Until the work is finished

BY MEAGAN EWTON

Adrian Holmes, a seventh grade student from Moore, helps fellow Youth Force participants paint the exterior of a house that was flooded in 2015. The house was one of only 20 projects remaining in the Oklahoma Conference's "Let's Finish This" initiative.

Focus on recovery

The work on site was led by Kevin Walker, a disaster project manager with United Methodist Disaster Response Oklahoma. He said the denomination’s recovery efforts help save homes that would otherwise crumble from the damage.

"This ministry is very important in this state because lots of organizations focus on immediate response during a disaster; few focus on recovery," Walker said.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE OKLAHOMA CONFERENCE'S "LET'S FINISH THIS" INITIATIVE, PLEASE VISIT OKCUMC.ORG.

Bishop addresses family separation

Bishop James Nunn shared the following remarks in support of the faith leaders' statement on family separation available at okumc.org.

The concept of “family” is the foundation of the Hispanic/Latino culture. Sadly, more than 2,000 children have been separated from their families as a result of the new “zero tolerance” policy imposed by the United States government. This is an inhuman, immoral, unfair and racist policy...

The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church appeal to the commitment to improve the quality of life of children, youth, women, men and immigrants, without violating their freedoms and human rights (¶ 162H of the Book of Discipline 2016).... Methodist Associated Representing the Cause of Hispanic/Latino American (MARCHA) calls upon the United Methodist Church to serve as an instrument of radical hospitality, unity, justice and peace; paying attention to our realities, responding to the commandment of Jesus and maintaining our tradition of compassion.

MARCHA call to action

MARCHA is the Hispanic/Latino national caucus within the United Methodist Church and the Methodist Church of Puerto Rico. An excerpt of their official statement is printed below.

T he Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church is joining other churches and people of various faith traditions in issuing a joint statement. I join with these colleagues in support of families. While the current news cycle highlights tragic experiences of people trying to enter the United States, I remind us that outrageous actions against families and children occur every day throughout the world.

Children are the most innocent victims of war, oppression, violence, abuse and neglect. Please pray and advocate for children and families around the world.

From only child to foster parent of six

BY JOHN KLEIN, TULSA WORLD

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ROKEN ARROW — Adam Heare grew up an only child and always considered two-child families to be the perfect number. “People change,” Heare said. “I did.”

Everything changed for Heare a few years ago on his drive home from work at the First United Methodist Church of Broken Arrow, where he is the modern music minister and contemporary worship leader.

“I just felt like God wanted more from me,” he said. “I believed there was a son out there I had never met that needed me. God was telling me my son that I had never met needed me now.

“We already had two children. I couldn’t imagine, considering how busy we were, that we could grow our family.”

Heare and his wife, Kate, grew the family by taking in Matthew, now a 6-year-old adopted son.

They’ve also fostered as many as three children in addition to their three biological children.

If you are counting, that’s seven, for the only child who felt like two children would be the most he’d ever want to father.

“Life needs to be more than just what you want to do,” Heare said. “It is pretty easy to see that our foster child system in our state is kind of a mess. They keep cutting funding for it. So that tells me they need help.

“Honestly, bringing these children into our home with the three we already had has been awesome. Kate and I and the kids are a team. It’s good. We all work together to make it work. We have a lot of friends and family that also make this doable.”

SEE FOSTER PARENT ON PAGE 7

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Read the full statement at marchaumc.org.
Out to the edge

BY BISHOP JAMES NUNN

At this point in our United Methodist journey, it is imperative that we focus on basic concepts and principles that connect us in ministry. Our stated mission of the church is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The church faces challenges, as it always has. The metaphor of the desert, or the wilderness, has been used to describe today’s challenges. Being in the desert may evoke fear; however, the desert is the place where God often appears.

Exodus 3:1 tells us Moses had led Jethro’s flock “out to the edge of the desert.” I’ve become intrigued with the image of being out on the edge. It requires reflection and curiosity in my soul to survive there. I have come to realize the desert is more than a metaphor. It is a place where the soul is exposed to God. Indeed, the essence of a faith story is the encounter of the exposed soul with God.

The exposed soul opens to God when we find ourselves on the edge of the desert. When we encounter God, it is tempting to justify our positions or actions, not to examine and learn from them through study, dialogue, and analysis.

When we are out on the edge of the desert, we must face ourselves, surrender ourselves, and allow ourselves to be formed in the image of Christ.

So, moving “out to the edge” is the first condition that needs to be met for the door to open for an encounter with God. Likewise, when we are in the desert, there is always something that sparks our spiritual curiosity. For Moses, it was the bush that was burning, but was not being consumed.

When he saw this bush, Moses said to himself, “Let me check out this amazing sight and find out why the bush isn’t burning up.”

Curiosity about spiritual matters is the second condition that needs to be met for us to be able to freshly encounter God. The opposite of curiosity is indifference. Indifference takes root when we sink into deep despair, question the meaning of life and God, blame other people or God for circumstances that don’t feel fair. Indifference is a time of feeling helpless, powerless, and unhappy. It expresses itself in anger and blame.

Indifference destroys the soul. Curiosity, when acted on, overcomes indifference.

On or about July 8, the Commission of the General Conference will release the report of the Council of Bishops for the called General Conference to be held in February 2019.

This report, along with petitions submitted by people and groups across the church will be the reason for the called General Conference. The decisions of the General Conference determine the next steps for the denomination.

Whatever the outcome, I encourage us to ask ourselves, “What is now possible because of this?” Perhaps we find ourselves at the edge of the desert on the thresh hold of a fresh encounter with God.

OCU team builds tiny homes for the homeless

“Alaska is Calling and I Must Go” reads the back of the official OCU mission team t-shirts. On June 1, a team of 12 students, faculty and family members flew from Oklahoma City to Fairbanks, Alaska for a week-long mission trip to build tiny homes as transitional housing for the homeless of central Alaska.

The work project, known as the Joshua Community Project, is a tiny house enclave started by Habitat for Humanity and now under the direction of the Fairbanks Rescue Mission. When completed, it will have 10 double-occupancy cabins, a community building, an office and a shower house.

The team from OCU worked for five days to add locally sourced wood siding to two of the three tiny houses currently under construction on the site.

Members of the team also helped clean and organize the Habitat resale shop that is also on the property.

During the week, the missioners toured the rescue mission’s main outreach center and met with members of the staff and residents of the shelter.

The trip was book-ended with several cultural experiences which included a riverboat ride, a dip in the Chena Hot Springs and a bus tour of Denali National Park.

This is the university’s sixth VIM mission trip in the last four years under the leadership of Dr. Charles Neff, vice-president for church relations. Based on the success of these trips, the university already has plans to return to Belize in January and to Puerto Rico next summer.

GBHEM honors OCU nursing professor

The General Board of Higher Education & Ministry has announced their selections for Exemplary Teacher of the Year 2017-18. The list of 35 professors from across the United States includes Oklahoma City University’s own Sara Manning, chair of clinical and laboratory education and instructor of nursing in the OCU Kramer School of Nursing.

The award recognizes faculty who have demonstrated exemplary leadership, excellence in teaching, service to students and a commitment to education.
OIMC celebrates 176th annual conference

The Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference held its 176th Annual Conference on June 7-9. Delegates and guests gathered at the OIMC’s Southwest Region Center a few miles west of Anadarko.

The opening worship service started with a flag ceremony featuring the flags of represented Native tribes. The service also featured Native hymns, a drum circle, worship and communion. Bishop James Nunn preached.

Clockwise from the top: Mary Noah of OKC-Angie Smith Memorial and Kendell Allen of Welty-Grant Chapel prepare to carry in flags representing Native tribes during the OIMC opening flag ceremony; David Wilson and Josephine Deere offer communion to Son McHenry of Broken Arrow Indian UMC; Bishop James Nunn prays over Martin Fleming from Muskogee-Fife Indian during communion; (from left) Jarvis Poahway, Kevin Sovo, Justin Sovo and June Sovo sing native hymns while leading a drum circle during the OIMC’s opening ceremony on June 7.

New coordinator named in OK-Bolivia partnership

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Susan Waite has been named the new partnership coordinator for the longtime Oklahoma-Bolivia partnership with the Oklahoma United Methodist Conference.

Waite, a member of OKC-Chapel Hill, says the South American country is special to her.

“I do have a heart for Bolivia,” she said.

In her volunteer position through the conference’s Office of Mission, she will do such things as encourage participation and recruit teams for mission trips to Bolivia, said Jeremy Basset, director of the Office of Mission.

Waite’s relationship with Bolivia began with a mission trip with members of OKC-Chapel Hill in 1989. After that, she decided to get a degree in Spanish.

“I wanted to be able to speak with people down there,” she said.

Another mission trip to Bolivia followed in 1992, and she got her degree from the University of Central Oklahoma in 1994.

In addition to Bolivia, she also has made mission trips to Guatemala, Venezuela, Mexico, Chile, England and Nicaragua.

Waite said the mission teams will pursue a different approach to the 30-year missional partnership with Bolivia.

As far as short-term missions, “people are kind of aging out of it,” she said.

The new focus will be to train residents there to help provide health care for their fellow Bolivians, Basset said.

“You get out of the way and they continue to provide services,” he said.

The goal is to help provide clean water, prenatal care vaccinations and health care for women, Basset said. The partnership seeks to spread the health care dollars and “create as healthy a society as possible.”

Basset said the partnership also seeks to help with items such as Sunday school curricula, church construction projects and English as a Second Language in Methodist-affiliated schools.

The relationship with the poor of Bolivia provides “a delightful lesson for us … in our middle-class comfortableness,” Basset said.

It provides “an understanding of God at work in people in the margins,” he said.

Churches set us apart from other foster care agencies by:

- Providing Christmas and Birthday gifts to children
- Conducting back-to-school or other donation drives
- Creating and supplying Welcome Baskets for new placements
- Hosting Parents’ Night Out or other events
- Praying for foster families
- Providing meals for foster families
- Hosting foster care information sessions

THANK YOU METHODIST COMMUNITY FOR MAKING THE DIFFERENCE!

Learn more about all Circle of Care programs at circleofcare.org or call (918) 402-3247 to find out how your church can get involved in this ministry.
Preparing to go tell the world

Ministry With Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries

BY AMBER FEEZOR, GENERAL BOARD OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Oklahoma leads the nation in the incarceration of women and comes in just behind Louisiana as the second highest in overall incarceration. As inmates complete their sentences and transition back into life outside of prison, many struggle to find housing, employment and other services. The lack of resources available to them creates direct pathways to poverty.

Further, the rate of recidivism is higher for those without a support system and are unable to find a job or place to live. The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that within three years of release from prison, two-thirds of those released were arrested again.

Many faith communities engage in prison ministries that focus on providing spiritual accompaniment for inmates. It is less common, however, for faith communities to walk with returning citizens to offer stability and assistance as they transition into life outside of prison. Recognizing the lack of support for the growing number of returning citizens in their state, the Oklahoma Annual Conference sought to interrupt the cycle of incarceration in their communities.

We spoke with Kristin Harlin with Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries in Oklahoma to learn more.

Tell us about the ministry

Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries was developed in the early ‘90s due to incarceration rates being so high for men and women. There were little to no resources for people in Oklahoma exiting prison that would otherwise be homeless. We opened Exodus House in Oklahoma City in 1998 and in Tulsa in 2002 to meet the need of this population.

Exodus House is a transitional living apartment community where we equip people with the skills to re-enter society in a healthy capacity. Residents are referred to us through their relationships with faith leaders during their incarceration.

We offer counseling and education to change criminogenic thinking patterns. Family reunification is offered to single parents.

Residents are sponsored by churches and individuals to establish relationships and community. We have begun partnering with apartment communities to offer second chance housing instead of “No Felons Welcome” housing. We have residents living together in communities after they graduate our community to help keep them connected and on the right path.

What dream is the ministry pursuing?

Our ministry is dedicated to breaking the generational cycles of incarceration. With little to no programming in our state to do this, we are dedicated to helping people out of the mindset they were once in to see a healthy reality. We are dedicated to getting people jobs for sustainable income. We have counselors to deal with past traumas to help with today’s thinking, as well as classes and programs to educate on healthy thinking and living.

Is there a particular moment or memory that stands out for you?

When I first began working at CJAMM, I wanted to shadow an Exodus House resident to see how the program truly worked. I shadowed “Byron.” He said during his intake when we picked him up from prison that he had to make this work. When asked why, he said something to the effect of, “my mom called and said my son passed a message through her that I better get right with God.”

Byron got a job and began his counseling. Each week I asked Byron about his children, and he would say not yet. A few months in, Byron got a job working in plumbing and even smiled when talking about sewage as he was making good money now with his license.

On the night of his graduation from Exodus House, I walked in to see the biggest smile I had ever seen. I walked further in the door to see two beautiful children sitting next to their proud dad. Not only had he reunited with his family, but he could also support them mentally and financially, as well have a community of faith to wrap around all of them indefinitely as they join society.

What have your neighbors (those utilizing services) taught you in doing this work?

People often label people as criminals, inmates, homeless, etc. I have learned each individual person is a person. Labels hurt. Labels stick around our entire lives. We do not see the labels; we see people who have needs but also individuals that have talents and skills to offer. It takes everyone for a community to be healthy.

What challenges have you encountered, and how have you adapted?

Because of the incarceration rates in Oklahoma, we have found that we cannot work with everyone. Our residents that graduate give back in so many ways to help with this issue. We have several graduates or members of our communities who are opening transitional homes to allow more spaces to help those affected by incarceration.

What advice would you give to others who are working to be in ministry with?

See the people, not the label. If they tell you their story, believe them and empathize with them. Then work with them to make a better future.

How can people contact you if they are inspired by your ministry?

Kristen Harlin
Office: 405.530.2015
Email: kharlin@okumc.org
Website: www.cjamm.org

Prepared to go tell the world

BY AMBER FEEZOR, GENERAL BOARD OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY

Reprinted with permission


Diversity kits reflect diversity in faith

Left to right: Pastors Twila Gibbens (retired), Valerie Steele, and Ruth Atterberry hold up items used in diversity kits that were given away during the 2018 Annual Conference. The items are meant to help churches “reflect the diversity of Christian expression.” The kits included a letter from Shelly Daigle, a black or asian baby doll, a poster of portraits of Jesus worldwide and curriculum from the General Commission on Race and Religion.

PHOTO BY DESI SHARP
Church inspires community to support foster kids

Elizabeth Witt, who describes herself as a new believer, had only attended Antlers-First UMC a handful of times when she asked her pastor, David Mingus, how the church could support foster children in southeast Oklahoma.

That conversation led her church to offer not only blessing bags, but also ongoing support such as home visits, training sessions, birthday parties and Christmas gifts, as well as addressing the trauma and stigma of being in foster care.

“I wanted to let these kids know that someone loves them,” Witt said. “The best way to get that across is to continue to interact with them and have fun things for them to do.”

In turn, Antlers-First UMC has inspired other churches and businesses in Pushmataha, Choctaw, and McCurtain counties to donate their time, money and resources to make that ministry happen.

“Christ would not stop with giving these kids something for the day,” Mingus said. “It’s not just about the bag, but about developing a relationship.”

The community’s support allowed the church to assemble 81 duffel bags full of hygiene items, pajamas, books, toys and teddy bears without spending a single cent to deliver to foster children in Pushmataha County. A $5,000 New People New Places grant and a $10,000 Woodworth Family grant will help fund 250 more bags for foster children in Choctaw and McCurtain Counties.

Mingus worked with the Oklahoma Department of Human Services to see how the church could be an ongoing resource to foster kids and families. Lynn McCarn, the district director at the time, said DHS provided some minor support and the church “really ran with it.” She had not seen a church do this kind of outreach on such a large scale in her 23 years of service.

“They’ve done a great job incorporating the entire community into this project,” McCarn said. “They’ve really made it something that feels like the whole community is getting behind these at-risk kids, and that’s not something you always see in a non-profit effort.”

The project grew so large that Tanya Powers, a member of Antlers-First UMC, volunteered to take on day-to-day functions for the blessing bags so that Witt and Mingus could focus on programmatic support. Powers has organized fundraising events, managed inventory, sorted donations, shopped for supplies, and coordinated with community members in three counties to make blankets and assemble bags.

“I feel it’s making our community stronger,” Powers said. “People want to serve, and by creating this ministry, it has given them an opportunity. And by partnering with DHS, members of the community and sharing the same mission within our community, our efforts will be more effective.”

Witt is excited for the possibilities not only for her home church, but also for the tri-county area.

“It’s one of those things where people say, ‘It takes a village,’” Witt said.

Mingus agrees, though he still gives credit to Witt for starting it all.

“It’s got a life of its own now,” Mingus said. “Maybe we need more people to come in and upset our churches.”
Editor’s Note:
The following remarks are taken from Bishop Nunn’s Episcopal Address given on May 29, 2018.

BY BISHOP JAMES NUNN

A t the root of every quest is a question or series of questions. I broadly frame our Oklahoma Conference quest this way: “How do we reclaim our purpose and integrity in the face of dramatically changing circumstance?” With this question in mind, we will examine our key priorities for the work of our ministry together.

Effective leadership
The first priority of the conference is the need to develop effective leaders who are passionate to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We need leaders, both clergy and lay, who possess the spirituality, vision, and skills to help a local church effectively reach its community and demonstrate the fruit of that ministry, part of which is to experience growth.

Equipping people to lead our existing churches into greater strength and effectiveness is critical to the conference. Different church sizes call for different leadership strengths, and each church size requires unique skill sets. We must develop leaders capable of serving with excellence in all the contexts that we currently have. An equally important strategy is to develop leaders to reach people in ways we have not yet discovered we need.

New Faith Communities
The second critical initiative of the conference is to start new churches and faith communities. Our new projects are having a positive impact on our annual attendance statistics. We currently have 10 projects that are meeting for worship on a regular basis with a total average attendance of 1,525 people.

With only two or three additional church plants, we will stop the chronic decline in worship attendance inside our buildings. Lord, send us more laborers for the harvest.

We recognize that church plants of any kind are expensive. New church starts are costly, disruptive to the status quo, and have an unknown outcome. Even while these costs are shared with the Conference through our apportionment, the parent congregation makes a huge investment of money and personnel and faces new challenges.

We acknowledge that cost and say to all involved in starting new church plants and new faith communities: thank you.

Invigorate local churches
The third priority is to invigorate our local churches with the goal of helping them thrive and flourish.

When there are gaps in our ability to fulfill the mission as a local church, the New People New Places initiative may provide difference-making funds to help churches reach their mission fields or communities in new ways.

All the programs in the world will not restore the vision of a church that has lost its missional sight. Local church ministry begins when we see all the people.

I strongly encourage every church to engage your local community in at least one of these ways this year:

(1) Partner with a nearby school;
(2) Honor your local first responders and provide them a Strength for Service book; (3) Get ready to serve in response to disaster or crisis.

Finish this
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Under his direction, volunteer crews had put up new siding, replaced the roof, and replaced the sheetrock inside the home. Walker said structural work often provides homeowners with mental relief from stress and anxiety.

“A new roof is really new hope; it lets people focus on other stuff,” he said. “To step foot in a house, build a relationship with the homeowner, to see the house at the end and to see the people so happy — that means more than anything.”

Getting involved
The most crucial aspect of disaster recovery in Oklahoma is that it’s not about if, but when recovery will be necessary, according to Walker.

“In some aspects, we’re their last hope,” he said. “Having this ministry helps people get back to their lives and return to a new normal.”

Bishop Nunn said it’s important for everybody, including him, to serve in mission, saying it’s important for the church to be available until the work is finished.

“If you’re just beginning, start local, but do something that makes an identifiable difference for somebody who otherwise wouldn’t have opportunity to get the service done.”

For young Adrian Holmes, that first step was deciding to volunteer with Youth Force instead of spend his summer on the couch. Raising his paint roller to reach above his head, he grinned at the sound of paint clanging to the new siding and declared, “it’s the best noise I’ve ever heard.”

The Oklahoma Conference reports statistics under the headings of worship attendance, evangelism, spiritual formation, missions, and stewardship. The statistics reported in the 2018 Pre-Conference Workbook are listed here.

Vital Congregation Stats | 2013-2017

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(2) Honor your local first responders and provide them a Strength for Service book; (3) Get ready to serve in response to disaster or crisis.

Stewardship and financial alignment
The fourth priority is strengthening stewardship and financial alignment. When I came to Oklahoma, I listened to many conversations, and a major theme emerged: beneath the surface of the reports, the conference is experiencing financial distress.

The Oklahoma Conference Council on Finance and Administration embarked on a long-term study. The study noted that while conference attendance has declined at a steady rate of 1.5% each year, both financial obligations and the average age of attendees continue to rise.

The conclusion: without significant intervention, the financial assumptions of the conference are unsustainable.

At Annual Conference, several recommendations were adopted: the 2019 budget is 6.36 percent lower than the 2018 budget; the decimal formula for 2019 apportionment calculations is frozen at the 2018 computation; each local church will experience a 6.36 percent decrease in 2019 apportionments; and several apportionment items have been reclassified as connectional opportunities, which each church may approach with a joyful spirit of giving.

2019 General Conference
In conclusion, I’d like to provide a brief update on the pending 2019 called General Conference. The called General Conference set for February 2019 will address the Council’s recommendation for the denomination regarding the current stance on human sexuality, especially as it relates to LGBTQ+ people.

The Council of Bishops recommends the One Church Plan, which will provide for differing practices and approaches to human sexuality. The plan removes prohibitions against same-gender marriage and ordination. It does not compel pastors or churches to conduct or host same gender weddings. It does not compel Boards of Ministry or bishops to approve or ordain candidates. It allows for central conferences to retain traditional language and values.

It is a privilege to serve you. I pray that God will bless our conference, guide our Church, and make us fruitful. Thank you, Oklahoma Conference.
Langston’s Wesley Foundation to host 10th Anniversary Gala

On August 4, 2018, at Church of the Servant, at 4 p.m., the Wesley Foundation at Langston University will have its 10th Anniversary Awards Gala.

The purpose of this event is to celebrate those who have contributed to this ministry and raise funds for the various ministries at the Wesley Foundation.

During the Gala, the foundation will have a silent auction and honor Bishop Robert Hayes, Mr. Gary and Mrs. June Chubbuck. Mrs. Ora Moten will be honored posthumously.

Gala Honorees

Bishop Robert Hayes

June and Gary Chubbuck

Mrs. Ora Moten (post-humous)

The address for Church of the Servant is 14343 N. MacArthur Blvd. in Oklahoma City.

The foundation asks for $50 per person for each gala reservation.

For further details and to make reservations, please call Alice Strong-Simmons at 405-905-1171.

Please RSVP no later than July 25.

Send checks or cash to Quayle United Methodist Church at 5001 N. Everest Ave. Oklahoma City, OK, 73111, or pay through www.quaylechurch.org/donate.

Gala at a glance

When: August 4, 4 p.m.

Where: Church of the Servant, OKC

Cost: $50 per person

RSVP by July 25, 2018

Save the date

Grand opening

Wesley Foundation at Oklahoma State University
Sept. 1, Stillwater
info@okstatewesley.org

Get on the bus to Memphis
Sept. 20-23, Cost $295/each
okume-reg.brtapp.com/getonthebus2018

Foster parent

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Heare celebrated Father’s Day with six children on June 17. One foster child was recently returned to a member of his biological family.

“We were so happy,” Heare said. “We had a child that was able to go home to his dad. That’s what being a foster family is. We are there to help, to be there for a child and their biological family as they work through some things. The whole point of fostering a child is reunification.”

“Adoption is not the point of taking in a foster child. Sometimes that happens, but this is about being a good, solid family for what is often a very difficult time in a child’s life.”

The Father’s Day celebration at the Heare home was in a new, larger house. They also recently changed from a regular-size minivan into a 10-seat van so that there would be transportation for the entire family.

“He’s a great dad,” Kate Heare said. “He does so much. We needed a bigger home, and Adam worked hard to fix up a home so that we could have more space.

“I grew up in a big family, so I understood how it could happen. It was tougher for Adam, but he never backed away from it. It was his idea, and he’s done so much to make it work.”

The Heare family had three children — Gwen, 14; Jackson, 11; and Nora, 8. Matthew, 6, is the child God urged Heare to find, and he was recently adopted.

Two other children, ages 10 and 1, are also currently a part of the family.

None of the process has been easy.

“But it is so worth it,” said Kate Heare. “It is so rewarding for all of us, not just Adam and I. The entire family, our biological children, adopted child and foster children, all get something out of this. …

“Sometimes the adopted and foster children have come through some sort of trauma. It is never easy. And to have so many children under one roof, you have to be pretty organized.”

In addition, both parents work. Kate Heare teaches at Union Public Schools.

“You just learn how to make it work,” said Kate. “We know a single mother that has several foster children.

“There are just so many children that need a family. All of those children have faced some difficulties. There is a huge need out there.”

The moment of truth for Adam Heare, as the father of the family, came during the process of getting the first foster child.

They applied through Circle of Care, a program through the United Methodist Church of Oklahoma.

The first thing that happened was an interview. Then, they went through a long process that included training sessions, screenings of family and friends, home inspection, financial records and “just about anything that could impact your ability to provide a good home for these children,” he said. “It was hard, but it is necessary. And in the end, it has been so worth it.

“Children enrich your life in so many ways. Things were going so smooth when we had just two kids. But I knew we could do more. I knew it was the right thing to do.”
OKUMF leaders encourage “hilarious” giving

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Putting money in the collection plate may not feel hilarious, but it should.

That was the message of “Hilarious Giving,” one of the workshops at this year’s Annual Conference.

The workshop referred to 2 Corinthians 9:7: “Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

The Greek word for “cheerful” sounds like it is related to the English word “hilarious,” said speaker Mike Wiley, a senior advisor at the Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation.

Years ago, his daughter Brook provided him with an example of hilarious giving. His birthday was coming so she took him into the card store, had him lift her up to reach the card and then asked him to pay for it.

“What made this special was a burning desire in her heart to honor her father. Then I watched her celebrate,” he said in a handout to the workshop.

“Now I get it – I am no different than Brook. There is little I can do without the help of my Father … I certainly cannot pay the price for my salvation without him.

“We need to respond and honor God by giving back those things he has already given us; then we need to learn to celebrate … hilariously!”

These days, members of the Baby Boom generation are floating the church with their giving, said Wiley and Alan Herndon, director of planned giving for Oklahoma City University.

“Boomers are not going away,” Wiley said. Many of them are holding leadership positions in the church, making younger generations think they “are not going to get their chance to lead.”

Wiley also said younger people must “take ownership in church.”

One approach may be to introduce online giving, which he believes can appeal to younger members of the congregation. That “does change how people give,” Herndon said.

Wiley encouraged trying the online method, even if people think “we’re too old a church.” To put something in the offering plate, online givers can get a card to put in the offering plate indicating the electronic gift.

Wiley also suggested hosting a special fellowship meal for online givers as a way to thank them.

Herndon encouraged churches to send personal thank-you notes to givers. “They look forward to them,” he said.

He also suggested offering the congregation copies of a “narrative budget,” which explains where the church’s money goes.

The men said one priority is to schedule meetings to get to know the individuals in the congregation. A good administrator will be needed to set up the interviews.

Course materials for “Hilarious Giving” is available online at www.okumc.org/2018workshops.

Connect with your congregation to encourage hilarious giving

Mike Wiley and Alan Herndon said one way to encourage hilarious giving in the congregation is to get to know individuals during scheduled meetings.

The OKUMF leaders recommend that pastors ask their congregants the questions listed below:

- Ask about their family: who are the parents, grandparents and siblings in their lives?
- Ask about spouses, places of employment and occupations.
- Ask about children and grandchildren.
- Does the family have faith traditions?
- Ask about their relationship with God.
- Whether they are close to people at church?
- Where they turn for spiritual support?
- Who has been the biggest influence on their relationship with God?
- Are there areas of your life you’d like to improve?
- What do you do to stay close to God?
- How do you share your prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness?
- What ministry excites you, or what ministry do you want to be involved with?