This serene beach was photographed before Hurricane Maria wreaked damage across Puerto Rico.

Loss in paradise

Oklahoman living in Puerto Rico rides hurricane’s winds

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

In the days after Hurricane Maria, it took the connections of Oklahoma United Methodist Volunteers In Mission to get Chelsea Riley on a plane out of Puerto Rico. A new job in Spain awaited her; her parents in Oklahoma wanted her off the storm-shredded island.

Still she felt that she abandoned the place she’d called home for two years.

Chelsea is the daughter of Mike and Sonja Tobey, who is pastor at Prague and Arlington. This PK (preacher’s kid) completed her degree at Oklahoma City University in December 2014 and moved to Puerto Rico in late summer 2015.

Now in southern Spain, she’s an assistant teacher and conversation aide at a secondary school. She’s a freelance photographer. She’ll enter the master’s program “Production and Investigation in Art” at the Universidad de Granada.

From Spain, she shared via email her firsthand experience with the weather monster that made landfall Sept. 20 in Puerto Rico.

“I had been planning to move to Spain since January,” Chelsea said. “It occurred to me to leave before the storm, but was not an option in my mind. I had already stepped forward to partner with Circle of Care on a sibling foster care initiative, Legacy of Care, that launched this year.

Preparing your house for a hurricane is very similar to preparing your house for a tornado; it’s preparing the resources you will need to live on afterward for an unknown amount of time. So it was a group effort to prepare, to gather food, water, flashlights, etc. Between all of us, we had two gas stoves and a grill for cooking.

“I did not have a generator, nor did I feel I needed one. I sleep just fine normally without an air conditioner. To be honest, my main concern was coffee; I’m a wee bit caffeine-addicted.”

“Since we had just had Hurricane Irma pass through (Sept. 5), most of the house was still hurricane ready. Everything loose was inside. We moved everything from the windows and put a plank of wood in front of the glass doors. Every other part of the house was hurricane windows or solid concrete.”

During the storm

“I woke up around 5 a.m. to astounding wind and my upstairs flooding. The balcony had accumulated so much water and leaves that it wasn’t draining. There was half-a-foot of green water on the other side of the glass doors, which were making a horrible curved shape that I did not trust AT ALL.

“I’ve never seen glass do that. I hope never to again.”

She braced the doors with a table, piled towels and blankets before them, and matching funds to build a home in that community for siblings who are in the state’s care. Once the house is built, the church will wrap its Christian love around the foster family that will reside there, providing a strong support network for sustainable fostering.

Woodward-First UMC has donated land adjacent to the church for two such homes and an activity center. Already providing unparalleled support to Circle of Care’s regional family specialist stationed in Woodward, First UMC looks forward to more impactful discipleship opportunities serving foster children in western Oklahoma.

Additional plans include one new home and an activity center on Circle of Care’s Holsinger Home property in Enid, with more potential sites for expansion identified in Elk City, Oklahoma City, Shawnee, and Coweta.

All these are part of a bold campaign by the 100-year-old organization to expand services and meet an enormous need for placement options for youngsters in the state’s foster care system who are brothers and sisters.

Legacy of Care will develop custom housing in which large sibling groups — three or more children — can remain together.

In Oklahoma, a sibling group of three foster children has only a 65 percent chance of being placed together, according to Circle of Care officials. That option falls to 45 percent for a group of four, and down to 20 percent for groups of five.

Yet foster youths describe the experience of being placed in homes separate from brothers or sisters as extra punishment, a separate loss, and another pain that is not needed.
Breaking a habit

BY BISHOP JIMMY NUNN

Luckily for me, my wife does most of the shopping. But occasionally I must go myself. Recently I visited a few stores with numerous fragile items for sale. Leaving one of them, I discovered a life lesson.

I noticed it as soon as I walked across the threshold of the store that had seemed filled with breakable things. My hands dug deep into my pockets. I realized I was repeating a reflexive action that I learned as a boy.

In my childhood, the last thing my mother said as we entered a store was, “Put your hands in your pockets. Don’t touch anything. If you break something, we will have to pay for it.”

Those words were drilled into me. Even today recalling them evokes fear and trembling of sorts.

Her message was reinforced by many stores. Signs were mounted near especially delicate items, declaring threats such as “You break it — you buy it” or “Thank you for buying the items you break.” Those kinds of messages still send me in the opposite direction in a hurry.

Some of you are probably thinking, “Come on, it’s just a store. It’s no big deal.”

But when I was a boy, “hands in your pockets” was a big deal. And I suppose I’ve followed that habit my whole life.

Only recently have I become self-aware enough to notice it. As I have reflected on my little habit, I have determined to become a little more relaxed. I even have drummed up the courage to enter a store and let my hands have an out-of-pocket experience.

Then I began to wonder if there is a larger message that I might learn from this practice.

People have lots of lifelong habits. Some of those habits relate to church.

There are people who push their hands down in their pockets when they walk into a church. Perhaps they sense an unwelcoming message when they enter.

Perhaps they are worried about the cost of breaking down or buying into something. Maybe they have had a bad experience.

Sometimes we in the church family reinforce those fears through both visible and invisible signs.

Those signs say: “You are not part of us. You don’t look like us. You don’t act like us.

“You are not welcome here.”

Once I suggested to a church that a sign displaying the times of its services might be a good idea. One of its saints told me, “Everyone here knows what time church starts. We don’t need a sign for the other people.”

I realized the place had a relational sign that broadcast the wrong message. No outward sign would change that inward attitude.

What messages tell people that it is OK to “take your hands out of your pockets?”

How do we communicate that all people are welcomed, valued, and loved by God?

How do you personally send a message of welcome, value, and love to other people who may be filled with fear?

Banquet will say thanks in big way

The Oklahoma United Methodist Contact November 10, 2017Page 2

CU University-Church Relations, Wimberly School of Religion, and OCU Religious Life are teaming up to honor alumni and donors together on Dec. 8.

Each year, the University-Church Relations (UCR) department hosts an appreciation dinner to thank donors who support religion scholarships and campus ministry efforts. Past banquets have culminated in awarding the Bishop Paul W. Milhouse Award to an outstanding United Methodist layperson who has been an ambassador for the university.

This December, the event is being expanded to include two recognitions from the Wimberly School of Religion: the Distinguished Alumnus Award and Rising Star Award.

“The university has traditionally awarded distinguished alumni awards all together at a special banquet in the spring, but this year the colleges are creating their own awards programs and adding additional recognitions,” said Cary Pirrong, director of OCU alumni engagement.

United Methodist Visit Day – Nov. 30

United Methodist high school students interested in learning more about Oklahoma City University are invited to participate Nov. 30 in a special United Methodist Visit Day. The Thursday event, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., includes opportunities to attend the weekly chapel worship, visit the Wesley Center campus ministry, and more. Registration can be found at www.okcu.edu/admissions/events.
Historian brings passion for films to church

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Behind the scenes of videos about the history of The United Methodist Church in Oklahoma lie the skills of a passionate Oklahoma City film historian. Elizabeth B. Anthony, a member of OKC-Crown Heights UMC, co-wrote, co-directed, and produced “Who Is My Neighbor? Native American Methodism in Oklahoma,” a 25-minute documentary examining the turbulent 300-year relationship between Native Americans and Methodism.

She also wrote, directed, and produced “Gone With the Oklahoma Wind: Methodist Division and Reunification, 1844-1939,” an 8-minute documentary about the pre-Civil War division of U.S. Methodism and the role Oklahoma Methodists played in bringing about reunification.

Anthony traces her interest in the Church to her family’s long relationship to it—paternal ancestors were Methodist circuit riders. They preached in the Love County area of what then was Indian Territory.

She displayed her interest in film as early as high school. As a student at Casady School in Oklahoma City, she did an independent project on “The Use of Movies During World War II as Propaganda Toward the War Effort.”


Her interest in classic films led to the formation in 1997 of the website http://reelclassics.com. She currently makes her living as a film historian, researching, writing, and lecturing about classic movies.

She began serving on the Oklahoma Conference’s Commission on Archives and History in 2012. Her father, state Corporation Commissioner Bob Anthony, is a former member.

Elizabeth Anthony said the “Who Is My Neighbor?” documentary was the result of a two-year Archives and History project that began with a question: How can we interact better with Native American churches?

The film was shown during the 2016 Annual Conference, and copies were distributed to local churches by the Archives and History commission.

Now that group is working on a companion study guide. The guide, in the 50- to 60-page range, will be an online resource, Anthony said. “People can print as many copies as they want.” It is expected to be complete in spring 2018.

“Who Is My Neighbor” is “very accessible,” she said. “You can watch it in a Sunday School class very easily.”

Oral history interviews helped the film tell about Native Americans during events including the Trail of Tears, she said.

Some people resent dredging up those details, Anthony said. They ask, “How are these wounds supposed to heal when you keep picking at them?”

The hope is the film will prompt small-group conversation about “how we can interact better with Native American churches,” she said.

Also key in making the film was commission member Jerry Gill of Stillwater, who was recently honored with a Distinguished Service Award by the General Commission on Archives and History.

The Conference’s DVD Library has copies of “Who Is My Neighbor?” available to churches free of charge. “Gone With the Oklahoma Wind” can be viewed at http://libguides.okcu.edu/Archives_home/UMCarchives

Save the date

- UMW Santa Operation Neighborhood Services Organization Dec. 2, Oklahoma City
- Orders Meeting for all clergy Jan. 16, OKC-St. Luke’s
- Clue Retreat for youths of Cimarron and Northern Prairie Districts Jan. 26-28, Canyon Camp

Passages

WHITE — Iva E. White, age 84, of Tulsa died Oct. 13, 2017. She was the wife of Rev. James Troy White of Tulsa, who retired in 1993. High school sweethearts, Iva and Jim had been married for 66 years.

Among survivors are her husband, daughter Linda Stanton, and sons Terry White and John White.

Service was Oct. 18 at Tulsa-Faith UMC.

Doris Shepherd died Oct. 27, 2017. She was the mother of Rev. Jim Shepherd, pastor at Sulphur.

The Wesley is building the future for the next 90 years of ministry. Learn how you can help sustain this growing ministry through our capital campaign.

Contact Daniel@OKWesley.org for more details.

LEARN MORE AT OKWESLEY.ORG/BUILDING-THE-FUTURE
Hurricane:
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and “then just watched it pour.” Chelsea said, “I was calm, but awfully contemplative. Everyone was. My mind was somewhere between worst possible scenario and feeling that storms like this are only going to get worse in the future. We have done a lot of damage to the earth.”

One friend complimented her for reinforcing the doors, but also warned her to expect even stronger winds. “We both knew if he was right, the doors would break.”

Clear skies

Once the hurricane moved on, Chelsea said, the group went outside and found “my home was OK. We checked on our whole neighborhood.”

“The damage was unbelievable. The lush tropical trees were stripped of leaves and downed like a logging company had rolled through. All you could hear were chainsaws hacking away at the fallen aguacate (avocado), panha (breadfruit), and other trees, clearing the streets.

“We went to work seeing who was trapped or couldn’t get out of their streets.

“The community came together in amazing ways. I grew to know that I lived in a community of fantastic, talented, caring individuals. Even through a humanitarian crisis, the people of Puerto Rico are some of the best neighbors, friends, and coworkers I have ever had.

“I was never scared. I was confident in the compassionate and vibrant community of people who would go out of their way to help you if you needed anything, whether you spoke their language or not.”

After the storm

Two days after the storm, Chelsea and her friends carefully drove to the airport, still closed to flights but the one place on the island that had cellphone reception, she said.

“We all called our families to let them know we were safe, which brought lots of relief and lots of tears.

Then they returned to the house. Among the group: a cook, two bartenders, a marine biologist, and a property manager for a home-sharing vacation site.

“Nobody went hungry,” but what seemed in light moments like a camping trip stretched much longer.

“Ultimately my house became hurricane quarters for several of my friends and co-workers. I had two extra people staying with me for a long time as we tried to figure out how to live and gather resources.

“We spent days doing what takes people minutes.

“The lines for resources were insane. We waited nine hours in a line miles long to get gas, and each person could only get $20, all supervised by military police. We waited three hours in line for an ATM, only to have the machine run out of money. Since we had no form of communication, really all we knew were rumors of relief efforts.”

Chelsea knew she soon was going to work in Spain, but many people were jobless. “Everyone is hoping their savings lasts until they can go to work again. Who knows when that is?”

“Personally, when I felt most poignantly the situations that other people were facing — damaged houses, lack of water, no means to provide for their families, stranded without gas, uncertain about the whereabouts of their families, injuries, and grieving the loss of loved ones, to name only a few — I cried to my mother that I felt like there was nothing I could do.

“All I wanted was to open a food truck with free food and move from place to place, cooking for people with my restaurant-savvy amigos. But this never happened.”

She said she regrets that.

1. Donations totaling $385,000 for UMCOR Advance No. 901670 were received in September and October by the Oklahoma Treasurer’s Office from Oklahoma churches.

2. As VIM teams prepare to deploy to help hurricane survivors in Texas, Louisiana, Florida, and eventually Puerto Rico, you can serve now in solidarity with them by helping flood victims right here in Oklahoma, as Bishop Jimmy Nunn encouraged in a recent video. Learn more at www.okvim.org.

Methodist churches in Puerto Rico checking communities

The Methodist Church of Puerto Rico activated an emergency strategy to respond to community needs immediately following Hurricane Maria, which made landfall there Sept. 20.

“My definition of the situation is the same as FEMA’s and other government entities,” Bishop Hector Ortiz wrote in an Oct. 4 letter explaining the Church’s initial plans. “They have all said that ‘this is a catastrophe.’ It has been a big obstacle to complete an evaluation of the situation around our churches,” he said in the letter.

But Puerto Rican Methodist leaders are doing what they can. “We have been using our financial reserves to help people in need around our churches,” Bishop Ortiz wrote.

In the poor suburban neighborhood of Barrio Obrero near San Juan, for example, a food pantry at San Pablo Methodist Church had served some 5,000 meals to the community, the bishop said.

Church volunteers also ventured far from San Juan. On Oct. 4, a group of Methodist youth, pastors, and lay people from the metro area visited hard-hit towns in the center of the island.

Also in October, UMCOR reported receiving $15 million from donors in recent months to respond to U.S. disasters.

— United Methodist News Service

Traveler in limbo

Hurricane Maria wrecked Chelsea’s scheduled departure from Puerto Rico. Days passed before the airport partially reopened at San Juan. The few flights were full.

Yet she faced a deadline to start her job in Spain.

“Finding a plane ticket off the island seemed to be impossible or at the very least extremely expensive. I was fervently calling my mother, asking for updates from my airline and to help make travel arrangements for me.”

In Oklahoma, Rev. Sonja Tobey appealed to Facebook friends for advice. Among those responding was Jeremy Basset, director of the Oklahoma Conference’s Office of Mission.

Rev. Basset shared the next part of this story.

He suggested the anxious mom check with VIM’s travel agent. But he knew getting a plane ticket was highly unlikely in the tumult after the disaster.

He gives God full credit for an extraordinary outcome. During a phone call with Sonja, the agent saw one seat suddenly become available among the flights being monitored.

An unknown traveler had cancelled. Chelsea’s departure was secured.

“Yes, there is indeed a happy ending here in Spain!” Chelsea said in late October. Her cat hadn’t yet settled into apartment life in Spain, “but who could blame him? He used to run around a rainforest all day.”

Thanking both the agent and VIM, she added, “My students here in Spain are grateful, too, as they were anxiously awaiting my arrival.”

Her gratitude for VIM “runs deeper than that. I am so grateful for all the tremendous work they do for people in need all over the world, when governments and other organizations fall short.”

She noted, “I love Puerto Rico. It’s the most amazing place I have ever seen, and I would love to live there and enjoy its beauty again.”
Asbury satellite aims for early 2018 opening

BY BILL SHERMAN
TULSA WORLD

TULSA — Asbury United Methodist Church, one of Oklahoma’s largest Methodist churches, will launch a satellite campus in early 2018 as part of a statewide initiative promoted by the Oklahoma Conference of The United Methodist Church.

Jon Odom, who will pastor the new congregation, said all of the growth in United Methodism in Oklahoma is coming from new church plants, and he said he doesn’t think Tulsa has had a new United Methodist church since 1982.

The church plant will be called Cornerstone and will meet at what used to be Ascension Lutheran Church, now the Lutheran Ministry Center, 4803 S. Lewis Ave.

The church will meet in the chapel and will have a children’s wing. Rev. Odom will have an office in the building.

Unlike some Tulsa-area satellite churches, Cornerstone will have live preaching, usually by Odom, instead of video sermons from Asbury, the mother church.

Established Tulsa worship leaders Ben and Noelle Kilgore will lead the worship services.

Odom said the arrangement with the Lutherans was natural because Asbury had already partnered with Lutheran churches to build water wells in Tanzania.

He said the church plans to work with a Hispanic congregation that also uses the building.

‘The goal is to reach new people’

Tom Harrison, longtime Asbury senior pastor, said the satellite model of church expansion frees new church plants to concentrate on ministry because much of the infrastructure and business of running a church — finance, human resources — are already established.

“The goal is not just to transfer our people over there; the goal is to reach new people,” Rev. Dr. Harrison said.

Odom said he will remain on the Asbury payroll and that Cornerstone also will be supported by the Oklahoma Conference and by the Council Oak District.

Harrison said the satellite model of starting new churches has proved effective in several Oklahoma City-area United Methodist churches but has not been used in Tulsa.

The Oklahoma Conference is encouraging Tulsa churches to adopt the model, and several churches are working on it.

‘New energy cycles’ valuable

Odom said that, in some ways, new churches can be more effective at attracting new people than established churches.

“What we’ve observed at Asbury is that there’s always a need for new things, new energy cycles. So a Sunday school class gets established, and after a period of time, they functionally become a closed group,” he said.

“The same thing can happen in entire churches. You get used to your rhythms together, and there’s no space for new people.

“So churches need to habitually do new things. This is a new energy cycle.

“We’re really attracted to the idea of helping to make apprentices of Jesus,” he said, an old term that suggests working alongside a master to learn a craft.

“There’s a certain amount of training that needs to happen in being a Christian. How do you unlearn the

The Oklahoma Conference’s New Faith Communities ministry, directed by Chris Tiger, is supporting and advising these 10 endeavors.

- In Ardmore: Home Church (related to First UMC)
- In Catoosa: The Table (related to Owasso)
- In Claremore: Vessel (related to First)
- In Edmond: One Church (related to Acts 2)
- In Edmond: St. Luke’s (related to OKC-St. Luke’s)
- In Elgin: Community
- In Midwest City: Wickline Douglas branch
- In OKC: The Christ Experience
- In Tulsa: Brookside (related to First)
- In Tulsa: Cornerstone (related to Asbury)

proclivities that we have? The church in America has had an information-based approach, that if we can just give people information they will behave differently. But the flaw in that is the assumption that we are rational creatures.

“We all know we should (eat right) and exercise. We have plenty of data on that, but we don’t behave differently.

“So we’re talking about a formation-based approach to discipleship, looking at the rhythms and the rituals and the routines of everyday life, and leveraging those for discipleship. So it’s formation and habit rather than just information.”

Odom, 32, is a Tulsa native whose parents attended Oral Roberts University. He grew up at Woodlake Assembly; went to Metro Christian Academy, where he first met his wife, Emily; and graduated from Oral Roberts University in 2008. He later got a master of divinity degree from Asbury Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky.

He married right after graduation from ORU, and he and his wife served as Asbury missionaries to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, for 14 months. He has worked at Asbury since 2010.


Employment

- Director of Children’s Ministry: Edmond-New Covenant UMC. Full-time. Contact Jay Smith, jsmith@newcov.tv or 405-562-3200.
- Music Director: Duncan-First UMC. Includes choir and bells. Send resume to office@duncanfumc.org.
- Administrative Assistant: Guthrie-First UMC. Part-time. Send resume to pastor@guthriefirstumc.org.
- Director of Senior Adult Ministries: Norman-McFarlin UMC. Part-time. Send resume/cover letter to rick.robart@yahoo.com.
- Director of Children’s Ministries: Norman-St. Stephen’s. Part-time. Email revjordanw@aol.com or call 405-321-4988.
- Director of Children’s Ministry: Tulsa-New Haven UMC. Part-time. Send resume to james.graham@newhavenumc.org.
- Youth Director: Clinton-First. Part-time. Send resume to rick.robart@yahoo.com.
- Home Study Manager: Circle of Care. Full-time. Send resume to careers@circleofcare.org or 1501 NW 24, Suite 214, Oklahoma City, OK 73106.
- State Director of Foster Care: Circle of Care. Full-time. Send resume to careers@circleofcare.org or 1501 NW 24, Suite 214, Oklahoma City, OK 73106.
- Administrative Ministry Assistant: Fairview-First UMC. Part-time. Send resume to employment@fairviewfumc.org or 811 E. Elm, Fairview, OK 73737.
- Youth Pastor: Enid-Willow View UMC. Part-time. Send cover letter with personal testimony and vision for ministry to pastormark@willowview.org.

Putting the independent in independent living.

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**Freedom from debt**  
Coweta lights blaze of glory

**BY KATE MILLER**

**COWETA, Okla. — First United Methodist Church of Coweta members gathered Oct. 15 with friends and statewide church leadership to celebrate the retiring of a 15-year-old mortgage.**

In 2002, the church trustees signed a $250,000 note to build a family life center next to the existing church building. In the years since, the center has been used for countless church and community activities ranging from potluck meals to town movie nights. In 2016, when Pastor John Miller was appointed to the church, the trustees made the choice to prioritize repayment of the building’s remaining debt, $80,000.

“The bank was willing to work with us, to refinance almost $57,000 when the debt, $80,000.

**From left: Pastor John Miller and Trustees Chairperson Dennis Hodges, both of Coweta UMC; Council Oak District Superintendent Cindy Havlik; and Bishop Jimmy Nunn.**

In 2005 the church made a bold decision to move from its downtown location to property on McGee Drive, where there was room for expansion and growth.

In that vision, the sanctuary was part of the design. But with a careful view toward funding, a multipurpose building was constructed first, and that has been serving as a worship center, fellowship hall, classrooms, and meeting space.

A year ago, the congregation again made a bold move. They decided to build the sanctuary debt-free. That meant paying off a half-million dollars in existing loans and raising funds for new construction.

This choice was not made without much prayer and evaluation of priorities. “We felt that our mission and ministry had to be first priority, and building programs often drain off financial resources for those,” said Pastor Al Potts.

“This was also something we needed to do now for future generations. We did not want to saddle them with heavy debt.”

Through donations large and small over the past year and a half, the Coweta church almost tripled the amount paid monthly on the mortgage. Special giving opportunities in December and May raised more than $15,000 each toward retiring that debt.

At a mortgage-burning ceremony Oct. 15, Bishop Jimmy Nunn congratulated and encouraged the congregation as the people step into a new chapter of debt-free ministry. “Reducing and eliminating debt unifies relationships,” he said.

The bishop also gave a mission to the church before concluding the service. “This is a day to celebrate being debt-free, but it is also a day to remember what we really owe: love and kindness to all of our neighbors.”

First UMC was founded in 1904. Worship attendance averages 42, according to the 2017 Oklahoma Journal. Worship begins at 10:45 a.m. every Sunday, and Bible studies meet Sundays at 9:45 a.m. and Wednesdays at 7 p.m.

**Sallisaw pursues pay-as-you-go project**

**PHOTOS BY KATE MILLER**

**From left: Don Burris, A.O. Campbell, Bryan Warner, Tami Martin, Pastor Al Potts, Max Nimmo, Gary Winton, Trad Lattimore, and Matt Duke dig in to the first phase of construction at Sallisaw-First.**

**ALLISAW, Okla. — First United Methodist Church in Sallisaw broke ground recently for a 300-seat sanctuary, which will add more than 7,000 square feet to the current facility.**

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The members responded. A large initial gift sparked a wave of generosity that swept through the congregation. In mere months the loans were retired and the building fund climbed over $1 million.

Sallisaw-First Church’s Building Committee engaged Architecture Plus in Fort Smith, Ark., to draw plans.

Standing by their commitment to build debt-free, the congregation is taking on the project in three phases. “We hope to complete all phases within the next year,” the pastor said in October.

Each year First UMC spends about 15 percent of its general budget on missions and ministries both local and international. Church members are actively involved in the community and in the Cherokee Nation, providing assistance in various ways.

“Our facilities simply provide a place for ministry to happen. We are excited about what God is doing here, and we realize it is all about God and not us,” Rev. Potts said.

**Church member Charles Williams burns his copy of the mortgage on Oct. 15 at Coweta-First UMC**

**PHOTOS BY KATE MILLER**

**Kelly is president at Epworth Villa**

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**ALLISAW, Okla. — First United Methodist Church in Sallisaw broke ground recently for a 300-seat sanctuary, which will add more than 7,000 square feet to the current facility.**

In 2005 the church made a bold decision to move from its downtown location to property on McGee Drive, where there was room for expansion and growth.

In that vision, the sanctuary was part of the design. But with a careful view toward funding, a multipurpose building was constructed first, and that has been serving as a worship center, fellowship hall, classrooms, and meeting space.

A year ago, the congregation again made a bold move. They decided to build the sanctuary debt-free. That meant paying off a half-million dollars in existing loans and raising funds for new construction.

This choice was not made without much prayer and evaluation of priorities. “We felt that our mission and ministry had to be first priority, and building programs often drain off financial resources for those,” said Pastor Al Potts.

“This was also something we needed to do now for future generations. We did not want to saddle them with heavy debt.”

The members responded. A large initial gift sparked a wave of generosity that swept through the congregation. In mere months the loans were retired and the building fund climbed over $1 million.

Sallisaw-First Church’s Building Committee engaged Architecture Plus in Fort Smith, Ark., to draw plans.

Standing by their commitment to build debt-free, the congregation is taking on the project in three phases. “We hope to complete all phases within the next year,” the pastor said in October.

Each year First UMC spends about 15 percent of its general budget on missions and ministries both local and international. Church members are actively involved in the community and in the Cherokee Nation, providing assistance in various ways.

“Our facilities simply provide a place for ministry to happen. We are excited about what God is doing here, and we realize it is all about God and not us,” Rev. Potts said.

**Church member Charles Williams burns his copy of the mortgage on Oct. 15 at Coweta-First UMC**

**Kelly is president at Epworth Villa**

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**R. Kelly**
Churches invited to apply

After a successful first road trip, Voyage mobile day camp leaders are mapping their route for next summer across Oklahoma. They’d like to include your church in their travel itinerary.

The words of youngsters who attended this new Conference Camps program describe how much it meant to them.

Something new I learned was ...

■ There are nice people here
■ You can have fun and learn about God
■ Some people break rules, some don’t, but God has forgiveness
■ How to make slime
■ How to shoot archery and play new games
■ David used God’s power to knock Goliath over

My favorite part of camp was ...

■ Everything
■ Bubble soccer
■ Playing with my new friends

Eight churches each hosted Voyage camp for a week in June and July. Some costs were covered by an Oklahoma Conference New People New Places grant.

A key goal for Voyage was to serve children of varied races and economic status. Neil Tate, the program’s director, shared data of success in that effort.

Checotah UMC marks 100th year

CHECOTAH — On Nov. 26, Checotah United Methodists will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the church’s sanctuary, constructed in 1917. Only a few sanctuaries in the Oklahoma Conference have hosted worshippers for 100 years.

This is the oldest brick church in McIntosh County, its bricks made from clay quarried nearby.

The late Lee Stidham, who chaired the Administrative Board, was instrumental in getting the church named to the U.S. National Register of Historic Places on Nov. 13, 1984.

The congregation was organized and built the first house of worship in 1890. Since that time three structures have occupied the hilltop setting.

The current building, 44 feet by 71 feet, was constructed in 1917 at a cost of $15,000. The interior is a “meeting house” design, with a corner pulpit, four aisles radiating out, and a semi-circular altar rail and balcony. It was a fairly common building plan in the early 20th century.

Limestone was moved by railroad from Missouri and then by dray wagons up Gentry Avenue to be used for the exterior high stone water table. The millwork and pews from Tennessee are oak, as are three Jacobean pulpit chairs and table. The pine floors also are original.

On Nov. 26, the centennial commemoration service will begin at 10:50. Guest preacher will be Emery Mason, Green Country District superintendent.

After a luncheon, a guided tour of the sanctuary will include some history about the 19 stained-glass windows. Also open for touring will be Memorial Hall, which is not part of the original sanctuary building. Memorial Hall pays tribute to the church’s 54 World War II veterans.

Visit the church at 419 W. Gentry, call 918-473-5714, or go to www.fumchecotah.org. Jim Jones is pastor.

Circle: CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“Connected at the heart, yet living apart. This happens to siblings in foster care every day, and we cannot let it continue,” said Don Batson, Circle of Care’s president for over 12 years.

The Legacy of Care initiative will build eight large homes, to help keep together more brothers and sisters. The capital drive had raised $2.1 million of the $5 million goal by late October.

Rapid acceleration in the project is causing Batson to shift his plans, too.

The president had expected to retire at age 66, admitting “a deep desire on the part of my wife and I to be part of our children and grandchildren’s lives in Tennessee.” He had planned a date “a little over one year from now.”

Instead, he will move up his retirement, to transition into providing key leadership for the Legacy of Care campaign and home construction.

The Circle of Care’s Board of Directors is working with a national executive search firm, Moran and Company, to select a successor president and CEO by February 2018.

A representative of the search firm recently spent two days in Tulsa and Oklahoma City, meeting with staff, the Board of Directors, and key ministry partners. The process has begun for identifying the ideal candidate to boldly lead the Circle of Care into its next century of providing help, healing, and hope to disadvantaged children, youths, and families in Oklahoma.

Circle of Care President Don Batson, left, and Tasha Atcity, church relations coordinator for the organization
How does this benefit you?
Each year you are required to take a minimum distribution from your IRA. This is taxable income that may move you into a higher tax bracket; it may cause more of your Social Security to be taxed, and it may have other negative tax consequences. By making a direct gift from your IRA to your church or favorite United Methodist ministries, the amount of the gift is excluded from income and satisfies the annual IRA required minimum distribution (RMD), up to the amount transferred. You can make up to $100,000 in annual IRA charitable distributions.

Qualified Charitable Distribution
The charitable IRA rollover is technically known as QCD (qualified charitable distribution). It makes sense to make charitable gifts in this manner. The amount of the QCD is excluded from income, which lowers your adjusted gross income. There is not a charitable deduction because that would be double-dipping. For many, this is the best tax-wise way to give.

It is very simple to do
The QCD should be payable to the Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation Inc. and mailed to 4201 Classen Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73118-2400. Send a copy of your instructions to your IRA custodian at the Foundation by email (dbattles@okumf.org) or fax (405-896-5027). On the copy of the form, please note how the proceeds are to be disbursed. Currently there is no coding on the 1099-R for a QCD. You will need to give your CPA a copy of the tax letter that will be sent to you from the Foundation.

This is a great year-end planning strategy!

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AGE HAS ITS BENEFITS!
Those among us who are age 70 1/2 or older have a wonderful benefit. Congress has made permanent the law that allows us to make cash gifts directly from our IRAs to our churches and favorite United Methodist ministries.

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TO LEARN HOW WE CAN HELP YOU EMPOWER YOUR GIVING IN A WAY THAT BENEFITS YOU AND SUPPORTS THE CAUSES YOU CARE ABOUT.

OIMC gala showcases young dancers
BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Some members of the Riverside Indian School Crown Dancers had to duck to get their headgear through the door to perform at the Oct. 17 benefit gala of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC), held at the Reed Center in Midwest City. Seeing the dancers was a treat for those who attended the biennial event that helps fund a leadership endowment for Native American pastors, said Pastor Wilson, OIMC superintendent.

“It’s the first time many of us have seen those,” Rev. Dr. Wilson said.

The dance team consists of junior high and high school students from the White Mountain Apache and San Carlos Apache Tribes of Arizona. The students attend Riverside, a Bureau of Indian Education school located in Anadarko, about 850 miles from their homes.

They performed traditional Apache dances that are intended for healing and curing. “Crown Dancers bring blessings and ward off evil spirits,” according to the banquet program. Decorated with body paint and wearing tall crowns, the crew danced to jingling bells, tapping sticks, drumming, and chanting.

Wilson was pleased to report that, as of Oct. 19, about $80,000 had been raised for the pastoral endowment.

Three bishops of the Oklahoma Area — current episcopal leader Jimmy Nunn and retired bishops Robert E. Hayes Jr. and Bruce Blake — attended the gala and contributed to the fundraising. “God is calling people to serve in the OIMC,” Bishop Nunn said in his remarks. He noted that three OIMC pastors were ordained this year.

Nunn, who began his episcopacy in September 2016, said it has been “a great, great blessing to get to know the staff” of the OIMC.

Hayes got the room chuckling when he told a story about the incident that made him call on Bishop Wilson to be his successor.

Bishop Jimmy Nunn, left, receives a walking stick made by the late Rusty Lowe of Big Cussetah United Methodist Church, an OIMC congregation. At right is OIMC Superintendent David Wilson.

Four youths perform an Apache healing/curing dance.

The DVD Library

“Faithful: Christmas Through the Eyes of Joseph,” from Adam Hamilton, has been added to The DVD Library at the United Methodist Ministry Center. It is among several titles in the library relevant to Christmas and Advent.

“Faithful” includes a DVD, book, and guides for adult, youth, and children’s programs. The set features four video sessions and is suggested for a four-week group study. Total length is about 42 minutes.

Also new is “The Redemption of Scrooge,” by Matt Rowle. Explore the world of Ebenezer Scrooge, Tiny Tim, and the Cratchits, with an eye to Christian faith. About an hour. Leader guide available.

Other topical resources in the library are:

■ “Once Upon a Stable,” for children, stars four animals that are about to have an important houseguest in their small stable in Bethlehem. (23 minutes)

■ “The Wonder of Christmas” looks through the lens of four elements in the Christmas story: a star, a name, a manger, and a promise. Four videos, 40 minutes total.

■ “Not a Silent Night: Mary Looks Back to Bethlehem,” also by Hamilton, imagines Jesus from Mary’s point of view — proud of her son, in awe of his gifts and mission, guided by love for him as a person, and so much more. Five videos, 59 minutes total.

■ “All I Want for Christmas: Opening the Gifts of God’s Grace,” from James W. Moore. Five sessions (each 8-10 minutes).

■ “A Thrill of Hope: The Christmas Story in Word and Art.” The familiar story in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew is illustrated by John August Swanson. (50 minutes)

To check out a resource, contact Chris Schutz in the Communications Ministry, 405-530-2075, cschutz@okumc.org. Search the complete list of DVDs at http://www.okumc.org/dvd_library