LAWTON — Churches’ leaders in the southwest part of the state will be first to experience a newly developed leadership and discipleship program, according to Carlos Ramirez, who is the Conference’s associate director of Leadership and Innovation.

The pilot, called “The Gathering – Southwest,” will be Feb. 3 at Centenary United Methodist Church in Lawton.

Rev. Ramirez said the Conference wants the program to address a void in learning opportunities especially for lay people who hold local-church leadership responsibilities. He expects similar sessions in other regions of the state to be scheduled in the future.

The Feb. 3 program in Lawton, from 9 to 4:30 p.m., will be varied and also offers a component for kids, plus childcare. Laity and clergy will hear TED-style talks and panelists will field questions from the participants, Ramirez said. Among topics for discussions will be: social entrepreneurship, marketing, intercultural development, fundraising, public relations, social theology, strategic planning, and working with the poor.

Another set of discussions will be under the theme HOPE (Hospitality, Offer Christ, Purpose, and Engagement). Speakers for those workshops will be Chris Dodson, Brandon Dollarhite, and Marsha Purtell.

The purpose is to expose people to “something they can do right away,” Ramirez said.

SEE LAWTON, PAGE 8

A parachute billows behind Noah Ramos and Michaela Waller during Camp Spark on Jan. 5-7.

Young adults bond at winter retreat

The Camp Spark program expanded this winter, adding a retreat specifically for young adults on Jan. 5-7 at the United Methodist Canyon Camp facilities near Hinton. About 50 people attended, mainly from the Heartland and Crossroads Districts. The event included a bonfire and worship with preaching by Adam Shahan, associate pastor at Moore-First. Housing was in Hardt Lodge. Young adults filled Canyon that weekend, according to Neil Tate of the Conference Camps staff, as the facility also hosted two other young-adult groups.

PHOTOS BY CHARLIE LUDDEN

Regional leader training day will launch in Lawton

https://okumc-reg.brtapp.com/Thegatheringsouthwest2018

From left: Earnest discussion engages Rev. Matt Borum, Melissa Williams, and Anna Stallings.

Roxie Morgan rocks out at Hardt Lodge while journaling during a solitude session.

A Canyon Camp hammock holds triplets Kellie, Allie, and Katie Seay (from left).
Three outstanding women take top honors

A wards season came early at Oklahoma City University, where University-Church Relations and the Wimberly School of Religion came together at their annual appreciation dinner on Dec. 8 to recognize the work of three distinguished women.

Virginia “Ginny” Walker was selected by OCU trustees as the recipient of this year’s Bishop Paul W. Milhouse Award. The honor was established in 1982 to recognize laity who symbolize outstanding support and communication between the university and local congregations.

Ginny, an active member of Haikey Chapel United Methodist Church in Bixby, a congregation of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, and of Living Water UMC in Glenpool, also serves in a number of roles in support of both the Church and higher education, and continues to be a strong advocate of OCU, where she served as first lady alongside her husband, President Jerald Walker, from 1979 to 1997.

For 16 of the last 21 years she has served in numerous capacities as a fundraiser for Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa. Ginny has also served on several boards and committees with Oklahoma Methodist Manor, the OIMC, and her local churches.

Part of the Walkers’ legacy to OCU is a charitable remainder trust that provides scholarships for Native American students.

Rev. Rebekah Belase was selected by the Wimberly School of Religion as its 2017-18 Distinguished Alumna. A 1999 graduate of the School of Religion and a graduate of Saint Paul School of Theology, Rebekah is an ordained deacon in the United Methodist Church. She serves as the director of Funds Development for Church World Service, a partnership organization of 37 denominations that oversees food, water, and justice ministries in more than 30 countries. She is married to Rev. Derrek Belase, the Oklahoma Conference’s director of Discipleship.

Rev. Shannon Rodenberg was selected by the Wimberly School of Religion to receive its first-ever Rising Star Award, given to a recent graduate in recognition of outstanding promise in that person’s chosen career field. A 2010 alumna of OCU and 2013 graduate of Saint Paul School of Theology at OCU, Shannon is now a provisional elder in the Oklahoma Conference and serves as pastor of Fairland-First UMC. In her short time in ministry, she has followed her passion and been instrumental in starting new programs for children and youth in Fairland.

In addition to the awards, the dinner gave students in the Wimberly School of Religion an opportunity to meet and thank donors who have contributed to their scholarships.

OCU University-Church Relations and the Wimberly School of Religion welcome nominations for next year’s awards. Please submit your recommendations for lay persons or alumni to consider to Rita Himes at rhimes@okcu.edu.

2018 Bishop Scholar Award

Feb. 1 is the deadline to submit all materials for persons applying for the 2018-19 OCU Bishop Scholar Award. This scholarship goes to incoming college freshmen who plan to study in the Wimberly School of Religion at OCU and pursue a vocation in United Methodist ministry. Application materials can be found at www.okcu.edu/bishopscholar.

Interviews will be held Feb. 24, with announcements following the week. Two or three full-tuition awards are given each year, with every student who interviews receiving scholarships valued between 60 and 80 percent of tuition.
See all the people:

Ruby Payne brings insights on poverty

On March 15 in Moore, Ruby Payne herself will lead a free workshop about understanding poverty, following her company’s presentation last fall of “What Every Church Member Should Know About Poverty” that was well attended by Oklahoma United Methodists.

“A Day With Ruby Payne” will be held at Moore-First UMC, beginning with sign-in at 9:30 a.m. that Thursday. The church’s address is 201 W Main, less than two blocks from Interstate 35.

The workshop will provide information to increase participants’ knowledge about the culture of impoverished people and ways churches may take steps to minister to those who are poor.

Topics will include: the hidden rules of the middle class, language patterns and cognition, violence and conflict resolution, family and relationship building, and church participation.

A goal for the event is to help local churches that are considering “next steps” in relating to the poor, said Derrek Belase, who is the director of Discipleship for the Oklahoma Conference.

Participants will discuss how to invite and integrate the poorest of people in a community into the life of a local church.

The program is open to laity and clergy.

Lunch will not be served on site, but there will be a 1 1/2 hour lunch break. Continuing education credit is available.

Dr. Payne’s presentation is separate from the previous seminar, Rev. Belase explained. Attendance at the fall program is not a prerequisite.

“A Day With Ruby Payne” is sponsored by the Conference’s Discipleship Ministry Team, the Mission and Service Ministry Team, and the Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation.

For more information about Payne, go to the website of the aha! Process company that she founded. Advance registration is helpful. The web link is https://okumc-reg.brtapp.com/ADayWithRubyPayne-March2018.

Domestic violence in spotlight

The Oklahoma Conference is partnering to present “Safe Town,” a program on domestic violence awareness, on Feb. 27 at OKC-Church of the Servant.

This one-day training, which is interactive, is made possible through a collaboration with the state’s Department of Human Services (DHS).

“Family units break down,” said Derrek Belase, director of Discipleship for the Conference and a former police officer. “People who experience domestic violence often pull away from the church because they don’t want the church people to see.”

He said Safe Town can help answer United Methodism’s call to #See All The People, a major new initiative, “to help our churches see people not often seen in their communities.”

Participants will not only gain awareness but also learn how to respond to domestic violence — “because churches can say the wrong thing” — and receive church-specific resources.

Belase would like to see the program offered in each district.

He said he is pleased that DHS agreed to partner with the Conference, and he noted that Church of the Servant leaders had been seeking some way to promote awareness of domestic violence. Connie Harrison, a member of that church, is the Conference’s Peace With Justice coordinator.

Some funding support for Safe Town comes from the denomination’s Peace With Justice Offering, Belase said.

The training will begin promptly at 8:30 a.m. Registration is required and must be done online at https://events.oucpm.org/safetown/
Youths in Seminole reach out to homeless neighbors

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

EMINOLE, Okla. — The youth of Seminole-First United Methodist Church were alarmed to realize some people in their town lived outside, in the cold, with nothing to eat. In November, they responded by collecting food, coats, sleeping bags, and tents to give out to people in need in Seminole and the area. They are continuing that outreach.

“It bothered them that there were people that were homeless or were going without food,” said First UMC Youth Director Tracy Jacomo, who is a retired schoolteacher.

Ten to 15 youth, including Jacomo’s daughter Katie, have been helping with the project.

Pastor Mark Watson praised the youths’ efforts. “It is a great ministry and going well,” he noted in an email statement.

The Seminole American Legion allows the church’s Community Outreach Program to hand out the supplies at its armory. Distribution is on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month, Jacomo said. They hope that schedule benefits people whose government assistance funds run out before the month is over.

The group also gives out packages of toiletries as well as socks, hats, and gloves, and they maintain a clothing closet at the armory.

Church members have contributed items to stock the pantry and clothing closet, Jacomo said.

Bethel church and school steer longtime Christmas basket project

GROUPS RALLY HELP ACROSS 32 YEARS

BY VIRGINIA BRADSHAW
COUNTYWIDE & SUN

BETHEL, Okla. — The men’s group of Bethel United Methodist Church continued a Christmas basket project that began 32 years ago, helping families in need in the Bethel community near Shawnee.

It’s pared down a little since the height of the project in, perhaps, the ‘90s, when the United Methodist Men packed their pickups with food, clothing, and toys, and hand-delivered the gifts provided by all levels of Bethel Public School and other community members.

On Dec. 16, a Saturday, 23 invited families, which included 58 children, picked up their Christmas baskets at a designated time and place, but chances are the smiles on their faces were just as big and their hearts just as grateful as those in earlier years.

“Each one of those families will receive food; the kids will receive clothing as a gift and will receive toys,” said Jim Jenkins, spokesman for the UMMen and this year’s project chairman, in an interview before distribution day.

PARTNERSHIPS MULTIPLY

“These are individuals that have been through a financial hardship. They’re all identified through the school,” he said.

Bethel teachers, who see them every day, know which children need clothes, coats, etc., explained Gary Cartwright, former Bethel junior high principal, now of Edmond, who founded the program.

“The school sends home an information sheet. ... The kids are from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade,” Jenkins said.

The food supplied isn’t just for a Christmas dinner. “We try to give enough food to last 30 days.” Students at the school collected the non-perishable food. The UMMen picked it up, took it to the church, and sorted it into “so many cans of this food and that, etc.”

The men also provided fresh foodstuffs. UMMen, with the help of the Bethel FFA, Girl Scouts, other Bethel UMC members and community volunteers, divided the food into groups for each family, according to the number of people in that family.

The number of helpers who show up may range “anywhere from 10 to 20 or more,” Jenkins said. Regina Flatt, of the lower elementary school, organized the toy selection.

“The gifts — the clothes, food, and toys — to me, the really neat thing about this is that absolutely no federal or state money is involved. It’s all members of the Bethel community taking care of each other,” Jenkins said.

Classes at the school held a contest to see which could collect the most food contributions. They started collecting immediately after Thanksgiving break. The UMMen rewarded the winners with a pizza party.

Today the men’s group consists of about eight members. “Most everybody who is there now has been there the entire 32 years,” Jenkins said.

It all started in 1985, recalled Cartwright, now retired after 38 years in the Bethel school system. He was a member of the UMMen then and still is.

“I knew the needs of the families around us; there wasn’t enough food, especially around a holiday. We started a food drive in the junior high and had a contest to see who would bring in the most food. They all brought food.”

Through the efforts at the junior high, names of people who needed help were collected. The United Methodist Church came up with clothes to give them, and the school, the food.

“Let’s see what we can do!”

Cartwright said he told the other men in the group, “Let’s see what we can do in 1986. Even then, it was about 15 families at most” who needed help.

About 1987, “we decided to do big time. We said, let’s see if we can get more food and more clothes. We all decided to have a big food drive. We took in a lot of food, and Methodist Men came up with the clothing. We would try to see that every kid through age 12 got a toy, also.”

By 1996, Blackburn Chapel and the Bethel Assembly of God churches were also providing money for clothing. Nonperishable food was being collected by school students, and the UMMen were holding pizza parties.

“The elementary usual won because Gary Bourdonnais was the elementary principal at that time. When he retired in 1998, another principal came in and carried the ball just as well,” Cartwright said.

It got so big, he said, that when customers at Walmart saw Cartwright and his wife, Marsha, who also worked at Bethel schools, pushing grocery carts piled high, they stopped the couple to donate money so they could help, too.

He remembered a man whom he knew from Blackburn Chapel stopped him at a retail clothing store and said, “I want to help;” as he handed Cartwright $1,000.

“I went back to Methodist Men and said, ‘I’ve got $1,000 here. Do you want me to go find some more families to help?’”

They did. He went home and started calling people. “It would wear you out, but we had fun doing it,” he said.

One of his most vivid memories, however, is of a time when a man called him and said, “You’ve helped me for the last two or three years. I don’t need it this year, but we feel like we want to give something back.”

They agreed to meet at Little Joe’s store. There, the man handed Cartwright five $100 bills. Then he pulled out an envelope with another $500 in it.

A SURPRISE DONATION

“We could say, ‘Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.’”

“I will never forget it. They needed it bad. We helped them, and they paid us back.”

“Whenever we felt like we didn’t have enough money, money would just appear,” Cartwright said of the project that’s still going on in Bethel each Christmas season.


Unlikely at some food pantries, a client is not required to show proof of a permanent address (such as an electric bill) to receive assistance. Jacomo said some recipients do live outdoors, while others are “couch surfing” at friends’ homes.

At each distribution, she has noticed new people come to get help.

“They’re from within our community,” she said. “There’s a lot of unemployment in our area.”

A recent point-in-time survey identified some 250 homeless people in the Seminole area.

In late December, Jacomo estimated 88 people had gotten assistance from the youths’ program since it started Nov. 11.

The food supplies they offer can be eaten as-is or heated up — with choices including potted meat and jerky, crackers, granola bars, shelf-stable milk, and canned fruit and vegetables. With the holidays in mind, the group also gave out items for a special meal, such as instant dressing and canned ham.
Las Posadas Service

Christmas programming gets Hispanic flavor at Enid-New Hope

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

ENID, Okla. — Seeking shelter, the Holy Family found more than symbolic refuge at Enid’s New Hope United Methodist Church at Christmas time.

First, the church hosted Las Posadas on Dec. 17. In the Hispanic tradition, especially in Mexico, this engaging “service of shelter” celebrates the safe haven finally found by the refugee family as Mary and Joseph anticipated Jesus’ birth.

In addition, New Hope held a real baby shower that month — with online gift registry for “the baby Jesus” — and an unused classroom in the church is becoming a freshly painted and stocked nursery to welcome today’s children.

Participants in the Las Posadas event got to see that project’s progress, according to Pastor Emily Robnett.

In costume, Brian Percy as Joseph and Haleigh Rogers as Mary led the indoor journey to three classrooms staged as inns, where they sought lodging. People carried candles and sang carols, accompanied by a guitarist.

“We know the story, but it’s another thing to take part in it’

They were rejected at each stop. They reached the church’s narthex — and received from that “innkeeper” a generous welcome that included a feast.

The choir performed; the sacred story was read. “Silent Night” was sung in three languages: English, Spanish, and American Sign Language.

Enid-New Hope members wanted new programming for Christmas 2017, Robnett said.

“We know the story, but it’s another thing to take part in it. It comes alive in a different way” through Las Posadas. Find the service in The United Methodist Book of Worship.

“I like the idea of introducing” how non-white people recognize and celebrate the Holy Family to a mainly white congregation, she added.

She’s known about Las Posadas since childhood.

Robnett was appointed to pastor Enid-New Hope in June. But she grew up attending Ada-First United Methodist Church, which has presented Las Posadas for 18 years, according to Roberto Escamilla, retired clergyman.

He said the Ada church welcomed more than 100 participants for Las Posadas last month — and the feast included homemade tamales.

Rev. Dr. Escamilla is credited in the Book of Worship as part of the team that revised Las Posadas for United Methodist use.

Robnett said the service at Ada-First was “almost magical” for her as a child.

The presentation at Enid-New Hope was “a loaves-and-fishes moment,” she said. About 40 people were expected; 70 turned up.

“There ended up being enough for everybody.”

The service complemented furnishing the nursery space, and the church now has welcomed a newborn, Robnett said in early January.

“If you want children, there must be a place for them. That was a first step in revitalizing a church that is ready to grow.”

Thanks to the Helmerich Foundation’s lead gift of $750,000, the special offering at Annual Conference of over $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.
NASHVILLE, Tenn. — For the second consecutive year, the work of the Commission on a Way Forward in addressing the United Methodist debate over homosexuality was considered the top news story by church communicators.

Coverage of the commission’s progress came in first place on ballots cast by 37 communicators in the United States, Africa, and Asia, along with News Service staff.

1 Commission on a Way Forward

The 32-member commission has been meeting to seek a way through the denomination’s impasse over how LGBTQ individuals are included in the church. Appointed by the Council of Bishops, the commission serves in an advisory capacity to the bishops, and in November the bishops reviewed three possibilities the commission is currently considering. The bishops also have called a special General Conference in February 2019 to take up the bishops’ legislation based on the commission’s work.

2 United Methodists respond to natural disasters

The United Methodist Church, through churches, annual conferences, UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief), and individuals, stepped up again and again to help after natural disasters — in the aftermath of devastating hurricanes in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico; earthquakes in Mexico; wildfires in the western United States; and a deadly mudslide in Sierra Leone.

They prayed, assembled cleaning buckets, offered shelter, donated financial resources, and brought their muscle and know-how to disaster response.

A group of United Methodists even developed an app to facilitate hurricane response in Texas and now Puerto Rico.

3 Judicial Council rules on gay bishop

The Judicial Council, The United Methodist Church’s top court, ruled on April 28 that the consecration of a “self-avaowed practicing homosexual bishop” violates church law.

A key part of Decision 1341 is that a “same-sex marriage license issued by competent civil authorities together with the clergy person’s status in a same-sex relationship is a public declaration that the person is a self-avaowed practicing homosexual.”

While the decision did not name Bishop Karen Oliveto, the denomination’s sole openly gay episcopal leader, it was her election and consecration in 2016 that prompted a petition to the court.

The ruling marked the first time the denomination’s court weighed in on same-gender marriage licenses since the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015 established same-sex civil marriage as a constitutional right.

4 United Methodists witness against racism

White supremacists were on the march in 2017, and United Methodists provided a witness against racism and for the way of Christ. UM clergy and their interfaith partners in Charlottesville, Virginia, took a stand against the Ku Klux Klan in July and offered shelter when white supremacists rioted and a woman was killed in a crowd of counter-demonstrators. UM clergy also bore witness against white supremacy when white-nationalist groups headed to Tennessee.

5 Global migration

More people are on the move than at any time in recorded history, and United Methodists around the world are helping those migrants and refugees. In response to the global migration crisis, The United Methodist Church planned a day of prayer and a special offering to raise awareness and funds to aid migrants and refugees.

Global Migration Sunday was held Dec. 3, the first Sunday of Advent. The offering went to the denomination’s Global Migration Advance, a fund set up in 2014 to designate gifts specifically for work that alleviates the suffering of migrants.

Other stories garnering votes

As the Commission on a Way Forward did its work, two new advocacy groups got off the ground and two more groups continued their development. The Wesleyan Covenant Association, which considers church teachings on homosexuality to be part of Christian orthodoxy, held two public gatherings and named its first staff members. The United Methodist Queer Clergy Caucus formed as a caucus and elected officers. The Uniting Methodists Movement organized to give voice to those who don’t see different views of homosexuality as church-dividing. The United Methodist Association of Retired Clergy also organized to promote full inclusion of LGBTQ Christians.

Africa University celebrated its 25th anniversary and the election of a new president. The United Methodist Commission on a Way Forward celebrated its 25th anniversary and the election of a graduate as bishop in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Discipleship Ministries launched its #SeeAllThePeople initiative. The message of the campaign: “Let’s stop fixing churches and start seeing the people Christ called us to reach.”

As sexual harassment and abuse dominated U.S. news headlines, the United Methodist Commission on the Status and Role of Women asked United Methodists to respond to a survey. And clergywoman Stephanie York Arnold produced a video — “#HerTruth: Women in Ministry Break Their Silence” — for the North Alabama Conference’s Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

(PASSAGES)

PIERSON — Rev. Dr. Robert D. Pierson, 81, of Tulsa died Dec. 14, 2017. He chaired the Russia Initiative for the Oklahoma Conference and planted several Methodist churches in Russia. He founded the denomination’s Large Church Initiative and led it for 15 years. He also founded the Leadership Nexus Foundation and authored books on church growth.

Other churches he pastored were Capron, Henrietta, Tulsa-First, Stillwater-Highland Park, and Bartlesville-First.

Survivors include his wife, Delia; and children Sarah, Jamie, and David Pierson, Cheryl Lynn Danni, Jill James, and Rev. Becky Pierson, pastor at Tulsa-Aldersgate. Service was Dec. 18 at Christ UMC.

Memorial gifts to: Leadership Nexus Foundation, 7103 S Columbia Place, Tulsa, OK 74136.


Survivors include his wife, Hammon, Bethel, Gotebo, Vinson, Brinkman, Willow, Prairie Hill, Duke, Erick, Hollis, Berlin, and Sayre churches.

Survivors include his wife, Carolyn, and sons Norman and Lyndon Shumaker.

Service will be at 11 a.m. Jan. 27 at Mangum-First UMC.


Gene served churches in Francis, Sashaka, Caddo, Kenefic, Bokchito, Maud, and Wanette.

Survivors include his wife, Juanita, and children Patricia Jones, Pamela Kirk, Susan Kelley, Wade Teel, and Gina Teel.

Service was Dec. 20 at Criswell Funeral Home Chapel, Ada.

Memorial gifts to: Mitchell Memorial United Methodist Church, 221 W Seventh, Ada, OK 74820.

DOZER — Rev. Charles Earl Dozer and his wife, Leola Pearl Dozer, died two days apart at Jenkins Care Community, Wellston, Ohio.

Charles, age 92, had served three churches: Fairview at Slapout, Morning Star, and Grandfield.

He died Jan. 1, 2018, and Leola, age 90, died Jan. 3, 2018. Their survivors include a daughter, Juanita Thatcher.

Their joint service was Jan. 6 in Wellston, Ohio.

COMBS-FRANCIS — Rev. Sheila Combs-Francis, 67, died Jan. 6, 2018, while visiting her daughter, Anna, in Burbank, Calif. At the time of her death, she was pastor at Kaw City. She also is survived by her husband, Tom.

She also pastored at Antlers, Enid, Ponca City-Allbright, Sayre, Billings, Hennessey, Geary, and Cashin.

Service was Jan. 13 at Enid-New Hope.

Nadine Humphrey, 87, of Oklahoma City died Jan. 7, 2018. She was the mother of Rev. Brad Humphrey.
Moore-First devoted to helping girls in India

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

MOORE, Okla. — Girls who live in a dormitory and attend a school in Vadodara, India, can bathe with sun-warmed water now, thanks to the generosity of First United Methodist Church in Moore, Oklahoma, 8,406 miles away.

Harriet Parmar and Charles Payne, members of a Volunteers in Mission team organized by First UMC, beam when they think about the latest in a series of improvements their church has helped make to the girls dormitory, called a hostel, and the 128-year-old school.

For Harriet, the projects are personal. A native of India, she’s been a member of First UMC since 1989. Three generations of her family — grandmother, mother, and older sister — lived at the hostel and studied at Webb Memorial Girls School. Harriet, however, lived with her parents and attended a private school. She’s now a retired accountant.

Moore-First’s latest project in the partnership is the $10,000 installation of solar panels to provide energy and hot water for the 200-bed hostel and the school.

The facilities “don’t have hot and cold systems like we do here,” Harriet said during a recent interview at the church.

Before installation of the system, people “took showers with a cup,” using water heated over a fire, said Charles. It was one man’s all-day job to tend the fire and heat the water.

But the man’s not out of work, Harriet said. “There is always work. The compound is very big.”

In 2009, Harriet initiated the idea for the Moore church to take on the hostel as a mission project. “The main thing is to take care of the girls,” she said.

Prior to the solar project, completed in late 2017, Moore-First has been involved in the construction of 27 bathrooms, new roofs, painting, a sewer system, and screens for the windows.

The screens are “lifesavers” because of the plentiful mosquitoes, which can infect people with malaria, Harriet said. The region’s large monkeys, some weighing 60 pounds, had jumped on the roofs, tearing them up, requiring replacement.

The girls who live in the hostel are all Methodists and include orphans, children of single parents, and children of pastors, according to Harriet.

Webb Memorial Girls School, with 2,000 students, educates girls of all faiths. Harriet said her language skills come in handy when work is planned by the church. “If I need to bargain, I can bargain,” she said.

Charles said the VIM team is thinking ahead to new projects for the partnership. More space for the girls and improved computer technology are envisioned.

“You just don’t realize how much need there is until you get there,” he said. “It’s always morphing into something new.”

The team’s most recent trip was in March. The Oklahoma group always gets a warm welcome, Charles said. “They are so appreciative. They treat you like royalty.”

Dan Wayman, senior pastor at Moore-First, said the congregation enthusiastically supports the partnership. “They love it,” he said.

For information about international VIM opportunities, contact Lori Foster in the Office of Mission, 405-530-2070.

Oklahoman finds home parallels while on mission in Ukraine

In Perechyn, Ukraine, a weekly small group for women of Roma ethnicity reminded Sarah Nichols of her own church small group in Oklahoma. She teamed with young adults of the Ukrainian Methodist Church last year to plan and implement two literacy camps there for Roma children. She also served alongside young missionary Haley Henson.

In Oklahoma, Nichols directs Project Transformation as well as Young Adult Mission and Service. She and Jeremy Basset, Office of Mission director, first connected with church leaders at a meeting in Ukraine more than a year ago.

“I felt right at home,” she said about the small-group opportunity.

“Like my group, the women in the Roma village worried about their children’s health and happiness. Like my group, the Roma women struggled to be Christ-like in their work and home life. Like my group, the Roma women asked for prayers for their marriages and spiritual lives. It was a spirit-filled community of women supporting one another.”

For the literacy day camps, however, Nichols and the others needed to adapt Oklahoma’s Project Transformation strategy.

“I learned that, while literacy is the key to success for American/Oklahoma kids, Roma kids live a very different life,” she said.

“They have much less than our poorest students in the U.S. The stigma and prejudice against Roma people makes it hard to encourage charity toward them, so the children continue to go without.”

Yet she also learned Roma people are very invested in their children. The parents showed up to volunteer and to help overcome language barriers.

“We placed our energy in morning games and activities that provided needed skills and resources — team games with conversations about loving one another and competing well” and fun snacks that told Bible stories creatively.

“The goal was to provide a healthy snack, arts and crafts that are skills-based, and music with instruments Roma children don’t have access to at home or school.

“The camp was a success because it was mission WITH the Roma community, not FOR it,” Nichols concluded. “I learned to close my mouth and be helpful in the ways the children’s caretakers, parents, and spiritual leaders needed me to be.”

That’s also her hope for every short-term mission participant.


GLOBAL NETWORKING — Jeremy Basset, at left, director of Oklahoma’s Office of Mission, taught a missiology class for pastors in Ukraine in 2017 at the request of United Methodist leaders there. With him are Duvan Vargas, center, a Global Mission Fellow from Colombia, and Pastor Volodymir Prokip of Ukraine, who gleaned information about Project Transformation when he visited Oklahoma with Bishop Eduard Khegay of Eurasia in late 2016.

Employment

■ Administrative Coordinator: Oklahoma Conference Camp and Retreat Ministry, Oklahoma City. Full-time. Submit cover letter and resume to campjobs@okumc.org by Jan. 20.

■ Coordinator of Food Services and Housekeeping: Camp Egan, near Tahlequah. Full-time. Resume to campegan@okumc.org.

■ Children’s Director: OKC-Southern Hills. Part-time. Contact Matt Scraper, mbscraper@clergy.okumc.org.

■ Youth Minister: Tuttle-First UMC. Part-time. E-mail pastor@tuttlefirstumc.org or call 405-381-2458.

■ Director of Children’s Ministry: Yukon-First. Quarter-time. Contact Greg Tolle at greg.tolle@fumcyukon.org or 405-354-8858.

■ Director of Children’s Ministries: Cushing-First. Contact Kathy Leitner at katleit2@aol.com or 918-255-5683.

■ Youth Director: Shawnee-Wesley UMC. Part-time. Call 405-275-1556 or e-mail wesleychurchoffice@sgbglobal.net.

■ Director of Student Ministries: OKC-New Hope. Full-time. Resume to Rebekah Hasly, jrhasty96@gmail.com.

■ Youth Director: Drummond-Salem UMC. Part-time. Resume and cover letter to salenumc@pldi.net.

(Send church job listings to Chris Schutz in the Communications office, csschutz@okumc.org, 405-530-2075.)
Can you just get them through until Christmas?

Children ages 7-12 can sample the fun of Mobile Day Camps in a preview staged by the Conference Camps staff. Those camps again will be hosted this summer at various churches around the state.

The Gathering’s organizers have invited speakers from churches in the region to talk about “what they’re doing that works in their context,” said Derrek Belase, the Conference’s director of Discipleship. Participants can identify resource people in their area that they can call upon, he said.

Local-church leaders who attend also will learn about available grants.

The goal of the new program is to show people from across Oklahoma “what we as a Conference have to offer,” Ramirez said.

The program at Centenary also includes lunch and midday fellowship. Registration, $12, includes meal cost.

A call material online asks, “Do you need an extra spark to get the new year started? Are you on a good path, but want to take the next step? Are you struggling to reach your community and need some encouragement? This event is a learning event for laity and clergy together, so bring a big group from your church!”

“The Gathering” is sponsored by the Conference’s Discipleship Ministry Team, Leadership Development Ministry Team, and the Wichita District.

For more information, contact Ramirez at cramirez@okumc.org or 405-530-2074.