2012. She currently serves as a trustee and chairs the audit and finance committee.

Burger is co-founder of Amethyst Investments LLC and on the board of directors of Tapstone Energy.

■ Pope has worked more than 25 years as a higher education administrator, supervisor, and educator.

For the past five years, he has served as vice president for student affairs at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond.

He holds a B.A. in history, an M.A. in higher education administration, and an Ed.D. in higher education administration, all from the University of Alabama.

■ Chesney has led Brookhaven College in Farmers Branch, Texas, since 2011.

His experience in leadership at higher education institutions includes positions as associate provost for student success and assessment for the University of Texas at Dallas, vice president of academic affairs and provost of Collin College; and additional administrative and faculty roles at the University of Texas at Dallas, Pennsylvania College of Technology, Texas Wesleyan University, and Whitman College.

He holds a B.A. in Spanish from Washington University, an M.A. in creative writing from Minnesota State University, and a Ph.D. in English Literature from Florida State University.

All the finalists are active in leadership for numerous nonprofit organizations, endeavors, and initiatives.



M. Burger



M. Pope



T. Chesney



Annual Conference 2018
May 29-31, Tuesday-Thursday

Registration is open:

<https://tinyurl.com/OkAnnualConf2018>

Delegates will get valuable information at a pre-conference meeting:

- April 8, 2 p.m. Lawton-Centenary UMC (Wichita District)
- April 15, 4 p.m., Woodward-First UMC, (Cimarron District)
- April 22, 2 p.m., Orlando UMC (Northern Prairie District)
- April 22, 5:30 p.m., Oklahoma City University Student Center (Heartland/Crossroads Districts)
- April 29, 4 p.m., Tulsa-Faith UMC (Council Oak/Green Country Districts)
- May 6, 1 p.m., Coalgate UMC (Lake Country District)



Be a great disciple

BY BISHOP JIMMY NUNN

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

But how do we know that a disciple has been formed?

John Wesley wrote that the marks of discipleship are faith, hope, and love. Those are insights that define discipleship. In addition to these, I believe there are four concepts that shape the pathway of discipleship.

■ The first mark of discipleship that I list is found in what has been called the **Great Commandment**. This commandment states to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:36-39). This mark shapes our inner attitude and outlook about ourselves, the people around us, and God.

■ The second mark of discipleship is found in a



Bishop Nunn

passage referred to as the **Great Commission**. These verses instruct us to go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded people to do (Matthew 28:19-20). This mark shapes our mission, which is comprised of four verbs: go, make, baptize, and obey.

■ The third mark of discipleship is found in a passage that is not known as one of the “great” statements, but nonetheless it has implications of greatness. I have begun calling it the **Great Commitment**. This mark is found in the text “If anyone would follow me, let them deny themselves, let them take up their cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). This concept properly sets our focus beyond ourselves and on a higher cause: the cause of Christ.

■ The last mark of discipleship is found in a passage often referred to during this season of Lent. The action Jesus took defines the concept, and that action occurred when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples (John 13). I like to call it the **Great Position**. The position of a servant to others is the great position in the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps these texts form the basis of making disciples. Perhaps they define the attitudes, aspirations, and actions of a church that truly wants to make an impact for Jesus Christ.

Two of these four biblical texts have had the word “great” attached to them over the centuries. Jesus said that those who would be great among us will be the least among us.

In common language today, the use of the word great is meant to identify a world champion, someone who has excelled greatly to achieve a worthy goal.

However, the use of the word great when referring to the commandment or commission given by Jesus is not touting a victory. Instead it is identifying what is of primary importance for Christians. It answers the question “What is the most important thing about faith?” The implied greatness marks it as a prime directive.

For me, the marks of discipleship include loving God and people, sharing the story of Jesus to help people become disciples, denying myself to follow Jesus, and serving others as Jesus served.

What marks of discipleship are important for you?

OCU extends partnership with Saint Paul seminary

On Feb. 21, President Robert Henry of Oklahoma City University and President Neil Blair of Saint Paul School of Theology signed a new Memorandum of Understanding, renewing the decade-long partnership of these two United Methodist-affiliated centers of higher education.

The new agreement solidifies their existing relationship,



extends university services such as housing and health care to Saint Paul seminary students, and opens the door to future joint academic offerings.

Saint Paul classes at OCU began in 2008, and the seminary is maintaining a student population of about 40 on this campus, plus faculty and support personnel.

With the new agreement in place, Saint Paul will begin upgrading classrooms in the Bishop Smith Chapel, installing new technology for better connectivity between the seminary’s Oklahoma City and Kansas City campuses.

Religions expo: a window on the world

The first floor of Oklahoma City University’s iconic Gold Star Building will bustle with life April 15, filled with music, exotic smells, art, and perhaps even a little dance.

That Sunday afternoon, churches’ youth groups and other guests will gather there to view displays and learn about the world’s major religions from members of the OCU community and religious presenters.

For the World Religion Expo, held each spring, students in OCU’s World Religion and Bible and Culture service-learning courses create presentations about major faith groups across the globe. The students develop visual displays, backdrops, handouts, and talking points that they share as they interact with those who attend the expo.

The public is invited to the free event, 2-5 p.m.

In preparing, a student chooses a religious tradition on which to report, visits a religious leader in that tradition, and enlists that person as a sponsor. They attend at least



From left: Religion major Jay Williams discusses the tenants of Judaism with Brady and Bryan Tener, while another classmate shares information about Confucianism and Eastern Religions at the 2017 expo.

one worship service in order to give firsthand perspective. Students may work individually or as a group. They research a religion over the course of two months before sharing what they’ve learned.

The expo has been popular with youth groups and



Confirmation classes. Previous programs have introduced junior- and senior-high students to some 20 religious traditions. Each participant gets a passport of sorts stamped at each booth, and most booths offer activities to especially engage younger guests. No event registration is required.

The Oklahoma United Methodist
Contact
1501 N.W. 24th
Oklahoma City, OK 73106

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Success tastes good

Skyline completes kitchen

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

OKLAHOMA CITY — An expanded kitchen with gleaming new equipment means Skyline Urban Ministry can serve up meals to more clients and offer classes in healthy cooking, said Director Debbie Ingraham.

The kitchen project, which took about two years to plan and complete with volunteer labor, was finished in February, Rev. Ingraham said.

Volunteer labor by professional construction workers cut \$40,000 from what would have been a total cost \$120,000, she said. The project was funded through individual donations and grants.

OKC-St. Luke's satellite known as the Asbury campus, on SW 38th Street, volunteered its space for Skyline's clients to eat while the work was taking place. United Methodist-related Skyline is located at 500 SE 15th.

The expansion project involved removing walls to enlarge the kitchen space and installing a six-burner stove, commercial refrigerator, convection oven, warming oven, three-compartment sink, hand-washing sink, and a high-heat dishwasher that cycles through a load in three minutes.

A new supply of conventional dishes and utensils means the center doesn't have to serve food on disposable dinnerware.

Coffee system a great perk

Yet the item that caused the most excitement was the coffee system directly connected to a water line, so the pot doesn't have to be filled by hand, Ingraham said with a smile.

Skyline welcomes 30 to 40 clients who are ages 55 and older to enjoy breakfast and lunch on Monday through Friday. On Saturday, when anyone can come for brunch — often breakfast casseroles or burritos and fruit — about 80 people come.

Some church groups prepare and bring meals that can be warmed up and served at the center, Ingraham said. "We are always looking for groups to help."

The urban ministry serves marginalized people of "every background, every culture," she said. There are no strings attached.

Director turns to scripture

Ingraham referred to Matthew 25:40 in describing Skyline's purpose: "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

"Our mission is to fill the gaps for those folks in need," she said. "We're about transforming lives."

The cooking classes, led by a nutritionist from OSU-OKC, are



PHOTO BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Skyline Director Debbie Ingraham stirs up food fun.

offered to "impact the way adults cook." One of Skyline's goals to help break generational poverty is educating parents because healthier children do better in school, Ingraham said.

Hunger or illness can overshadow spiritual concerns, she said.

The ministry's focus on health means clients can consult with a nutritionist, get tested for hypertension and diabetes, and take exercise classes.

In April, Skyline will begin offering classes on growing vegetables indoors using a "tower garden," especially successful for kale, spinach, herbs, and cherry tomatoes, Ingraham listed. The system requires less watering and protects plants from hail, cold, and wind. The plants go from seed to harvest in four weeks, she said.

An outdoor community garden also is being planned on property at the east side of the Skyline building.

Save the date:

Northern Prairie District Lay Servant Training

April 6-7, Enid-New Hope UMC

Led by Karen Mitchell and Jim Key
District office: 580-382-4030

Hispanic Family Retreat

April 20-21, Canyon Camp

Sponsors: Conference Camps and Hispanic/Latino Ministry Committee

Contact: Neil Tate, ntate@okumc.org, or Carlos Ramirez, cramirez@okumc.org

Fee: \$15 per person; \$50 for a family of four; \$10 for each additional person

Sign up your family in advance, which helps meal planners

Fish Camp (for UMMen groups, families, individuals)

April 27-29, Cross Point Camp

Fishing tournaments, ropes course, archery, and more

<https://okcamps.org/fish-camp-2018>

Questions: oklahomacamping@okumc.org

Passing the Baton (for clergy and laity)

April 28, OKC-St. Luke's UMC

Led by church consultant Jim Ozier
Deadline to register: April 23

Fee: \$25 laity, \$50 clergy

<https://tinyurl.com/PassingTheBaton>

Questions — Megan DeCastro, mdecastro@okumc.org

Charity golf tournaments

- April 10 at The Patriot Golf Club, Owasso, benefits Restore Hope Ministries. Email golfshop@patriotgolfclub.com.

- April 14 at The Golf Club of Edmond, benefits the Wesley Foundation at the University of Central Oklahoma. Register by April 2 at www.UCOWesley.net.

- June 18 at Oak Hills Golf and Country Club, Ada, benefits the Wesley Foundation at East Central University. Contact campus minister Janey Wilson, ecuwesley@gmail.com.



PHOTOS BY TABITHA BECKMAN

LEANING IN TO LEAD — "The Gathering Southwest" drew about 50 people from churches in that part of the state on Feb. 26 at Lawton-Centenary UMC. The day featured TED-like presentations, workshops, worship, and

more, sponsored by the Oklahoma Conference Leadership Development Ministry Team. A panel included Chris Dodson, Ann Clayton, Brandon Dolarhite, and Marsha Purtell, who is shown presenting at right. Musicians

came from OKC-Village UMC. "The biggest takeaway was that people saw what the Conference has to offer local churches," said Carlos Ramirez, who directs Innovation and Leadership for the Conference.



The grant committee chose 23 projects across the state. This fourth round of grants will be presented at Annual Conference.

Antlers-First UMC, \$5,000

Blessing Bags & Foster Family Outreach

This project will reach out to vulnerable children in Pushmataha, Choctaw, and McCurtain Counties who are entering the state foster care system. We will provide for each child a personalized bag that contains a hygiene kit, clothing, blanket, Bible, toy, and teddy bear. We also will host activities to encourage foster families and let them know the Church is an ongoing resource for them.

Broken Arrow-Heritage UMC, \$51,734

The Foundry @ Heritage

Our original focus was an area of the city northwest of Heritage UMC. We would like to expand; the city is experiencing growth in multiple locales. As a result of the project's first year, we report six professions of faith, 20 new people attending church, our first co-ed church softball team in 10 years, 70 connections through the Easter egg hunt, and a 40 percent increase in Vacation Bible School attendance. (Year Two)

Conference Camps Ministry, \$91,521

Leadership Development and Mobile Day Camps

We help churches reach their communities with a high-impact day camp experience that positions them to follow up with new people/families they attract. We also hope to connect with underserved children and families and ethnic minority populations. Last summer, 83 percent of the day campers were eligible for free/reduced-price school lunches, and 53 percent of campers were non-white. Over 300 people were impacted. For this summer, Conference Discipleship leaders are available to consult with each church to evaluate its readiness and capacity. (Year Three)

Edmond-First UMC, \$30,000

Worship on Hurd

Early indications are that "Worship on Hurd" is on a growth trajectory. With the appointment of an additional associate pastor (funded by the NPNP grant) and the official launch of the project, attendance at this service quickly jumped by 12 percent in less than eight weeks. We anticipate weekly attendance will reach 100 in fall as families return to school routines. (Year Two)

Glenpool-Living Water UMC, \$56,423

Thrift Store Evangelism

Our goal is to open up space in our building to invite thrift store customers and other new people to join small groups and Bible study. The store currently takes up the sanctuary space and two of the three classrooms. We cannot add small groups or host our Cub Scout group due to space constraints. The Living Water church plant is only 4 years old, but its reputation of helping people through its Thrift Store for Missions is drawing people to trust this faith community.

Heavener-Faithbridge UMC, \$20,000

Acts 2:4 ESL Ministry

We want to offer Christian-based English as a Second Language classes to our community, which has a population that is 50 percent Hispanic, many undocumented and afraid to reach out for help. We feel compelled to help them overcome the language obstacle they face as they try to become legal citizens. In addition to teaching English, we hope the time we spend with them in class will develop bonds of trust and they will come worship with us in an environment that is language-friendly due to our bilingual worship service.

Hominy-First UMC, \$5,000

Project FLAME (Fellow Lives And Methodist Eating/Engaging/Encouraging)

This breakfast brings people from all walks of life here in Hominy. It's an outreach to anyone in the community, especially those who don't have a home church locally. Our average attendance is 65 per breakfast. We have a core group of about 15 people serving in this project. (Year Two)

Jenks-First UMC, \$26,700

First Jenks

This project will create intentional community outreach opportunities for First UMC in a city where other churches don't carry out local hands-on missions. New people will then be invited to engage in discipleship through our modern liturgical worship service and small groups. The project calls for an Outreach/Hospitality leader to create opportunities and

a Worship Leader to help bring new and more diverse people into our church facilities.

Laverne UMC, \$2,640

M.A.S.T.

(Methodist After-School Tutoring)

We want to grow the number of young families in the church in Laverne and to create in children a foundational knowledge of God through worship, song, and tutoring. The project will provide English tutoring for children who are early-elementary age. In grades pre-K to fifth, 65 percent or more of students are new English speakers. We tested our plan in early 2017, and the people served were either marginally or not connected to churches in Laverne. M.A.S.T. provides a high-profile connection among the school, community, and our church.

Lost Creek UMC, \$41,000

Oak Park Retreat Center

The church's newly purchased Oak Park Retreat Center is located in Perkins. Men's and Women's Emmaus Walks and Chrysalis flights for youths have been held at Oak Park. The main building was transformed into the "Road to Jerusalem," a one-day event for families. Voyage Mobile Day Camp hosted 50 children on site in 2017 and returns this year. Discussion is under way about a Vacation Bible School, and so many more plans are being made to impact people's walk with Jesus. Our facility can handle the plans with a little more remodeling. (Year Two)

Norman-McFarlin UMC, \$26,140/\$25,000

Project SHINE

Project SHINE is part of McFarlin's plan for next-step faith engagement with new, younger, and more diverse members of the Norman community and is directly connected to four schools. We will offer a Vacation Bible School/camp-style program during school breaks when students are off but parents still have to be at work.

McFarlin in Motion Mobile Food Pantry

Since starting the food pantry in September 2016, we have served an average of 159 people per month. In a survey of participants, 29 percent said they had attended an event at McFarlin, and 86 percent said they read the devotional made available at each visit. A new goal is to go to each school twice a month so that people have access to food every 14 days. (Year Three)

OKC-Penn Ave. Redemption UMC, \$30,709

Redemption Solutions

Redemption Solutions is a readiness program designed to prepare people for living successfully post-incarceration. The project consists of two components.

1) RediWork will promote community by providing meaningful employment and job skill training.

2) RediFamily will promote family bonding between incarcerated individuals and their children as well as serve other children of incarcerated parents by providing a worship alternative.

The grant will support a youth pastor who will split duties between the two components.

OKC-Quayle UMC, \$33,200

Collegial Connection Ministry at Quayle

Our base audience continues to be young adults in the Quayle Church community in northeast Oklahoma

City. However, through our music concerts and other fruitful initiatives we have seen more diverse young adults can be reached effectively throughout Oklahoma City. The Collegial Connection Ministry envisions practicing hospitality with strangers and intentionally cultivating worship and discipleship with an intercultural, multi-ethnic audience of young adults. (Year Two)

OKC-Southern Hills UMC, \$11,256

SHOW (Southern Hills Outstanding Wednesdays)

The project first sought to reach younger students at schools within 2 miles of the church. We have expanded into other schools. Including families, we are impacting 240 people and over 50 volunteers. Part of the SHOW schedule is a praise-and-prayer service. The children share their prayer concerns and pray at the Communion rail. Many joined the church children’s choir, and families participate in other church activities. (Year Three)

OKC-Village UMC, \$21,090

Single-Parent Support Groups and Upgraded Communications

Village UMC is partnering with the Single Parent Support Network, with simultaneous activities for children and youth. In Village’s immediate neighborhood, there are 1,300 single-parent households of diverse ethnicity. Single parents have significant support needs that can be met by a caring church community. This provides a perfect avenue for discipleship to occur with both parents and children. Concurrently, we are upgrading communications. Among our greatest needs is electronic signage. We need digital means to communicate that we are a multi-ethnic, intergenerational, and mission-oriented congregation. We anticipate this strategy will result in new professions of faith and revitalize the church.

Okmulgee-First UMC, \$9,600

Friday Friends Ministry

Okmulgee Public Schools began a four-day school week in January 2018. Friday Friends’ goal is to reach out and provide a weekly, Christian-based discipleship program for working parents who struggle to find a Friday solution for their grade-school-age children who need supervision that day. Our goal is to assist families facing financial challenges, lack family nearby, or lack other local support.

Piedmont-First UMC, \$130,450

Inviting Piedmont

First, we will plan and execute a modern, comprehensive, and professional marketing campaign. We will primarily use digital advertising to make 1,800,000 “impressions” with a targeted demographic. We will couple this with a series of well-run community outreach/involvement events each month. Secondly, we will increase the effectiveness of our hospitality and guest follow-up through hiring a part-time hospitality coordinator. We know this plan will create significantly more first-time guests. Our desire is to create a clear and welcoming pathway from first contact to established life with our church. Piedmont’s population grew 22.3 percent between 2010 and 2015; the school district is increasing each year by almost 200 students.

Tulsa-Asbury UMC, \$40,000

Asbury International Fellowship

Demographics reveal a trend of increasing immigrant and ethnic groups coming to Tulsa. Asbury UMC’s calling to “make disciples” and to “welcome the foreigner” compels us to share hospitality and the gospel with these newcomers. We believe this project’s emphasis is unique and in keeping with the criteria of New People New Places. Asbury International Fellowship started in 2016; we seek to hire part-time leadership to shepherd this growing fellowship and help reach beyond our congregation to others from the many nations represented in our metropolitan area. Our current international membership represents at least 28 nations from six continents, and they will extend invitations, hospitality, and relationship connection to other international persons.

Wesley Foundation at Langston University, \$16,275

WFLU Student Intern Program

The Wesley Foundation reopened its doors with a worship service on Aug. 16. Participating in freshmen orientation created many student connections. The student interns at the Wesley who are upperclassmen are a huge factor in generating interest among those new students who may be looking for a church home and campus ministry to nurture them. Our college interns are prepared to go out into the world and encourage others like them to develop a relationship with God and to develop personally and professionally themselves. Their outreach also enables us to then develop relationships within the Langston, Guthrie, and Coyle communities. (Year Two)

Wesley Foundation at the University of Central Oklahoma, \$15,000

UCO Wesley Outreach Ministry (Intern Project)

The project proposes to reach a more diverse group of additional student participants through (1) new campus-based engagement, (2) outreach ministries, and (3) ministry intern skill development. Interns will deploy in new settings on and near campus where commuting students gather and in local United Methodist churches with soon-to-be university students. We are reaching out to 200 participants for Bible studies, worship, UMC Youth/Student Ministry Groups, Weekly Wesley Meals, mission projects, professions of faith, and ministry career commitments. (Year Two)

Wesley Foundation at the University of Oklahoma, \$40,600

Increasing Our Global Footprint

Our international ministry has grown exponentially in the past five years, and we believe an additional full-time staff member along with extra programming and leadership development are necessary for continued growth. We intend to add a second staff member solely devoted to international ministry, build an international office suite, and increase funding for outreach and leadership development of international students. We believe this will lead to more students involved, more new disciples, more student leaders of ethnic diversity, and a more global and diverse ministry.

Yukon-First, \$18,600

Modern Worship Service Improvements

First UMC wants to continue the growth of our new worship service by updating our equipment, renovating our space, increasing our publicity, and adding a part-time staff person. Since beginning some efforts, we have seen dozens of visitors, and five families have joined the church through this new service. We believe the steps we describe will allow us to reach even more people, as well as provide a more helpful environment for first-time guests.

(These descriptive excerpts were compiled from applications submitted mid-year 2017.)

Support for the Oklahoma Conference’s New People New Places initiative comes from the Apportionments.

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EPWORTH VILLA

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PHOTO BY NEIL TATE

BUBBLING WITH FUN — Voyage Mobile Day Camp gets a thumbs-up from a boy playing in an inflatable body bubble. Young adults are being recruited for paid positions on the summer 2018 leadership team for the eight events across Oklahoma. Check out <https://okcamps.org/mobile-day-camps>.

OCU repeats as a Tree Campus USA

Oklahoma City University has been honored with 2017 Tree Campus USA recognition by the Arbor Day Foundation.

The university is home to a unique native tree arboretum featuring 40 trees from across the state — evergreens from southeast Oklahoma, oaks from central Oklahoma, and elms from

western Oklahoma. The trees are labeled, providing an ongoing educational opportunity for OCU students and tree enthusiasts.

OCU met Tree Campus USA's five standards, which include a campus tree-care plan, dedicated annual expenditures for its campus tree program, an Arbor Day observance, and student service-learning project.



PHOTO BY PAT HOERTH

URBAN FARMERS — United Methodist clergy Josh Langille-Hoppe, left, who pastors McCloud UMC, and Scott Spencer, senior pastor of OKC-Mosaic UMC, took part March 2 in the inaugural session of Hands in the Soil, a monthly education and spiritual formation opportunity for clergy, at CommonWealth Urban Farm in Oklahoma City. United Methodist deaconess Pat Hoerth leads the ecumenical program.

United Methodist Women

RED ZONE — Ponca City-Albright United Methodist Women wear red in February as part of “Standing in the Red Zone,” a national UMW campaign to draw attention to the problem of human trafficking. Ponca City is close to Interstate 35, one of the major arteries for such trafficking. From left are: (front) Pastor April Coates, Aleene Romine, Jennifer Douglas, Allison Palmer, Lynrita Miller, Jeanne Burge, and Kathy Calderon; (back) Sara Palmer, Pat Purkey, Mary Cantrell, Paula Coppock, Sandy Kanelakos, Sally Warner, Kathie Goss, and Carol McGaughey.



Assembly returning to roots

Oklahoma United Methodist Women soon will travel to Columbus, Ohio, for Assembly 2018 — a highlight of the anniversary celebration that continues into 2019 as the organization marks 150 years of mission service, spiritual growth, and advocacy for women, children, and youth.

This year the gathering that draws international participants returns on May 18-20 to the city that first hosted Assembly, in 1942.

Eight thousand women are expected at the event, which is held every four years.

Forty women are registered to attend from the Oklahoma Conference, according to Glenda Gilpin of Hooker and Harri Williams of Oklahoma City.

Among them are six Conference UMW officers, including Treasurer Tanya Case of Duncan, who will assist with the offering. Four women from Sapulpa will help serve Communion.

Those attending for the first time include Amy Neathery of El Reno-Wesley and Brenda Clear of Jones. They won scholarships from the South Central Jurisdiction UMW leadership team.

Also from Oklahoma will be Marsha Lyons and Faye Perry, both of Oklahoma City, who serve on national UMW committees; Jo Ellen Reed of Oklahoma City, part of the SCJ UMW team; and Professor Elaine Robinson of Saint Paul School of Theology at Oklahoma City University. Rev. Dr. Robinson directs the denomination's training of

deaconesses and home missionaries.

The Assembly theme is “The Power of Bold.” Worship, plenaries, and workshops fill the schedule.

Speakers include a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, “The New Jim Crow” author, a filmmaker, climate scientist, and women’s rights activists.

In 1869, eight Methodist women in Boston raised funds and sent a woman doctor and woman teacher to India. Today’s organization of United Methodist Women counts 800,000 members.

Assembly registration closes April 9. The schedule includes a teen track of activities. Learn more at www.UMWAssembly.org.

More spring activities

■ **Spiritual Growth Retreat** — On April 6-8, Cross Point Camp will host this annual UMW-sponsored retreat that is open to all women.

Glenda Skinner-Noble will teach “Creativity and Working with Our Hands as a Form of Spiritual Formation.” She is a clergy elder and visual arts teacher at an elementary school.

Sign up by March 28 at <https://okumc-reg.brapp.com/SpiritualGrowthRetreat2018>.

■ **Annual Conference luncheon** — In late May, a UMW luncheon during the 2018 Annual Conference will honor United Methodist deaconesses who serve in Oklahoma.

— Holly McCray

Microfinance project enriches women’s lives in Congo

BUKAVU, Democratic Republic of Congo — Abandoned by her husband, Esperance Linda once worried how she would support her family. Thanks to a microfinance project initiated by United Methodist Women here, she is caring for her four children and teaching other young women to become self-supporting.

This is significant in a country where half of the people live below the poverty line.

In 2016, the bishop of the Eastern Congo Episcopal Area appointed Marie Dundja to head women’s work in the Kivu Conference.

Married and the mother of seven, Rev. Dundja is a mentor to women as they learn to knit clothing,

sew small bags and do arts and crafts projects such as mobiles and small sculptures.

United Methodists across the connection donate materials.

Pastor Omoy Wandjaka Henriette of Goma said she has trained more than 50 women in art projects and sewing. She also teaches women to manufacture and sell a liquid soap.

Kika Benda is one of the entrepreneurs. “I sell (the liquid soap) in hospitals and households,” she said.

Benda, UMW president in the Uvira District, hopes to expand this activity to other areas.

— United Methodist News Service, Feb. 23

20 small churches sign up for pilot VBS program

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

Even children like to get mail. They will receive daily letters from Paul when they attend Vacation Bible Schools at some 20 small churches in a pilot program of the Oklahoma Conference's Rural/Small Membership Church Commission.

For 2018, the commission approved a custom VBS curriculum, "Ready, Set, Go," to assist rural churches with minimal budgets to more fully engage in their communities.

The trial program also fits the denomination's #SeeAllThePeople initiative.

"Conference officials want to hear from those 20 to make decisions for the future," said Derrek Belase, staff liaison to the commission and director of Discipleship. Rachel Parrott chairs the commission.

"VBS historically helps you break out of 'we can't' mode," said Rev. Belase.

On Feb. 24, training was offered for the participating churches.

Based on four chapters of Paul's letter to the Philippians, "Ready, Set, Go" was written by J'Nevelyn Lloyd of Austin, Texas, with music by Justin and Michelle Graves. It is designed for 4-year-olds through fifth-graders.

Lloyd said she wants kids "to know the



PHOTO BY DERREK BELASE

Discussing VBS props and curriculum, from left, are: (seated) Connie Barnett, Lee Ann Simpson, and Alma Flores; (standing) Justin and Michelle Graves, Wendie Jencks-Wilson, J'Nevelyn Lloyd, and Laura Flores.

Bible is a current book. It's very important to me that the kids know it's their book."

So costuming and decorations are contemporary. "This VBS isn't an ancient marketplace. Everybody is in normal clothes. A mailman delivers a letter each day. Sometimes there's a prop with it," she said.

A leadership group of only two people could successfully present "Ready, Set,

Go," according to Lloyd and the Graveses. The 10 songs can be taught using videos that include lyrics and movements, so a music leader is not necessary. One large room could accommodate all the activity centers.

The material can fit a five-day, three-day, and even one-day VBS schedule, with notes for each included.

However, the goal is to make VBS a churchwide event. "This isn't me by myself trying to pull off a kids' event," Lloyd said.

To recruit volunteers, she asks people to pray about serving. She doesn't merely say, "Will you come and help?" She begins with prayer and scripture study well in advance. She also advised that it helps recruiting when your pastor says from the pulpit, "We're praying about VBS."

Justin Graves suggested using some VBS songs in worship before the event.

"If you start now and ask people to pray about it, you're asking someone to really give some thought about it," Belase said. "If people can only do a day or two, maybe have them read the curriculum and then ask what they can commit to do."

Graves added, "Even if people commit to one day, they will see the energy and be a part of something — and not want to miss at all next year!"

Churches enrolled in the pilot program are: Antlers-First, Atoka-First, Fitzhugh, Healdton-First, Heavener-Faithbridge, Holdenville-Barnard Memorial, Madill-First, Marietta, Newcastle, OKC-St. Luke's at Asbury, Otterbein, Pawnee-First, Redland, Skiatook-First, Springer, Tulsa-University, Wanette, and Waynoka.

Passages

■ **ISELL** — Rev. George Isbell, 90, of Cordell died Feb. 25, 2018.

He served at Grainola, Webb City, Atoka, New Zion, Beaver, Stilwell, Enid-Christ, Enid-First, Holdenville, Cordell, Dill City, OKC-Asbury, Tulsa-Sheridan Avenue, Ponca City-Albright, Harrah, Hollis, and Gould.

Survivors include his wife, Barbara, and children Patricia Blackard, Eddie Isbell, Helen Henderson, Annette Bell, and Paula Mann. Service was March 2 at Cordell-First.

■ **MURRAY** — Rev. Lenn Murray, 83, of Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines, died Feb. 19, 2018. A Local Pastor, he served at Temple and Shattuck before retiring.

Survivors include his wife, Linda, and children John Murray, Rhonda Wyckoff, and Colita Murray.

Memorial service will be at 3 p.m. April 15 in Enid, at Country Inn Suites. A service also was held in the Philippines.

■ **HINCKLEY** — Jean Hinckley, 93, of Oklahoma City died Feb. 18, 2018. She was the widow of Rev. Dr. De L. Hinckley Jr. Survivors include children Deede Cauley, David Hinckley, Jim Hinckley, and Debbie Dillard. Services were Feb. 23 at Epworth Villa, Oklahoma City, and Feb. 24 at Tulsa-Asbury UMC. Memorial gifts to: Oklahoma City University "De and Jean Hinckley Scholarship Fund."

■ Marcella Regan, 95, of Quinton and McAlester died March 9, 2018. She was the mother of Rev. Marsha Purtell, pastor at Mangum-First.

Employment

■ Director of Development and Social Media: Oklahoma Methodist Manor, Tulsa. Full-time. Apply at www.ommtulsa.org.

■ Director of Confirmation and Mid-High Ministries: Tulsa-Boston Avenue UMC. Full-time. Resume and cover letter to Angelyn Dale at angelyndale@bostonavenue.org.

■ Director of Youth & Children's Ministries: Chickasha-Epworth UMC. Full-time. Contact Scott Keneda at pastor@epworth.info or 405-224-3320, ext. 101.

■ Executive Director & Campus Minister: The Wesley Foundation at OU, Norman. Resume and cover letter to david@thepromotionsolution.com.

■ Accompanist (piano and organ): Duncan-First. Part-time. 405-255-3353.

■ Children's Ministry Program Director: OKC-First. Full-time. Contact Lesly Broadbent at pastorlesly@firstchurchokc.com or 405-239-6493.

■ Youth Ministry Assistant: Tulsa-Faith. 15 hours per week. Resume or questions to jarrett@faithtulsa.org.

■ Youth Leader: Muskogee-St. Paul UMC. Full- or part-time. Resume to David Burris, davidburris@me.com or call 918-687-7571.

■ Music Director: Okmulgee-First. Part-time. Resume to Roland Youngberg, rolandyoungberg@gmail.com or 918-756-6083.

■ Missions Administrative Assistant: Tulsa-First. Part-time. Cover letter and resume to kellyjunk@fumctulsa.org.

■ Modern Worship Leader: McAlester-First. Part-time. Contact Matt Judkins at mbjudkins@gmail.com.

■ Children's Director: Cushing-First. Part-time. Contact Kathy Leithner at 918-225-5683 or katleit2@aol.com.

■ Administrative Assistant: Collinsville-Meadowcreek. Part-time. Send resume to mumc74021@gmail.com.

BACK TO SCHOOL

supply drive

Circle of Care has once again partnered with Citizens Caring for Children to provide school supplies for children in foster care.

Here are a few ideas for helping Circle of Care send foster children back to school with the supplies needed for success:

- Do a drive as a mission for Vacation Bible School
- United Methodist Women's Drive
- Sunday School class drive
- Church wide donation



To arrange a drive or get more info, please contact: Denise Ebersbach, Development Specialist at Circle of Care, 405-613-2276 or denise.ebersbach@circleofcare.org.

ALL SUPPLIES DUE BY JULY 1, 2018 for the 2018-19 SCHOOL YEAR.



DEEP-ROOTED MINISTRY

You want to have a long-lasting effect on your community. Supporting ministries to care for those who need it and bring the light of Christ's love can be a challenge. There are so many ways to extend your reach.

We help develop your effectiveness to reach your community for Christ. Our staff has years of experience with Charitable Giving, Endowment Programs, Estate Planning, and more ways to support your church's ministries.

DO LASTING GOOD. We desire to help you do the good you want without complicating the process of wills and estate planning. Our staff can guide you on the steps to take and work with your professional advisors to create a plan for lasting good. — **CALL OR EMAIL DAVID BATTLES AT 800-259-6863 OR DBATTLES@OKUMF.ORG**



CHARITABLE GIVING

The Foundation has resources available to supplement your charitable giving messages within your church. We can meet with individuals and families and explain the different charitable giving options available.

Our focus is to guide you through all the options and make the best choice to accomplish charitable goals.

ENDOWMENT PROGRAMS

An excellent and simple way to set up stable financial support for a ministry is through an endowment program. This creates an enduring source of income to benefit a specific cause or ministry within your church.

An endowment can be set up with a gift now, or be included in an estate plan to be created later.

We can help in understanding all of the details of accomplishing lasting good through endowments.

ESTATE PLANNING

Encouraging wise stewardship of a life's accumulation is important to ensure long-lasting support for the good your church is doing. We have many tools to help in this planning process, and we suggest scheduling a time for one of our staff to come and share this process with you. We are always available to promote this message and answer any questions involved with setting up a will, an estate plan, or other legacy gift.

Call our office at 800-259-6863 so we can connect with you. We are an organization that is helping you to invest in doing lasting good in this world.

THE OKLAHOMA UNITED METHODIST FOUNDATION
4201 N CLASSEN BOULEVARD, OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73118-2400
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Citizenship:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to minister in a majority white culture, how to sing in English the songs I had first learned in Spanish, and to sing new songs.

But also in that part of Oklahoma, known as "Little Dixie," I experienced difficult situations: prejudice, discrimination, and racism.

With thanks to God, relationships grew between me and my congregants as well as between the Spanish-speaking fellowship and the English-speaking Howe and Heavener churches. We reached a point that the congregations identified themselves as "sister churches."

Then Wendi and I, a clergy couple, were appointed as associate pastors at Elk City UMC, relocating from far eastern Oklahoma to far west. Soon after our arrival, Senior Pastor Dan Peil and the leadership of that church entrusted us to launch a worship service with modern/contemporary flavor, called "New Day."

While in Elk City, I received my permanent U.S. residency card, effective for 10 years, but I gained much more: the support of a congregation that allowed me to be myself, with all my grammatical mistakes and cultural idiosyncrasies, and also taught me many things.

Elk City fully embraced our multi-ethnic family, being present for the birth of our two children, our clergy ordinations,



PHOTO BY MEAGAN EWTON

With a Statue of Liberty replica in the background, well-wishers delight as clergyman Carlos Ramirez shows them his Certificate of Naturalization on Jan. 10 at the Homeland Security Office in Oklahoma City.

and my graduation from Phillips Theological Seminary.

In 2012, Wendi and I moved to the greater Oklahoma City area. My appointment was to the Oklahoma Conference staff.

Last year I decided to apply to become a U.S. citizen.

My children are U.S. citizens. I am a clergy elder in the Conference. I have lived one-third of my life in this country.

It was time to formalize my relationship with the USA.

For me, the last step in the U.S.

citizenship process took about eight months. (Over the years, cost of all the process for me totaled about \$8,000.) Finally I learned that I had qualified to take the oath at the Homeland Security Office on a specific date.

My family and I arrived at that office on a cold, windy day: Jan. 10, 2018. My in-laws had made the trip to Oklahoma City to be with us.

As I entered, I learned family had to wait separately. There were more instructions for those of us in the ceremony that day.

But we were allowed to keep our cellphones. Wendi sent me a text as I was going through that final paperwork.

Her text: "Look behind you."

I turned and saw so many familiar faces. Over 20 people had come — from Elk City and OKC-Village churches, the Conference office, and more.

I was amazed all those people had come. I saw in their faces how much they care for me and how proud they are of their country — now mine, too.

Over cake and ice cream at the weekly community meal later that day at OKC-Village, where I pastor part-time, people described their excitement for me. The next day my co-worker Rebekah Hasty hosted a reception at the United Methodist Ministry Center.

Throughout my 13 years in the United States, God's presence has been constant and shown to me through the wide-open welcome and love of many Oklahoma United Methodists.

I was a stranger, an immigrant from Mexico, and you welcomed me, just as stated in the Gospel of Matthew. "When did we see you a stranger and invite you in?... I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me" (Matthew 25).

I can but give thanks to God. In this Lenten season, as we reflect in our humanity and in our darkness, I pray that my story reminds you of the beauty of building bridges instead of building walls.