

## Board of Laity

# Voices of Christmas

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

**A**mong the gifts that come with Christmas are memories — of interactions with family and at church. As Christmas 2017 approaches, the Oklahoma Conference’s associate lay leaders shared some of their personal memories of this special time of year.

### Herschel Beard of Madill:

“I grew up in a small town, Madill. I learned from parents and grandparents that we had a little bit more than other people. I grew up with the understanding that to whom much is given, much is expected.”

The father of two boys, he said he tried to instill that same philosophy in them.

For one holiday, the Beard family decided to “adopt” a family that lived outside of town and buy gifts for the children. The three children all wanted bicycles.

Beard took his sons shopping and let them pick out the bikes and other gifts. He explained to his sons that the family they were helping was pretty poor.

They left the gifts at the family’s back door.

“My boys kind of woke up to the fact of what helping

other people means,” including helping through the year, Beard said. “They’ve been doing things like that ever since.”

Those sons, now ages 34 and 31, sometimes go back to Madill from Oklahoma City to help with food baskets and toys for poor families.

“There’s such a need out there,” said Beard, who is president of Marshall County Abstract Co. and an active member of Madill United Methodist Church.

### Don Kim of Oklahoma City:

Until he moved to Oklahoma from New York, Christmas was just something Kim saw featured in movies;

SEE CHRISTMAS, PAGE 8

## Prison encounter: ‘I will praise Him in the hallway’

BY KRISTEN HARLIN  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND MERCY MINISTRIES

**L**ast month, I had the opportunity to go speak inside John Lilley Correctional Center at Boley, Okla. As I prepared my lesson, I began to pray for the men inside and that God would use me to share what I wanted to share.

When I arrived, the men were actively talking, but there was one man sitting in the center of the room who seemed agitated by his surroundings. While another man talked about how he had been reconnected with his family and how God was working on him, the man in the center of the room said very abruptly, “I have one good ear, and he’s in it.”

So I asked that man if he wanted to talk. He said that God hadn’t talked to him in eight years, “but I keep showing up.”

In response, I shared that a few years ago I, too, had felt as

if God was not talking to me. But then a friend had told me: Sometimes we have to praise Him in the hallway and trust that He will open a door.

Inside the facility at Boley, we began our praise and worship music, as scheduled. The praise band was phenomenal, and you could feel the desire for Christ to be in the room.

As the second song began (“Even If,” by MercyMe), you could feel the anointing take over the room. I looked at the center of the room and saw my new friend began to cry, as did others in the room. I found myself needing a tissue.

The service ended with Communion, and the men began returning to their unit for head count. The man who’d sat in the center looked at me and said, “I will praise Him in the hallway, and I felt Him today.”

(CJAMM is supported by churches’ Apportionment giving.)



PHOTO BY JIM KEY

**Volunteers pray with incarcerated men in the correctional facility at Boley.**

## Save the dates:

### Camp Spark

- Young adult winter retreat, Jan. 5-7, Camp Canyon (NEW!)
- Youth winter retreat (grades 7-12), Jan. 12-15, Canyon

<https://okcamps.CampBrainRegistration.com>

### Council Oak District winter youth retreat

Jan. 19-20, Camp Egan

### Clue Retreat (Cimarron and Northern Prairie District youth)

Jan. 26-28, Camp Canyon

### “The Gathering 2018 – Southwest”

Leadership and discipleship training for churches in southwestern Oklahoma

Feb. 3, Lawton-Centenary UMC

### “Safe Town”

Interactive training to raise awareness about domestic violence

Feb. 27, OKC-Church of the Servant

Questions? Contact Derrek Belase, Discipleship director, at the United Methodist Ministry Center

<https://events.oucpm.org/safetown>

### “Shaped by God’s Mission”

VIM team leader training for adults who lead youth/young adult missions

Leader: Sarah Nichols, director of Young Adult Mission and Service

■ Feb. 2-4, Camp Canyon (West)  
Contact: [mdecastro@okumc.org](mailto:mdecastro@okumc.org), 405-530-2199

■ Feb. 16-17, Camp Egan (East)  
Contact Green Country District Office



# Hunger no more

BY BISHOP JIMMY NUNN

The opening words of the Christmas carol “Away in a Manger” lament the fact that the bed for newborn Jesus was a manger. He didn’t get to sleep in a crib. The sentiment offers a subtle judgment on Jesus’s parents. It suggests that, had we been there, we would have provided a crib, not a manger, for the birth of the Son of God.



Bishop Nunn

Have you ever thought about the message of the manger?

Normally a manger is a place for animals to eat, not a spot for anyone to sleep.

But throughout scripture, physical hunger is symbolic of spiritual hunger, and

bread is often the food that satisfies hunger.

In Exodus, the people wandered in the wilderness. They were hungry. God met their need and gave them quail and manna.

And the people responded to God’s provision with a question.

“What is it?” (Exodus 16:15)

Those were the words the Hebrew people asked Moses when they saw manna from heaven for the first time.

It could be gathered, but could not be possessed. It came in the right amount, never too little or too much. When the people gathered too much, the manna spoiled. When they failed to gather enough, it stretched to meet the need.

What is it?

Translated literally, manna means “a whatness” — and the question “What is it?” is phrasing that is better understood.

The Hebrew people tried to define “what is it.” They gave it the name manna. They thought manna was a means to satisfy their daily hunger. But what they named and ate could sustain them only one

day at a time in the wilderness.

A physical solution for a spiritual hunger fails to satisfy the deeper need.

Manna was not really “it.” While the bread made from the manna collected by the Hebrews satisfied physical hunger, it never fulfilled the deepest needs of the soul. “It” would not be defined; instead, “it” defined a people.

When the time came for the birth of Jesus, the whole world asked, “What is it?”

A baby was born in Bethlehem. That city name means “house of bread.” Jesus later called himself the Bread of Life.

The Bread of Life was born in the House of Bread. As an infant, he was wrapped in bands of cloth and laid in a manger, the place where the animals came to eat.

In the House of Bread, the Bread of Life was laid in the breadbasket.

When the angels appeared to the shepherds, proclaiming the birth of Jesus, those shepherds responded to the announcement by declaring, “Let us go to Bethlehem to see *what it is*” (Luke 2:15).

## Orders Meeting set Jan. 16

At the Jan. 16 Orders Meeting, clergy of the Oklahoma Conference will reflect on a preliminary report by the Commission on the Way Forward, as directed by the denomination’s Council of Bishops.

Key to discussion, Bishop Jimmy Nunn said, will be three sketches published in a Council press release. The Council recommends two questions based on those.

1. How would you build a church from this sketch?
2. How does this sketch multiply our Wesleyan witness and expand our mission in the world?

The meeting will be 10 a.m.-3 p.m. that Tuesday at OKC-St. Luke’s. The meal is made possible by the Apportionment for the Board of Ordained Ministry.

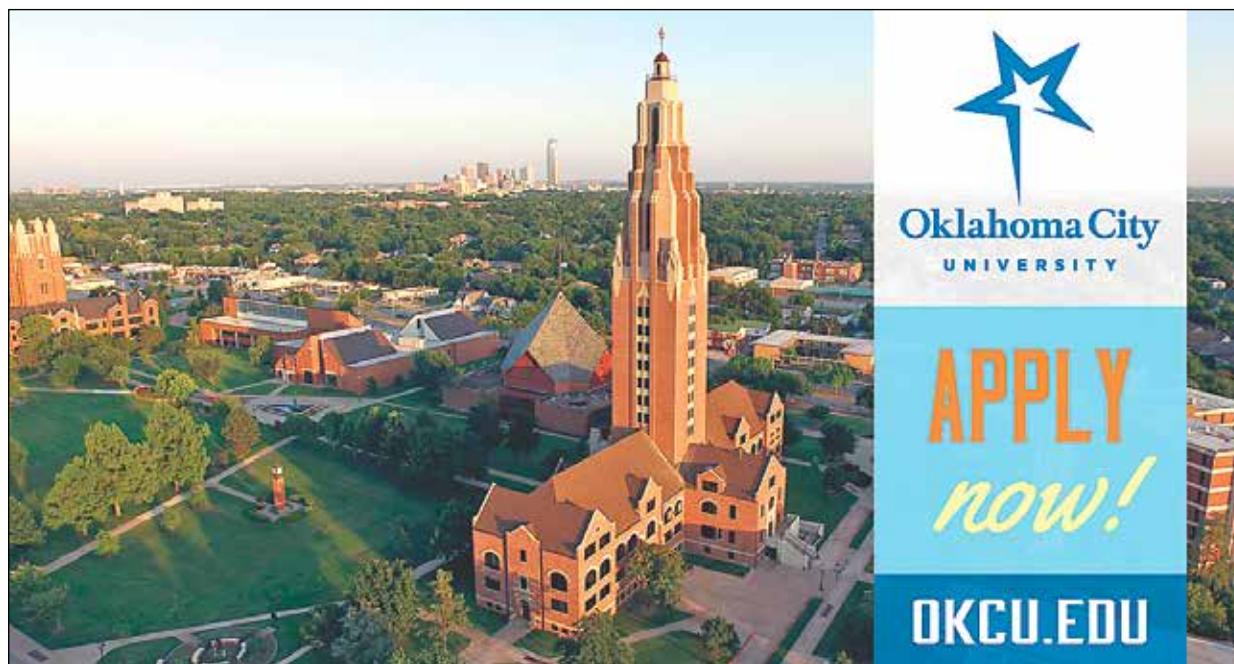
I have added the italicized emphasis.

They were not going to ask the old “what is it” question. They went to find the answer to “what it is.”

We don’t have to wonder, “What is it?” Join me on the quest to discover “what it is.” It is the Bread of Life.

## It’s time for your college-bound student to apply to OCU!

Have your student apply now for the best scholarship opportunities. Hundreds of internships, professional partnerships with a variety of companies, and multiple opportunities to learn outside the classroom make OCU graduates highly employable.



### 2018 Bishop Scholar Award

Applications and nominations are now being accepted for the 2018-19 OCU Bishop Scholar Award.

The full-tuition scholarship is awarded to incoming college freshmen who plan to study in the Wimberly School of Religion at OCU and pursue a vocation in United Methodist ministry. The scholarship is not reserved solely for students who feel called to pulpit ministry, but also has been awarded to students called to youth or children’s ministry, social justice ministry, ecumenical and interfaith ministry, and missions.

The scholarship covers four years of undergraduate study at OCU.

Pastors may nominate high school seniors. Students also may apply directly for the award. The entire process is now online. Find the forms at: [www.okcu.edu/bishopsscholar](http://www.okcu.edu/bishopsscholar).

Feb. 1 is deadline to submit all materials.

To be selected, a student must apply for admission to OCU, submit the requested paperwork, and undergo an interview process in mid-February with faculty of the School of Religion.

Two to three such awards are given yearly, and every student who interviews receives a scholarship valued at 60 to 80 percent of tuition.

## OCU and SPST offer Fast Forward to ministry

The coming academic year marks the official rollout of the OCU/SPST Fast Forward degree path.

Also known as “3+3,” this collaborative partnership between Oklahoma City University’s Wimberly School of Religion and the Saint Paul School of Theology benefits students of both United Methodist-affiliated educational entities.

Fast Forward allows OCU students who are majoring in Religion to also enroll in the new Pre-Seminary specialization. In their fourth undergraduate year, the students transition to seminary studies with Saint Paul theological school.

Thus students who enroll in the Fast Forward degree path can graduate with both a Bachelor of Arts in Religion and a

Master of Divinity in as little as six years. That potentially saves a student thousands of dollars in tuition and fees.

Incoming freshmen and transfer students who are interested can contact Sharon Betsworth, director of the School of Religion, at 405-208-5284. Additional information can be found on the school’s website, [www.okcu.edu/religion](http://www.okcu.edu/religion).

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# Young adults work for racial reconciliation

## General church grant supports vision for 4 partner groups

**N**ASHVILLE, Tenn. — An Oklahoma group is among the first recipients of grants for United Methodist young adults who have a passion for racial justice to initiate projects that can impact their churches, communities, and world.

OKC DiREction received a project grant of \$2,500 awarded through Young People’s Ministries, part of the denomination’s Discipleship Ministries, based in Nashville.

The group is composed of college students and young adults from Edmond-First UMC, the Wesley Foundations at the University of Central Oklahoma and at Langston University, and OKC-Quayle UMC.

Participants from the four communities — two primarily African-American and two primarily Caucasian — seek to discern how they can partner together and work toward racial reconciliation.

Trey Witzel said they gather monthly, with questions meant to guide discussions on racial experiences, and a shared meal.

They are working to build trust.

They learn one another’s stories, about similarities and differences in their lives as they grew up, and about how race in America has affected them personally.

For Spring Break 2018, they will travel to The Center in Baltimore, Maryland, and to Washington, D.C., during a week-long immersion experience.

They want to become more educated in critical race theory. The overall goal is to learn how to partner in racial justice work.

The group wants “to develop a concrete plan to bring back to Oklahoma, to bring people together to bring about healing,” Rev. Witzel said.

### 3 clergy collaborate

Giving leadership alongside Witzel, who is an associate pastor at Edmond-First, is Kevin “Tank” Tankerson, an associate pastor at OKC-Quayle and director of the Wesley at Langston; and Matt Borum, director of the Wesley at UCO.

Witzel recently completed seminary

in Boston. He said the Black Lives Matter movement and mainstream public conversation about racism shaped his experience during that time and informed his reading and class discussion.

He said he returned to Oklahoma with a desire to bring college students and young adults together for conversation about race in Oklahoma.

### Dinner discussion

In summer, the three leaders drafted and submitted the grant application, but they didn’t wait to convene monthly.

OKC DiREction began at the start of the academic year.

Witzel said in early December that about 16 people participate. The dinner and discussion rotate among the Wesley centers and the two churches.

The Spring Break trip can accommodate 28 people, he said. UCO and Langston University have scheduled the same break. “We’re not asking anyone to miss any extra school,” he said.

The Project Review Committee of Young People’s Ministries awarded two grants in this first round. The second went to a group in the Philippines.

“We’re very grateful for Young

People’s Ministries to be supporting us like this,” Witzel said. “The Philippines and Oklahoma — this is global and local. That’s exciting.”

A total of \$65,000 has been allocated for grants to support young adult racial justice projects. Seed money, up to \$2,500 per project, is available to support efforts that can be leveraged by others to inspire and resource young people across the denomination. The grants are set up on a rolling, monthly basis. To apply, go to <http://bit.ly/2xUreBy>.

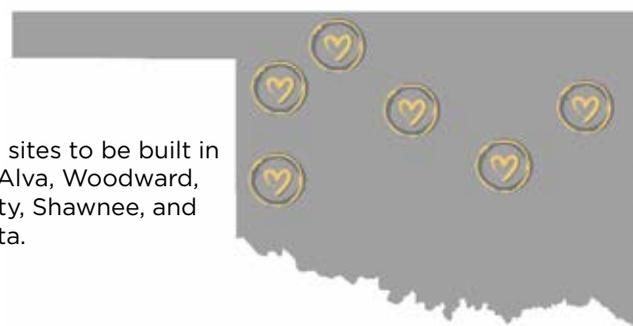
### Ideas for other groups

Charlie Ludden of Oklahoma is a member of the Project Review Committee. He is the Oklahoma Conference’s associate director of Project Transformation and of Young Adult Mission and Service. Because of the Oklahoma application, he recused himself from that first grant round but is serving going forward.

Ludden said he appreciates the collaborative effort by the churches and campus ministries. He said Young People’s Ministries will receive outcome reports and pass on results to benefit the wider United Methodist community.



Rendering of new Circle of Care Foster Homes



Home sites to be built in Enid, Alva, Woodward, Elk City, Shawnee, and Coweta.

Thanks to the Helmerich Foundation’s lead gift of \$750,000, the special offering at Annual Conference of nearly \$50,000, and contributions from many of you, we are well on our way with our Legacy of Care Campaign. Eight new homes will be built to accommodate sibling sets in Oklahoma Foster Care. Construction is set to begin in Alva the first quarter of 2018, with the Enid site close behind.



To donate or learn more, visit [legacy.circleofcare.org](http://legacy.circleofcare.org) or call Sarah Steffes at 405-215-1400



**A young-adult service group repairs a storm-damaged roof in southern Oklahoma. The AmeriCorps members team have been serving through Oklahoma United Methodist Disaster Response Ministry. "I have something to be grateful for this Thanksgiving for sure," a homeowner told them.**

## Help arrives 2 years later

BY RHIANNON SAEGERT  
THE DAILY ARDMOREITE

**A** RDMORE, Okla. — Natural disasters often take years to fully recover from, but a team is helping southern Oklahoma residents do just that over several weeks.

An AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) group is working for Oklahoma United Methodist Disaster Response to repair damage from flooding and storms in 2015.

Disaster Response project manager Kevin Walker is overseeing the group, which is repairing several homes during their stay. He said the organization connects groups who want to volunteer their time and skills with people who need it, then supplies the tools and materials for the repairs.

"We have volunteers from across the country who help us out," Walker said. "They're great because they're usually here for six weeks to three months. So we can knock out a bunch of jobs."

One home the team has been repairing took damage after Tropical Storm Bill sent a tree through its roof in 2015, damaging the decking underneath.

"Two years of leaking takes a heavy toll on the decking. It rots it out, so we've had to replace it," Walker said. "That's what we see a lot of the time. High winds, heavy rain, water leaks, and it becomes a never-

ending problem."

He said Oklahoma United Methodist Disaster Response works with victims of flooding fairly often. Volunteers have cleared out homes flooded in 2015 in Tishomingo, Kingston, Ardmore, Lone Grove, Healdton, and Wilson. He said the organization primarily works with uninsured or under-insured homeowners.

"In this particular case, the roof was in such disrepair that she couldn't even get insurance because of the damage," Walker said. "A lot of people may have homeowner's insurance, but they won't have flood insurance. They're kind of dependent on agencies like us and FEMA"

The AmeriCorps young-adult team that's been partnering with Oklahoma United Methodist Disaster Response to help flood victims is from AmeriCorps' southwest region, based in Aurora, Colorado.

"We're not quite volunteers, because we do get benefits, but essentially it's a residential service program for people ages 18 to 24," spokesperson Mariel Godard said. "We work in team-based situations."

The teams can tackle disaster response work all over the county, ranging from clearing out homes that have been recently affected by storms to repairing damage that's years old.

(The Daily Ardmoreite, Nov. 17, 2017. Reprinted with permission.)

## Disaster Response progress report:

**B**ishop Jimmy Nunn has called for volunteers to help some 230 Oklahoma families repair homes ruined in flooding two years ago. Three months later, Disaster Response Coordinator Richard Norman reports about 195 projects remain incomplete.

Although an UMCOR grant for this work expires at year's end, Oklahoma Conference disaster response donations are making it possible to extend recovery efforts through May.

Teams have come from United Methodist NOMADS; AmeriCorps; and churches including Tulsa-Boston Avenue, Lawton-St. Paul's, Norman-McFarlin, OKC-Chapel Hill, Grove-First, OKC-St. Mark's, and the Wesley Foundation at SWOSU, among others. Will you help, too? Sign up at: <http://OklahomaUnitedMethodistChurchDisasterResponse.org/>

## Employment

■ Coordinator of Food Services and Housekeeping, Camp Egan, near Tahlequah. Full-time. Includes housing on site. Resume to [campegan@okumc.org](mailto:campegan@okumc.org) or call Josh Pulver, 918-456-6489.

■ Director of Children's Ministry: Yukon-First UMC. Quarter-time. Contact Greg Tolle at [greg.tolle@fumcyukon.org](mailto:greg.tolle@fumcyukon.org) or 405-354-8858.

■ Minister of Students: OKC-Chapel Hill. Full-time. Resume with cover letter to [jennifer@mychapelhill.org](mailto:jennifer@mychapelhill.org).

■ Director of Student Ministries: OKC-New Hope UMC. Full-time. Resume to Rebekah Hasty, [jrhasty96@gmail.com](mailto:jrhasty96@gmail.com).

■ Associate Director of Children's Ministries: Tulsa-Faith UMC. Part-time. Contact [leldridge@faithtulsa.org](mailto:leldridge@faithtulsa.org) or go to [www.faithtulsa.org/jobs](http://www.faithtulsa.org/jobs)

■ Youth Director: Drummond-Salem UMC. Part-time. Resume and cover letter to [saleumc@pldi.net](mailto:saleumc@pldi.net).

■ Administrative Assistant: Tulsa-Memorial Drive UMC. Full-time. Resume and cover letter to [aa.mdumc@tulsacoxmail.com](mailto:aa.mdumc@tulsacoxmail.com).

**(Submit church job listings to Chris Schutz in the Communications Ministry, [cschutz@okumc.org](mailto:cschutz@okumc.org), 405-530-2075.)**

## Blackwell's Blessing Box is popular

**B**LACKWELL, Okla. — The First United Methodist Church in Blackwell ramped up its seasonal festivities, including its live Nativity and model Christmas village, but a new addition to the long-standing church on Coolidge Avenue is a feature that might symbolize the spirit of giving more than anything else: the "Blessing Box" located just on the edge of the grounds.

"The Blessing Box is something that we've seen a lot of other Methodist churches do," said Pastor Cap McIlroy. "You basically stock it with food for families that are in need and they come and take what they need, and if they can replace the items they take that's great as well."

The Blessing Box operates off an honor system, and began (in November) after being constructed by two members of the church.

"The Box has only been 'open' for about two weeks now and already it's been met with great response. It stays stocked and we see (the supplies) moving around a lot. Canned foods, Vienna sausages, ramen noodles... those are all pretty popular with it so far," Cap said recently.

Those who wish to bring food items to



**The Blessing Box at the Blackwell church was first stocked in late November. A growing number of churches in the Northern Prairie District are extending this ministry.**

donate to the box can take their foodstuffs to the church office, which is open from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

(Blackwell Journal-Tribune, Nov. 29, 2017. Reprinted with permission.)

## 2018 Conference calendar goes digital

**F**or 2018, the Oklahoma Conference's leadership will use a digital calendar exclusively, rather than a printed one, to track meetings and events planned by the various Conference groups.

For people who prefer printed calendars, a useful option is the United Methodist Program Calendar, produced

by United Methodist Communications (UMCom), the denomination's media agency. Wall calendars, desk blotters, pocket calendars, and other printed versions are offered. Go to [shop.umc.org](http://shop.umc.org) and search "calendars."

View the Conference calendar at [www.okumc.org/calendar](http://www.okumc.org/calendar).

## Appointments

■ Heather Scherer, to associate at Tulsa-Faith in addition to pastor at Glenpool-Living Water, effective Jan. 1, 2018.

■ Erma Pregler, from associate pastor at Tulsa-Faith to retired, Jan. 1.

■ David Player, from Altus-First to senior pastor at Guymon-Victory Memorial, Jan. 1.

■ James Smith, from Northwest Texas Conference to Altus-First, Jan. 1.

## Passages

ROWLEY — Pamela Jean Rowley, 60, of Mannford, died Dec. 2, 2017. She was the wife of Rev. David Rowley, pastor of Mannford-First UMC.

Survivors include her husband and a son, Bryan, of Durant.

Service was Dec. 9 at Mannford-First.

# 'A season of growth'

## Claremore satellite adds second service

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

CLAREMORE, Okla. — Not yet a year old, The Vessel recently added a second Sunday worship service. This satellite of Claremore-First United Methodist Church symbolizes “a season of growth for this church,” said Senior Pastor Ray Crawford.

“We are always looking for ways to take the good news outside of the walls of our church,” Rev. Crawford said.

The “season of growth” shows up in membership numbers this year.

A total of 33 people have joined The Vessel, said Laurie Ault, who is First UMC’s administrative assistant. And the main campus counts 83 new members, including 20 people who came forward together one Sunday in Fall after a recovery group moved to the church. His House is a transitional living ministry in Claremore.

First UMC established The Vessel in January after church leaders decided the infrastructure of the main campus was becoming stressed – the sanctuary was nearly full and so was the parking lot.

“It would be difficult for us to grow too much beyond where we were,” said Crawford, who is in his 18th year with First.

After a church-planting workshop included ideas for creating churches in storefronts or diners, First UMC decided to try both.

The church did “a lot of discerning for eight or nine months” before deciding,

Crawford said.

Then the Oklahoma Conference “affirmed our dream,” he said, when it helped out with funding through its New Faith Communities Ministry. “We took that as a serious affirmation that God was guiding us in this direction.”

Space for the Vessel was created by knocking out a wall between two storefronts. The building is on Claremore’s south side.

The satellite opened Jan. 15, and its 180 seats filled quickly. The second service was added Oct. 15.

The Vessel “was full out there almost from the very first Sunday,” Crawford said.

Jaimie Willis, who is campus pastor at the Vessel, described a couple of factors in the success of the new congregation. One is its “incredible” band, named *glorifi*. When the second service was added, musicians from within the congregation stepped up to help.

Another factor is the church’s “culture of hospitality.” When worshippers arrive, “people are there ready to greet you and smile at you and welcome you into church,” Rev. Willis said.

Adjoining the Vessel is a coffee shop called She Brews, which offers employment to women who formerly were incarcerated. She Brews also operates a shop downtown. Two women from that business are among members at the Vessel now.

First UMC also holds services at



**Two storefronts were combined in Claremore to create the Vessel, a satellite campus of First United Methodist Church.**

two restaurants. The goal is to add three more such sites over the next five years, Crawford said. The church guarantees a certain amount of food sales during a service, he explained, and people who come often buy more.

The diner services create a non-threatening setting for people who “for some reason have become de-churched,” he said.

The senior pastor said the church welcomes 890 people overall, or 1 percent of the Rogers County population of 89,000, to services at its various sites through the week. The current goal is to

reach another 1 percent.

“We look at our parish more as our county,” Crawford said.

So far, First Church offers three worship services each Sunday at its central campus, two at The Vessel, and a Sunday evening service at the downtown She Brews shop. Also on the weekly schedule are a Celebrate Recovery service on Tuesdays and a casual service named The Bridge for people who are in recovery, those differently abled, and those who live in residential care centers. Early on Wednesdays, the ETA Coalition focuses on prayer and meditation on scriptures.

## Return of Wesley UMC’s bells cheers El Reno

EL RENO, Okla. — After years of silence, the majesty of carillon bells and the Westminster chimes has returned to downtown El Reno.

Several years ago, Wesley United Methodist Church’s carillon system stopped working. Saddened by the loss of music filling the streets, one of the Sunday School classes started each week by singing with its doors open, hoping their voices could substitute for the bells’ silence.

Today the class singing continues, and the bells add their joyous sounds.

With funds donated in memory of some church

members, Wesley Church purchased a new digital carillon system.

“We thought bringing the music back to El Reno was a great way to honor church members,” said Melanie Walker, a church trustee. “For decades, Wesley’s bells were known throughout the downtown area, and we wanted to bring back the sound.”

Trustee Mary Margaret Coats remembers the purchase of the original system in the 1970s; it was updated a couple of times, until it reached the point that it could not be repaired.

“Something was missing from our church when the

bells stopped working,” Coats said, and “it’s exciting to hear the bells again after all these years.”

The new system plays traditional chimes, now heard downtown every 15 minutes and on special occasions such as weddings, funerals, and holidays. Additionally, the system can play other songs such as the soundtrack for Vacation Bible School, contemporary Christmas music, or any digital track.

The Wesley UMC chimes can be heard between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and from noon to 8 p.m. Sunday.

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# Church security

## Active-shooter training among ways Oklahomans prepare for crises

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

Some Oklahoma United Methodist churches invested in safety strategies months, even years, before a gunman burst into morning worship at a Texas church on Nov. 5.

Leaders at three of those churches spoke about procedures put into place and suggested proactive steps for others. Watchfulness before, during, and after an activity is paramount, they all emphasized.

That assault killed 26 people at a Baptist church in Sutherland Springs, population about 600, near San Antonio. Some of the dozens of people injured remain hospitalized.

### Safety for children

At Tulsa-Boston Avenue UMC, EvaMarie Campbell's job portfolio includes security matters particularly because she is the minister to elementary-school children. The large church provides extensive children's programming.

Three years ago, Boston Avenue "realized families have expectations of a level of security for their children," said Rev. Campbell, an associate pastor.

The Security Council was established. Its members have law enforcement and medical experience, among other gifts. They mapped out a plan, looked at building modifications, and got training for active shooter scenarios. They shared information with Sunday School classes. Professionals

patrol the campus at times.

Backpacks and duffel bags are stored while people attend the downtown church.

"Some people go to Boston Avenue and their life possessions are in that bag, but they can still be with us and secure their backpacks," said the associate pastor.

She said more than 80 "security ministry volunteers" have received training. They know "now that you're trained, whenever you're here, be aware."

Campbell said "assertive hospitality" is practiced at Boston Avenue.

"We're not becoming a fortress. We're not going to let fear stop us from doing what we need to be doing, being welcoming."

### Police offer intense class

In Summer 2017, officers of Claremore's police department presented an active-shooter training program to about 40 staff and select volunteers at Claremore-First UMC. Brent Youngs called it intense.

He is the church's executive director.

In a crisis involving gun violence, "the best thing to do is get out — with intelligence," he said.

That training "also gave us a lot of common-sense things, and we have put some into place," such as the location of welcome centers and stocking wasp spray, which "will shoot out 25 feet," rather than pepper spray.

Yet he noted there are "hundreds of thousands of churches in worship that had

no incident. You don't want to create an atmosphere of hysteria. You want to give people a confidence that this is a safe place to come."

A week after the attack in Texas, safety at the Claremore church's campuses was discussed as people gathered for each worship service. "I had very positive comments and actually some thank-yous from the congregation," Youngs said.

"The media is making us nervous about coming to church," an elderly woman said.

Youngs said, "We want to give people more peace about things. It's mostly about hospitality, but we are going to keep our eyes open. We are going to lock some doors, and we gave people notice."

First UMC has an emergency response team equipped for several scenarios, not only gun violence but also a tornado or flooding, he said. Engaging people, questioning strangers in the parking lot and halls, has been practiced for three years, primarily because of the preschool on site.

### Safety volunteers recruited

In Oklahoma City, retired clergyman Gary Graham directs "safety volunteers" at OKC-New Hope. Law enforcement service by his family members dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. His great-great-grandfather was a law officer in Indian Territory, Rev. Graham said.

Graham himself is an advanced certified peace officer for the state. At one parish during his ministry career, he also

was the town's deputy sheriff.

"I'm really saddened" about the Sutherland Springs attack, he said.

Graham said New Hope UMC enacted more security measures after a 2015 church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, when nine people died.

The church's safety volunteers learn how to use firearms and how to disable a person wielding one, he said.

If gun violence erupts, people must not be so frightened that they freeze in place, Graham said. "I want everyone to grab a hymnal or Bible and throw it at that person."

### Careful listening

He said, "You can generally tell someone's upset by their demeanor. I teach my people to go up and say, 'Is there anything I can do to help you?' My people are trained to listen." That can help defuse anger.

He and Senior Pastor J.D. Ward made the same statement about a pastor as shepherd: "I'm responsible to protect those sheep."

"Talk about it in advance," said Rev. Ward. "It's not about being scared; it's being prepared."

**This concludes a two-part story series. Read the first story at [www.okumc.org/newsdetail/church-security-questions-rise-after-shooting-at-small-church-10082126](http://www.okumc.org/newsdetail/church-security-questions-rise-after-shooting-at-small-church-10082126)**

## International mission update: Asbury College, Philippines

Building up people and building projects in the Philippines are reported by United Methodist deacon Marsha Alexander, who entered missionary ministry from Chickasha, Oklahoma.

Founded in 1947, Asbury College today extends its mission from elementary through college ages.

This year the addition of the 12th grade accomplished the goal to educate students at every grade level, Rev. Alexander reported. Most people live in poverty in Anda, where the college is located.

"Our population is 1,054 students, and our part- and full-time faculty and staff, over 50. We continue to grow and grow," she said.

Here are more highlights from her Fall 2017 missionary letter.

■ Forty-eight Asbury College graduates recently took the licensing exam for teachers. During the testing, six faculty members served as examination watchers for the Philippines' official

**To connect with a missionary, contact Karen Distefano, who is the Oklahoma Conference's secretary of Global Ministries, [kdistefano@okumc.org](mailto:kdistefano@okumc.org).**

regulatory commission.

■ "Our students have been succeeding in putting the name of Asbury on the academic charts as well as athletic charts. One of our sixth-grade students won a championship in singles table tennis, competing with municipal schools. Our high school students won eight gold medals in the municipal athletic meet, and they won second place in the mathematics contest."

■ 50 elementary pupils, four secondary students, and 51 college students are receiving scholarships this year through the denomination's General Board of Global Ministries Advance (number 3021056).

■ "We hired a new nurse last summer and, since her coming to Asbury, we

have worked with the local health clinic in providing vaccinations for our elementary and high school pupils."

■ Three faculty members have earned M.A. degrees, with nine others studying toward that goal.

■ Construction of the elementary building is complete. A new student union building is under way. The dilapidated canteen was razed. Four water wells now supply the school, with two water towers under construction. Security cameras have been installed.

■ "We have made a name for our school within the United Methodist circle of schools as well as within our region. Our bishop recently called together the presidents of the five Baguio Episcopal Area institutions of higher education, and we organized. Five of us are officers in this historic organization."

Also in her letter, Alexander wrote of her father's death this year. She said Asbury College experienced the loss of several alumni as well.

"God has been faithful and His love has sustained us through all the sad



**Two students of Asbury school in the Philippines display their award.**

times," she wrote. "Thank you for your continued prayers and financial support." Her GBGM Advance number is 10772Z.

# 2017 Episcopal Address

BY BISHOP JIMMY NUNN

**I** celebrate a high level of competence, a low level of anxiety, a deep faith in the Gospel, and a wide missional reach in the Oklahoma Conference.

Thank God for your witness and service. We have made and will continue to make a difference in the world.

A few years ago, we developed a Conference strategic plan. I realize not everyone agrees with the need for a plan or with the major initiatives of a given plan. I acknowledge regional differences I have noted in Oklahoma.

But strategic plans can add value to any organization. I can see positive evidence of the Conference plan at work.

At the Laity Session of the 2017 Annual Conference, I asked whether the group believed we declined or grew in worship attendance last year. We declined.

I asked a second question: Was the decline larger or smaller (than in previous years)? The overwhelming consensus of the group was that the decline was larger.

In fact, the 2016 decline was the smallest in the past four years.

We declined by 687 people versus prior year declines of about 1,500-1,600 and, four years ago, a decline of nearly 2,200 in worship.

There are reasons for this relative good news. There is a workable plan to make a difference being rolled out. We are in the early stages of it.

The reason I isolate this one issue is that it points to a potential pessimism that may be creeping into our hearts. That pessimism says just hold on until we all die.

I am acutely aware of the challenges we face. But I will not give up hope. I will not come to Annual Conference every year expecting more and larger-scale bad news.

Don't you give up hope, either.

We celebrate these ministries and acknowledge with gratitude the fruit produced from them. Together, we can accomplish more than we can alone. The strategic plans were developed and executed with insight and skill.

While we celebrate the accomplishments, adding or reconfiguring layers within an organization resets the system.

Change brings stress. An appropriate level of stress is beneficial. But in all change, stress can produce injuries. Simply acknowledging the stress is the first step toward healing, adapting, and moving forward in a positive way.

I wish to share four observations that have caught my attention and require naming, lest they go unspoken and become counterproductive.

■ My first observation is that we are still adjusting to the reduction in the number of districts in the Conference.

In districts that had little change, the transition has already been made. But for districts that moved centers, created new partnerships with people who were not previously known well, or were challenged to develop a new sense of identity, the adjustment is significant.

District Superintendents face significant challenges as well. Not only do expectations for superintendents rise, the amount of time available to spend with each pastor and church is compressed. Travel and administrative demands increase. Overall costs shift, but seldom decrease. Full-time District Administrators have offset some of the demands and have helped increase coordination. The roles of the District Superintendents and District Administrators are evolving as we create better alignment, improve administrative services, and eliminate redundancies.

■ The second observation that I wish to share is that we are in a shifting financial climate. We are experiencing challenges in the Conference and across the Church. We also see these challenges beyond the Church. Within our

churches collectively, we generally have fewer people and rising fixed costs. I acknowledge the financial stress felt throughout the Conference.

How should a healthy annual conference cope with changes in the financial climate? We will move through a multi-year process of adjusting our financial system.

In a healthy organization like our Conference, incremental change is preferred over sudden, drastic change. But we must be intentional, because organizational cultures do not self-correct.

A change in the level of Conference funding does not invalidate a ministry. In their article "Building Trust While Cutting Costs," authors Couto, Caglar, and Pansky "start with the premise that all spending is investment: every cost is a choice. The secret to unlocking growth through cost reduction ... is to make more deliberate choices about where to invest, focusing on what to keep rather than what to cut." (Strategy + Business, Issue 86, Spring 2017, p. 39).

As we focus on what to keep rather than what to cut, it is imperative to remember that every ministry we fund, or have ever funded, has value.

## Journal available now

**Want to know more about Oklahoma Conference ministries? You'll find reports from the groups, financial information, clergy service records, the bishop's full Episcopal Address, and much more in the 2017 Oklahoma Journal. Go to [www.okumc.org/journal2017](http://www.okumc.org/journal2017) for a downloadable PDF, or order the book from Mimeo Marketplace, <https://marketplace.mimeo.com/okumc>.**

I want to distinguish between something having value and something being vital. A valuable ministry produces fruit, and we celebrate that.

Vitality is different than value. Let me share a working definition: Vitality "fundamentally affects the continuation, value, efficiency, and the like of an organization." Vitality has a higher claim on an organization than value because value depends on vitality.

As we navigate future budgets, we will continue to ask: What are the vital functions of a conference? Are those functions producing the type of fruit that we need? What levels of funding are appropriate to give us the best chance for maximum vitality?

■ Third, we have had another significant change in the Oklahoma Conference. Bishop Hayes completed 12 years of distinguished and effective service as your bishop. We rejoice in the season of ministry you have had together.

Now, you have a new bishop. I am grateful you have made my transition to Oklahoma as smooth as one could ask. Again, I express my gratitude for your love, acceptance, openness, willingness, and spirit. I am incredibly blessed to have been assigned to the Oklahoma Area.

But there are still stressors in the system with this transition. I want to name them, as I have named others. With the change, our norms suddenly are reset. The formal and informal practices that groups have lived by through an unspoken code are suddenly questioned without a word being spoken. Now we must discern how decisions are made in the meeting, whether a meeting is for decision-making or information-sharing.

Our ministry teams have demonstrated a high capacity to adapt to a different style, and I offer my gratitude and acknowledge the journey.

One of the processes that raise anxiety each year is the appointive season. What are the rules of engagement? How is it going to be done? Can I trust this new person?

The same questions surface with new superintendents, new pastors, and new churches. Each year 15 to 25 percent of our churches and pastors experience a system reset with

a pastoral change. The effects of leadership change are greater when a long-tenured pastor moves.

Many times, moves are healthy. Other times, moves feel excessive. One of the appointive tasks is to discern the difference. Let me share how I approach the appointive task. It is a year-long task that is broken into seasons of the year.

During the fall, superintendents conduct charge conferences and gather feedback for consultation. Personalized consultations are conducted with pastors and churches. In late January, the appointive cabinet meets to review the churches in a process called Inventory.

The making of appointments demands the full attention of everyone around the table. Every appointment is considered both individually and within the context of the whole. The appointment process is not linear, but it is not chaotic either. It is malleable in process and flexible in implementation. Changes in availability and need occur throughout the appointive season, which contribute to the challenges of the process.

One of the questions I always raise is: What kind of leadership does this church need to effectively serve the mission field?

The superintendent shares the profile of the church. We consult Mission Insite. Because all superintendents are conference superintendents, anyone can nominate any pastor from across the Conference for any church. If we cannot answer a question inside the room, we will make a call or visit to a pastor or church and ask.

Each nominee for a given church is listed, discussed, and a decision to move forward is made. I ask, "How does this pastor best fit the mission field and the church?"

Once the appointment of a new pastor is announced in both churches, the appointment is shared on the Conference website. Appointments are not official until fixed by the resident bishop at an annual conference.

I wish to express my humble, heartfelt gratitude to pastors and churches. Thank you for serving one another and for serving your mission field.

In my review of the Conference strategic plan, I note the absence of an appointment strategy. It naturally fits in the second of our priorities: Invest in lay, clergy, and indigenous leadership. For the sake of transparency, I hope to collaborate to develop a strategic statement.

■ The final observation I offer is at the level of the general church. The denomination's Judicial Council released its April 2017 decisions, which address ongoing conflicts throughout The United Methodist Church concerning human sexuality. While views differ on the issue of human sexuality within the Conference, we have always displayed patience and understanding of church processes.

The Council of Bishops has called a Special Session of the General Conference to be held February 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri. Its purpose will be "limited to receiving and acting on a report from the Council of Bishops based on the recommendations of the Commission on a Way Forward." The Commission's task includes examining paragraphs in the *Book of Discipline* concerning human sexuality and exploring options to strengthen the unity of the Church.

I ask us to pray for the Church. Let us set our hearts on Jesus and continue to serve our mission fields within the parameters of the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*. These parameters outline our understanding of accountability to one another and to God.

In closing, the Oklahoma Conference has always aimed high. We have many strengths, and we build on them. We possess diverse and exceptional capabilities, which always transcend functional challenges. May God continue to bless the Oklahoma Conference. — Page 229, *The Journal*



## TAKE PROFITS WITHOUT PAYING TAXES – PART 2

*In the last issue of Contact we wrote about Waldo, who purchased shares of stock for many years through his company's stock purchase plan. The value of his stock grew and became a substantial investment. Because he has been purchasing the stock for over 30 years, his cost is very low. Yet, he hesitates to sell it because he knows any sale will trigger an immediate capital gains tax.*

### WHAT ARE SOME OPTIONS?

Waldo knows that by transferring his stock to a charitable organization rather than selling the stock, he avoids capital gains tax. Even though his cost is less than 25% of the stock's current fair market value, he will receive an income tax deduction for the fair market value. And most important, the gift will help support his favorite ministries and causes.

### GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING:

Waldo would like to make a gift this year of stock that can be used to support several United Methodist ministries and several other charitable organizations in the future. A Donor Advised Fund (DAF) offers this type of flexibility and is easy to establish. Many believe that a DAF is a low-cost alternative to a private foundation, with more favorable tax benefits and without the unfavorable restrictions and excise taxes.

### EASE AND BENEFITS OF A DAF:

Opening a DAF account is easy to do. Contact us and we will prepare your DAF agreement

for signature. Your DAF account can be funded with gifts of cash, securities, real estate or other assets. Check with us if you have unique or special assets that may be donated in a tax-efficient way.

### RECOMMENDING YOUR GIFTS TO CHARITY:

Once your account is open, you are ready to begin giving! Simply notify us in writing with your recommendation of how your DAF funds should be distributed. We will seek to honor your wishes to help further the organizations and causes you love.

***Please contact us if you would like more information on giving stock at year's end or other ways that you can use stock to support your favorite United Methodist ministries.***

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# Christmas:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

it held no meaning for him.

"I had no Christian background," he said.

That changed when Kim met his wife-to-be, became a Christian like her, and celebrated Christ's birthday at OKC-Korean First United Methodist Church.

"I've never missed Christmas services since," Kim said.

His traditions now include a Christmas Eve service, dinner together, singing contests and fun games as a church family. "It brought me joy in my family," he said.

Kim said now he knows "what it's like to be a Christian family."

### Aly Shahan of Moore:

The Christmas Eve service took on new meaning for Aly Shahan when her husband held up their 4-month-old child, Peyton, and talked to the congregation about the vulnerability of an infant.

Adam Shahan is associate pastor at Moore-First United Methodist Church.

"How powerful that Christ came to Earth in that vulnerable state!" Aly thought as she watched father and baby.

"Christmas really took on a whole new meaning for me. It opened my faith to a whole new level."



**Bishop Jimmy Nunn, right, joins other volunteers wrapping family gifts for the annual Christmas Store project at Cookson Hills Center. Leaders at the mission said more than 600 gifts had been packaged by early December.**

Adam also sang MercyMe's "Joseph's Lullaby" in the service. "It made it that much more powerful," Aly said.

### Janey Wilson of Ada:

"The older I get, the more meaningful the Christmas season is to me. Christmas is much more than Black Friday/Cyber Monday shopping, stressing over

getting the Christmas decorations ready, the house being super clean, cooking for days, and feeling exhausted from it all.

"Christmas is simply about Jesus. Celebrating His birth. We don't need all that extra stuff. We simply need Jesus.

"I love celebrating his birth with my family, friends, and students of the Wesley at East Central University. I love hearing

the Christmas story, singing Christmas carols, and being together with those I love.

"Christmas Eve worship is one of my most favorite things to do all year long. Everyone is dressed in Christmas colors, young and old are happy, and celebrating Jesus with a candlelight service is simply beautiful."

Janey Wilson is campus minister for the Wesley Foundation at ECU. She also shared what Joel Nalare, an ECU freshman from Uganda, wrote.

Nalare submitted, "First of all, God enabled me to find an awesome campus ministry with very good people who love people and God ... He has manifested mightily in my academics. He has provided for me despite the hardships in the foreign land. He has given me life. His has covered me with his grace and showered me with favor.

"God has added new members, which is a goal of any Christian ministry ... He has inspired loyalty in the hearts of all Wesley members ... He has provided for the ministry.

"Mainly it has given me a family of friends that know, believe, and worship God. It has strengthened my faith and has given me a splendid spiritual experience in a foreign land."