

'I found a community' — Gloria A., campus ministry intern

Nigerian at OU hears God's call

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

“God knows best.” That’s the translation of the Nigerian first name of Tsematosan Gloria Ajinomisanghan, an international intern at the Wesley Foundation, the United Methodist campus ministry at the University of Oklahoma.

Gloria came to Norman to continue her studies in energy law but found out God had a different plan for her.

“When God calls you, it just changes your path,” said the 27-year-old.

Gloria, whose father worked for Chevron Corp. in Nigeria, began her law studies in Nigeria. She applied to continue her education at OU because of Oklahoma’s prominent role in the energy business.

English is not a problem for her, she explained. Nigeria has many tribal languages, but English is that nation’s primary language.

During her first week at OU, she asked another student on campus to help her find her classroom.

That person didn’t know but said, “I’m sure we can find it together.” The student turned out



Gloria tosses beanbags for a game outside The Wesley at OU in Norman.

to be active at The Wesley.

That was the first step on Gloria’s new path.

Next was visiting The Wesley’s weekly worship, which includes Communion, on a Tuesday night.

“I fell in love with Wesley that day. I found a community,” she said.

More OU students from nations in Africa



Gloria Ajinomisanghan, right, greets an OU student at The Wesley.

also have found their way by word-of-mouth to The Wesley for church services and perhaps a meal of African food, Gloria said.

But Daniel Dennison, The Wesley’s director, credits her for initiating a Bible study for them that has grown into a new fellowship group of about 30 people within that campus ministry’s overall outreach. Additionally, The Wesley makes new disciples through other groups such as the flourishing OU Chinese Fellowship, which is led by missionary Fuxia Wang.

In Nigeria, Gloria grew up in a Christian home and went to a Pentecostal church. In her family, you learned “how to pray when you start talking.”

Her high school had a program called Scripture Union, in which leaders talked to the students about Jesus. “That was kind of like a start” for God’s calling on her life, she said. There were Bible studies and quizzes.

In her second year at the university in Nigeria, she realized she needed a deeper relationship with God.

At that college, the chapel and mosque were close together. She attended chapel services, but did not visit the mosque — and recalled another student who was suspended for trying to preach Christianity in the mosque.

Gloria graduated from OU in May 2014

with a master’s in Energy Law.

Then she returned to The Wesley in August of that year, following her call to ministry. As a full-time international ministry assistant, she leads Bible study, fellowship, and prayer groups. She also offers one-on-one discipleship of students to help grow their faith.

The Wesley helped her obtain a Religious Worker Visa, valid until August 2018.

What’s next for her? “I don’t have the full picture,” Gloria said.

She is applying for an online seminary program offered by Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Ky. She hopes to be a full-time pastor, perhaps in student ministry.

Rev. Dennison is pleased that Gloria plans to go to seminary. “I felt like I saw a lot of ministry gifts” in her, he said.

A New People New Places grant from the Oklahoma Conference has helped pay Gloria and six other interns at The Wesley. (Both the campus ministry and the New People New Places initiative receive Apportionment funds.)

Students already look to Gloria as a kind of pastor, Dennison said. She goes out on campus, meets strangers, and invites them into the campus ministry’s community.

“She has shepherded several through some difficult times,” he said.

4 locations for finding new H.O.P.E.

Workshops offering H.O.P.E. (for a Changing Church) will be available at four regional locations in February.

The acronym for these small-church events stands for “Hospitality, Offering Christ, Purpose, and Engagement,” according to Derrek Belase, Conference director of discipleship.

The workshops focus on churches with up to 80 members, but attendance is open to all.

- Feb. 22, 5-9 p.m., Pawhuska
- Feb. 23, 5-9 p.m., Fairview at Slapout
- Feb. 25, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Coalgate
- Feb. 26, 3-7 p.m., Anadarko-First

Keynote speaker will be Jodi Cataldo, director of Laity in Leadership for the denomination’s Discipleship Ministries. She previously was on the Dakotas Conference staff, working in Congregational Development, Safe and Sacred Spaces, and other areas.

“The core process of every local congregation is to offer H.O.P.E. to the community it serves,” Rev. Belase said. “Paragraph 122 of the *Book of Discipline* offers a model for a discipleship system in local congregations that includes proclaiming, seeking, welcoming, leading persons to commit their lives to God, nurturing persons in Christian living, and sending persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ.”

Belase added, “This is not a new program, but rather a systems approach to discipleship.”

Registration is by church. Cost is \$10 per person, per event, and includes meal, handouts, and the book “Charting a Course for Discipleship.”

To register and pay online go to www.okumc.org/hope. You also can send checks to H.O.P.E., 1501 NW 24th St., Oklahoma City, OK 73106-3635. (Make checks out to Annual Conference Council.)

For questions about registration, call Megan DeCastro, 405-530-2199, or email her at mdecastro@okumc.org.

Sponsors of the event are the Conference’s Discipleship Ministry Team and Commission on Rural/Small Membership Churches and the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference.

Dear readers:

In 2017 we recommit ourselves to proclaiming, illustrating, and educating on our Conference mission for every Oklahoma United Methodist, as expressed in our Conference Strategic Plan with its three goals: grow fruitful congregations, recruit — equip — send spiritual leaders, and promote ministry partnerships.

Keep these in mind as you read. In each issue, we try to answer the questions of how, why, and where Oklahoma

United Methodists are advancing the Church’s mission. Consider what’s in this issue = Advice on millennials and baby boomers. A church on fire (figuratively). A district serving inside the box. Gun violence. Legacies in leadership. Plan to use what you read in your life and community.

Journeying with you,
Holly McCray, editor@okumc.org

Letter from the editor

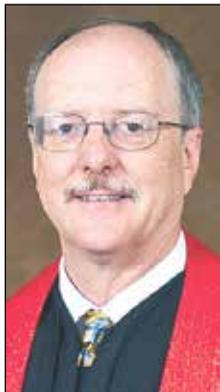


BY BISHOP JIMMY NUNN

I read a *New York Times* article titled “Secular Hollywood Quietly Courts the Faithful,” by Brooks Barnes, in that paper’s Dec. 26 edition. It explored the news that movie theater attendance is slightly down from its 2009 high, even though the general U.S. population is growing.

The article caught my attention because church attendance also is declining. I read it seeking what I might learn.

The movie industry has identified changes in society and is pointing to them as reasons for the decline in attendance/



Bishop Nunn

tickets sold, according to the *Times* article. The Motion Picture Association of America asserts that “cheaper and more convenient in-home entertainment options are threatening the grip that multiplexes have long had on young adults.” As proof of that hypothesis, the association states, “The number of frequent moviegoers ages 12 to 24 has fallen for three consecutive years.”

Hollywood is under pressure to reverse that trend. The industry is developing strategies to address the issue.

One of the strategies targets young people who are interested in prayer!

The *Times* article quoted a statistic to support that aim: “Churches may seem like an unusual path toward young people, but 41 percent of millennials engage in some form of daily prayer, according to a 2010 Pew Research paper.”

It is interesting to me that the article identified Hollywood’s most-desired audience — young people — and went on to name prayer as a specific behavior that a large part of that population engages in on

a regular basis.

A second strategy articulated in the article suggested that studios build upon what they have learned about the religious population. The industry has “newly realized that religious Americans, if approached on their own terms, can be captured for movies that would, at first glance, seem to be an unusual fit.”

Over the holidays, my wife and I made our annual trip to the movies and saw “Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.” I was interested to see how many prayers, blessings, and spiritual references were made in that film.

A third movie industry strategy identifies a next step in reaching a potential audience. Hollywood executives have evaluated the traditional method of placing advertisements in Christian publications and have found a more effective way to communicate to millennials today, the article explained.

Now they are focused on locating church leaders, providing discussion

guides, and facilitating discussions.

Elizabeth Gabler, the president of Fox 2000, said in a statement, “Corby and Marshall help to locate these important faith audiences and leaders who are hungry for aspirational content without feeling like they are going to church.”

As the Church, we can learn something from these strategies.

- First, identify a specific target audience and identify what is important to the people in that group.

- Second, build an experience that builds on what has been learned about the audience.

- Third, replace ineffective advertising strategies that speak “at” an audience with a communication strategy that speaks “with” an audience.

Prayer, learning, and small-group conversations are tools many churches know well.

What is your strategy for reaching people for Christ and the Church this year?

Bud Sahmaunt receives Milhouse Award

Each year the Bishop Paul W. Milhouse Award is conferred by Oklahoma City University to recognize the outstanding efforts of a lay person or lay couple who actively and generously support and promote the relationship between OCU and The United Methodist Church.

On Dec. 9, Joseph “Bud” Sahmaunt became the 35th recipient of this prestigious award.

Dr. Sahmaunt was nominated because of his many years of outstanding service to OCU and the denomination’s Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC).

This OCU alum is a member of the university’s Sports Hall of Fame. He is a former OCU professor and athletic director who remained active in the life of the university for many years following his retirement.

A Kiowa, he was a longtime member of Bishop Angie Smith United Methodist Church in Oklahoma City before moving to Pawhuska, where he now resides. Bud also has been inducted into the Kiowa Nation Hall of Fame.

Sahmaunt enthusiastically assisted with the Native American Society on campus and the annual OCU Powwow. He served on the OIMC Committee on Archives and History, which oversees that conference’s archives housed at OCU.



From left are OIMC Superintendent David Wilson, honoree Bud Sahmaunt, and Bishop Jimmy Nunn.

The Milhouse Award was given at the annual OCU University-Church Relations Appreciation Dinner. Presenter was David Wilson, who chairs the University-Church Relations trustees.



Sign up now for Youth Service Day

On Saturday, March 4, youths and local church youth groups from across the state are invited to OCU to spend a day in service and fellowship together at Oklahoma’s only United Methodist university.

Each year the Wesley Center at OCU hosts Youth Service Day, an opportunity for UM youths and their leaders to participate in service and outreach projects in the city. The event begins and ends at OCU, and includes lunch, worship, and projects in cooperation with partner agencies.

The March 4 event will begin with sign-in at 9:30 a.m. and will close with worship, concluding by 4 p.m. Registration materials, due by Feb. 17, are online at www.okcu.edu/campus/religious-life. For more information, contact Elizabeth Horton-Ware, 405-208-5484.

Bishop Scholar Award deadline near

The deadline is Feb. 1 to apply for the OCU Bishop Scholar Award (including all supporting paperwork), with interviews following on Feb. 18. This full-tuition scholarship is awarded to outstanding incoming students who are discerning a calling to ministry and plan to study in the Wimberly School of Religion. Application materials can be found online at www.okcu.edu/BishopScholar/.

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

Moving to a new address?
Call 405-530-2075
or send an email to
communications@okumc.org.

Sign up for Contact Digest,
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Inside the box

Churches in Northern Prairie offer food for the taking

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Looking out his office window, Pastor Rob Harris of Tonkawa United Methodist Church sees blessings flowing from what amounts to a small kitchen cabinet mounted on posts on the church grounds.

Tonkawa UMC, and other churches in the Northern Prairie District, are installing Blessing Boxes. The wooden boxes, with clear acrylic doors, contain several shelves that hold free food.

A sign at the box reads: "Leave what you can. Take what you need. Remember, God loves us all."

Rev. Harris frequently sees people in vehicles pause beside the box to get food. Others come along and put in groceries



Tonkawa youths restock the Blessing Box outside the church.

they're donating.

"The blessing is equal with the people who go to the box who may need to get the food out and people who put things into

the box," Harris said.

"God placed within us the need to be in relationship with one another."

The project started after David Nichols, husband of Northern Prairie District Superintendent Tish Malloy, visited a church service at Tonkawa to suggest the boxes as one way of addressing food insecurity in that community.

The idea was shared on the church's Facebook page. "It just took off right away," Harris said.

The Blessing Box is near one of Tonkawa's schools. Harris said it is a frequent stop for students on the way to classes or after school.

"It's a great ministry. It cost the church nothing," he said.

Fourteen such boxes have been built in the woodworking shop at Northern Oklahoma College in Tonkawa.

So far, Blessing Boxes also have been placed at the United Methodist churches in Newkirk, Ringwood, and Pawhuska — all in the Northern Prairie District. The

remaining boxes are being stored by the district and available when a church in the district requests one.

Churches generally pay \$125 to get a box, Nichols said, although the cost is flexible.

Each box is meant to hold non-perishable, easy-to-prepare food. Donations of diapers or games and toys for children also are welcomed.

Harris said people have been generous in stocking the Blessing Box at Tonkawa. Sometimes the box gets too full, and a few items are put aside at the church until there's room on the shelves.

Another box will be installed in Tonkawa near the Wesley Foundation at NOC. Harris expects it will offer supplies in frequent demand by cash-strapped college students, such as Ramen noodles, deodorant, soap, and shampoo.

Nichols is glad to share information with churches outside Northern Prairie if they want to start a program like this. Contact him at 405-640-4589.

Conference connection provides copyright licenses for all

In February, the Oklahoma Conference will renew the umbrella copyright licenses that permit every local church to use the extensive collection of songs and movies specifically licensed through two companies: CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International) and CVLI (Christian Video Licensing International).

Your church's Apportionments make possible this annual coverage.

In addition, local churches have related responsibilities during the year to show they are complying with U.S. copyright law. This involves separate tasks, according to type of license, and are described in this article.

CVLI — video licensing

Every local church must report its children's ministry attendance totals, to ensure the correct amount of CVLI coverage. This annual digital report typically is made during the season for Charge Conferences.

It includes noting the proper names for any daycare, after-school, or Mother's Day Out programs.

The children's ministry numbers must be submitted on the "CVLI Children's Ministry Online Survey" form that is part of each church's digital Charge Conference packet.

Assign this reporting task to only one person at your church. (Duplicate submissions increase the cost for this licensing.)

Submitting the form is mandatory. If a local church has no such ministry, zero or not applicable must be entered.

If you have questions about the form, contact your district office, which oversees the digital Charge Conference packets.

Not every movie is covered by the CVLI license. To check, go to us.cvli.com

and follow the instructions.

CCLI — song licensing

Local churches must keep records of songs covered by the CCLI license that they have copied, perhaps for choir use, or projected during worship.

The most accurate way to track these is on a weekly basis. Assign someone to spend a few minutes each week on this task.

A critical part of this licensing is the "Copy Report." More about this:

- Every 2 ½ years, the local church will be required to digitally submit a six-month Copy Report.
- The CCLI company will notify a church by mail and email before it's time to do the report.
- Several people may create profiles and log in to work on the report online.
- If there is no copy activity within the reporting period, the submission must note "Nothing To Report."

Number of copies does not affect the licensing fee.

The purpose for these reports is so that CCLI accurately pays royalties to songwriters and producers. There are four types of reports explained on the company website: print, digital, recording, and translation.

For questions about CCLI licensing, email Nyla Wallin in the Conference Communications Ministry, nwallin@okumc.org.

Internet sharing is not covered

A local church must separately purchase a license for live streaming, podcasting, and posting recorded worship services that include music on social media such as Facebook. The Conference's umbrella licensing does not cover this. Go to <http://us.ccli.com>.

Employment

Summer Camp Counselors, Staff:

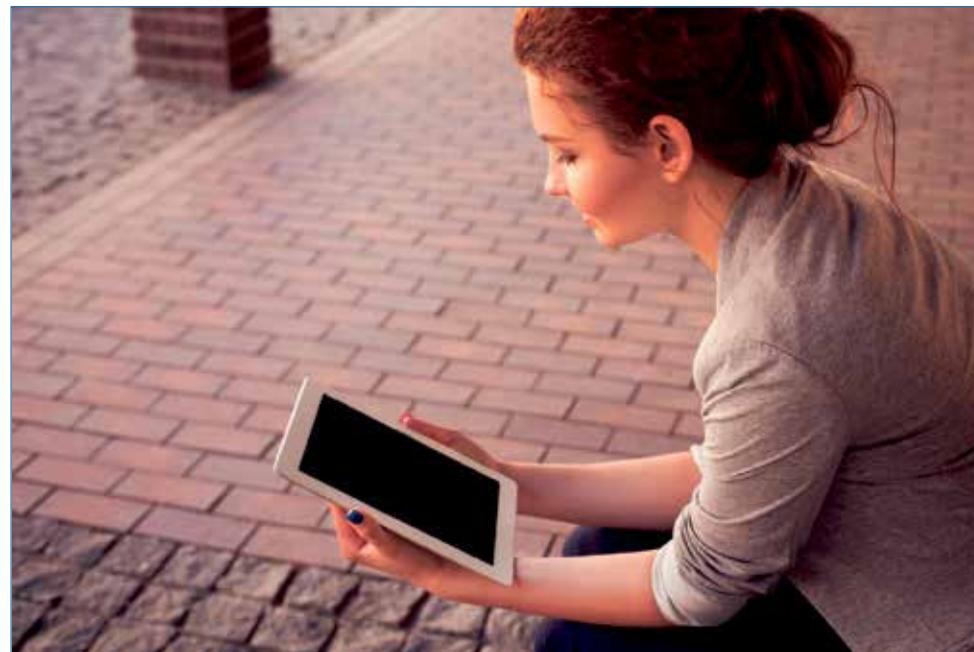
College-age young adults sought for camp facilities (Cross Point, Canyon, and Egan) and for new mobile day camps around the state. Full-time, seasonal. Contact Neil Tate, ntate@okumc.org or 405-530-2018.

Music Director: Watonga-First UMC. Part-time. Contact Tracey Ivy, wfumcpastor@pldi.net, 580-623-5122.

Youth Minister/Worship Leader

(combo position): Yukon-First UMC. Full-time. Resume to Greg Tolle at greg.tolle@fumcyukon.org.

Administrative Assistant and Youth Director: Broken Arrow-St. Stephen's UMC. Both positions part-time. Resume to Kirt Moelling, kmoelling@ssumcba, 918-455-4202.



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Playing with purpose



As Conference groups organized for the new leadership quadrennium, 2017-2020, get-acquainted games and goal-setting were part of their strategies. Left: member Gary Gilpin contemplates a Jenga move, during a Discipleship Ministry Team (DMT) retreat. Above: As the Leadership Development Ministry Team (LDMT) met, this group donned silly hats. From right are member Susie Pierce, co-chairs Audra Fogle and Adam Shahan, Scott Spencer of the Commission on Religion and Race, and member Janice Sharp.

Where have all the

Largest U.S. generation is missing in churches

While United Methodism has been intensely focused on becoming younger and more diverse, people in the largest U.S. age group need attention, too, leaders told participants at Boomerstock, a recent national conference.

Many baby boomers aren't part of local church life.

Among those at Boomerstock was Derrek Belase, the Oklahoma Conference's director of Discipleship.

Boomers — born between 1946 and 1964 — “represent the single greatest opportunity for evangelism and outreach for the church,” declared William Randolph at “Boomerstock: Launching a Ministry Movement,” held in Nashville, Tenn.

Boomers “are not only as large as our youth and young adults but they are a bridge generation,” which will offer unprecedented opportunities to also reach their millennial children and their grandchildren, said Dr. Randolph.

He directs the denomination's Aging and Older Adult Ministries, part of Discipleship Ministries (formerly the General Board of Discipleship), the event sponsor.

Priorities for boomers

Speaker Brent Green said he studied boomers with an eye toward marketing to them, but after his sister's lengthy illness and death from cancer, he began to see boomer life through the eyes of faith.

He suggested six priorities for boomers that could be addressed by local churches.

Self-care and the “compression of morbidity” is at the top. Green said boomers want to stay healthy as long as possible and then die quickly.

Grandparents raising grandchildren and dating after divorce are some big changes they face.

Travel is important, with a focus on creative experiences and celebration vacations.

Philanthropy also is important, as boomers have money to donate to worthy causes, but only 28 percent of them are actively connected to a church.

Finally, Green described a return to spirituality as important for boomers. Many of them are “searching for tribes” — providing a great opening for potential outreach by churches through activities such as spiritual retreats.

Changing the world

Rev. Belase said the speakers emphasized that boomers are looking for ways to give back and make a difference in the world.

“Think about boomers who populated the civil rights movement, the peace movement, the feminist movement, and gave us Earth Day,” Randolph told those at the conference.

He offered some useful principles for teaching and educating people in this age group.

Boomers appreciate options and choices in life, he said, so churches must offer many opportunities without the expectation that any one thing will work for everyone.

Pastor shares confirmation class

BY SAM POWERS

When I became a United Methodist minister, the bishop asked me, “Will you diligently instruct the children in every place?”

I take this seriously and have offered confirmation classes every year. In the communities I've served, I always have found families in which parents are interested in their children learning more about the faith, taking the vows for themselves, and receiving baptism if they never have.

Now I have been asked to share about the program I use, because this ministry has contributed to higher-than-average numbers in professions of faith by both youths and adults in those churches.

My own profession of faith was made in morning worship at Boston Avenue UMC in Tulsa following my childhood confirmation class. I remember taking

the classes on Sunday afternoons when I was in the sixth grade. I learned about the Christian faith, and my class jointly developed an affirmation of faith. We used that creed in worship on the Sunday we were confirmed.

Today as a pastor, I have moved the classes to the Sunday school period. I emphasize the importance of regular worship; a student or family is less likely to skip worship if classes are held during Sunday school.

Inviting the students to serve as worship liturgists or help the pastor during Holy Communion also helps them grow in their faith.

I utilize 12 class sessions. We begin in January, when families often are ready to make new commitments. For 12 weeks, they attend both Sunday school and worship together. For people outside the church, new to the faith, 12 weeks is just long enough to be a significant

commitment — and not too long to scare them away.

At Edmond-First UMC, we offer concurrent adult confirmation classes. An associate pastor presents the same material to parents or other interested adults, also during Sunday school. If the adults went through confirmation, that likely was years ago, so our classes help bring faith renewal for the whole family.

Also, we often find at least a few parents who are not members of our church — and some have never made a profession of faith or been baptized. During our worship service that concludes the confirmation experience, parents are invited to renew their vows along with their children. Some also will join the church, profess their faith, and be baptized at that time.

Some new adult Sunday school classes have formed after those 12 weeks together.

We also invite other adults to act as mentors to our young confirmands. They

share notes of encouragement, greet them in worship, and help out on occasion with youth fellowship events. This is helpful in faith formation for more of our adults, as well as growing our youths' comfort level and connections within our congregation.

During the 12 weeks, we take field trips. We make visits to humanitarian agencies related to the Church. On Confirmation Sunday, we take an afternoon hike at Canyon Camp, introducing this United Methodist facility to the confirmands. We hope to return with them for summer church camps.

We sometimes invite other youths — who have completed confirmation — to help our confirmands feel comfortable in the youth group, a natural next step for them.

We market our classes.

We track all families who visit throughout the year and contact those with confirmation-age children. We check with

boomers gone?

5 tips for ministry with boomers

BY MISSY BUCHANAN

Baby boomers are complaining that 2016 was cursed. The list of U.S. celebrities and public figures who died during the year is long and includes actors Alan Thicke, Patty Duke, Gene Wilder, and Carrie Fisher; PBS news anchor Gwen Hill; author Pat Conroy; legendary basketball coach Pat Summit; and musicians Natalie Cole, David Bowie, Prince, and George Michael.

What makes this particular list so stunning is that these well-known people were baby boomers — born between 1946 and 1964. Their passing is rocking the boomers' world.

What then can the church learn about this unique generational group that will benefit church health?

Boomers typically don't like to talk about aging and dying. But the reality of deaths among their celebrity peers provides great opportunity for the church to engage boomers in conversation.

1 First, church leaders must have a basic understanding of **what makes boomers different** from their older counterparts and why it's a mistake to try to force boomers into traditional, existing older-adult ministry models. Ken Dychtwald's documentary "The Boomer Century" is a must-see to

understand this and is available online.

2 Church leaders should accept that even the most faithful boomers are **not likely to attend church regularly**. They will be traveling to see grandkids or RVing across the country. The church must be willing to adapt ministry and discipleship opportunities for them.

- Offer more short-term opportunities. Create three-week Bible studies in addition to long-term studies.

- Invite boomers to usher or greet when they are available.

- Engage them through one-time opportunities for mission work.

- Even though they often are away from the church building, they want to feel connected. Utilize technology and social media to make them feel a part of church life even when they are away.

3 Many boomers are struggling emotionally, physically, and spiritually as **they care for aging loved ones**. They desperately need the support and encouragement of the church as they deal with the challenges of journeying alongside their aging loved ones.

Some boomers have aging parents nearby; others are trying to care for parents hundreds of miles away. Some have healthy relationships with their older loved ones;

others are snagged in a mire of family dysfunction. Offer caregiving workshops and support groups that provide practical eldercare information. My book "Voices of Aging: Adult Children and Aging Parents Talk with God" was written as a resource for helping boomers and their aging parents stand in one another's shoes.

4 Not all boomers are alike. In fact, they are a **fiercely independent** group. Fighting the stereotypes while also embracing the realities that come with aging, Carol Orsborn provides insight at <http://FierceWithAge.com>.

5 Building relationships is key. Boomers covet relationships with their grandchildren and are willing to invest great resources of time and money on those. Churches can help boomers value their role as **mentors to younger generations** — not just to their grandchildren. Rick Moody has radio broadcasts on topics of boomers and legacy at <http://JewishSacredAging.com>

Missy Buchanan is a nationally recognized older adult advocate, writing and speaking on aging and faith. Her works are top sellers for Upper Room Books. Website is <http://missybuchanan.com/>

Boomers are results-oriented, so practical application of learning is important. They prefer to learn in informal environments with shared leadership.

Here are resources

To engage boomers, several tools are available, Belase shared after the conference.

- MissionInsite provides demographics to identify the types of boomers in your community. Among them are people identified as Booming with Confidence,

Thriving Boomers, and Blue Sky Boomers! The Oklahoma Conference makes this tool available to any local church, and it is funded with Apportionments. To learn more, contact Chris Tiger at the United Methodist Ministry Center, 405-530-2005, ctiger@okumc.org.

- "Boomer Spirituality: Seven Values for the Second Half of Life" was just published by Discipleship Resources. Author Craig Kennet Miller, also a presenter at the conference, examines seven values at the spiritual roots

of boomers: brokenness, loneliness, rootlessness, self-seeking, godliness, supernaturalism, and wholeness. A seven-week study guide is available. Go to the website <https://boomerspirituality.org>

- Connect boomers to worship and liturgies. Sue Nilson Kibbey writes that churches miss the opportunity to formally recognize people who are retiring. She suggests "retirement commissioning" services followed by a connection to further "engagement in service and contribution ... providing spiritual

and prayer support." Other services relating to boomers include National Grandparents Day (in September) and the denomination's Older Adult Recognition Day (in May).

Local churches can provide great venues for connections to happen for boomers, Belase summed up. Offering practical, relevant opportunities for engagement are paramount, and the new year is a great time to begin.

To contact him: 405-530-2144, DBelase@okumc.org.

experiences

member families that we haven't seen for a while that have children the appropriate age.

We make our best attempt to invite all of these through letters, emails, and calls.

There are even more ways to extend invitations. Perhaps a Scout troop meets in your church. If middle schools in your community publish class directories, send letters to all those parents. Use social media, where you can market your event for little or no cost. Ask students who already enrolled if they will invite friends who don't attend church — or if you may invite those friends on their behalf.

Be aware that in every school district, adults who experienced confirmation in their childhood have fallen away from regular church attendance. Sometimes your letter or contact about the upcoming classes will serve as God's prevenient grace, nudging them back to the community of faith, too.

Confirmation Sunday is my favorite worship service of the year. As an ordained elder who has vowed to instruct the children, what a joy it is to share our faith with others at this critical juncture in their lives! Although I made plenty of poor choices in my middle- and high-school years, I know my faith kept me on the right path during that time. I knew what was expected of me as a faithful Christian.

Sharing this faith with young people who are beginning middle school is life-giving. It renews my own faith as well as the church.

Whether you are a pastor or lay member reading this, I encourage you to begin planning a confirmation class for your church. It is never too late to start!

(Sam Powers is senior pastor at Edmond-First UMC. Twice he has received the Denman Award for Evangelism in the Oklahoma Conference.)

Conference-wide

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Feb. 10-11

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for grades
6, 7, and 8

This retreat is designed for you to "kick off" or "wrap up" your church's confirmation program: it is not designed to replace what you are already doing.



Registration: www.okcamps.org
Deadline: Feb. 3



PHOTO BY MAXINE WHEELAN, MIDWEST CITY BEACON

Ron Perceful burns the mortgage at St. Matthew UMC in Midwest City.

St. Matthew alight in faith

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

The Holy Spirit fire could not be extinguished at OKC-St. Matthew United Methodist Church despite the single-digit temperature on Dec. 18.

The people “whooped and hollered” outside as flames in a barrel consumed the church’s mortgage note, said Wendee Perceful, associate pastor.

Property debts, first incurred in 1992, now are paid in full.

In January 2016, the church still owed \$227,000. In May, a campaign began to retire that debt. Eight months later, that goal was fulfilled.

“It was the Spirit of God working through the faithful people of this church,” said Senior Pastor Ron Perceful.

St. Matthew Church also fully paid its 2016 Apportionments, according to the Conference Treasurer’s Office.

The clergy couple described the big

celebration Dec. 18. Among the 300 worshippers were charter member Carl Sims, who joined the church in 1952, and his daughter Jayna Sims.

Handbell musicians performed “Hallelujah,” a catered lunch was served, and the cake was decorated with “Hallelujah, we did it.” The choir’s holiday cantata was another highlight.

Copies of the mortgage were handed out so everyone literally could take part in burning the paperwork. The first turn was Jayna’s.

“God has poured out all those resources on us,” Wendee said. “It’s so freeing.”

A time of visioning begins with this new year. Initial plans are to provide covenant support to a missionary and expand some ministries, Wendee said.

The people will meet in small groups to explore “what God wants them to do” financially going forward, said Ron.

The first sanctuary was built in 1957.

Church & Society aims to counter gun violence

When the 2016 General Conference passed the resolution “Our Call To End Gun Violence,” a team went to work to provide relevant resources for United Methodist congregations. Then they presented that work to 48 laity and clergy from across the country by hosting a “Faith and Guns” forum at the headquarters of the General Board of Church and Society, in the nation’s capital.

Janet Boone and Twila Gibbens traveled to Washington, D.C., on behalf of the Oklahoma Conference’s Church and Society committee.

They attended the three-day event and reported back with resources for our churches.

The United Methodist Church owns the only non-government building on Capitol Hill, and the General Board of Church

and Society is housed there. Our United Methodist work on mental health, healthy families, gambling, alcohol and other addictions, and many other societal issues are researched and resourced by this agency.

Among U.S. statistics the women learned: 60 percent of gun deaths are suicides; mass shootings, 1 percent; and 91 people die per day in gun violence (seven of those are children and teens).

These statistics were presented by passionate Christian speakers from public health organizations, research professors, and Christian pastors, Rev. Gibbens said. Participants worshipped, asked questions, heard stories, and visited members of Congress.

What can Christians do? “Our compassion will not let us remain silent or unmoved by the statistics and stories of innocent lives taken. Many Christians

are ready right now to work to reduce gun violence,” Gibbens said.

The Oklahomans came back with these resources, and they are ready to share them.

- Literature for a three-week study titled “Kingdom Dreams, Violent Realities”
- Resources that Christian communities have used to honor victims, and to shut down illegal sales by gun shops (“Heeding God’s Call”)

• Suggested topics for discussions with legislators and other groups to build coalitions within your area

Contact Boone or Gibbens through the Facebook page “The Board of Church & Society, OK Conference of the United Methodist Church.” You also can go online to GBCS at www.UMC.org to access resources.

Also, at the 2017 Annual Conference, local-church delegates are invited to visit



Janet Boone, left, and Twila Gibbens tour the Church & Society offices in the nation’s capital.

the Church and Society booth to gather resources and build connections.

“We have a long road ahead, and it starts with prayer, passion, and partnership,” said Gibbens.

OIMC delivers Christmas cheer to North Dakota camp

BY GINNY UNDERWOOD

Several Oklahoma United Methodists braved subfreezing temperatures Dec. 15 to deliver 700 Christmas stockings and basic supplies to people still camped near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation in North Dakota, as a protest that began in July continues over construction of an oil pipeline.

Joining five members of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC) traveling to the camp was Allen Buck, associate pastor at OKC-Quail Springs/Summit, in the Oklahoma Conference.

The group loaded up a rental truck and drove 14 hours to the reservation. The stockings were to be distributed later in the month.

“A child from a family staying at the camp asked if Santa would be there this



Members of the OIMC and Allen Buck, second from left, delivered Christmas stockings and more to pipeline protestors in North Dakota. At right is David Wilson.

year,” said Jen Mattel, a Standing Rock Sioux tribal member. “I was happy to tell him yes.”

The OIMC “sent out a call for help and raised nearly \$5,000 to purchase toys, socks, gloves, and basic items for cold weather,” said David Wilson, OIMC

superintendent. He has traveled to the North Dakota location several times since the campers set up.

“People want to do what they can to be a part of this great effort, whether it be contributing money, praying, assembling the stockings, and more. It has been very affirming and heartwarming.”

In July the Standing Rock Sioux first took legal action to block the Dakota Access Pipeline by filing a complaint against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers over its permitting process.

Even though the Corps most recently denied a construction easement under a dammed section of the Missouri River, temporarily halting the pipeline work, many members of the tribe and other protesters have chosen to stay at the camp to make sure construction does not

continue. They have self-identified as water protectors.

The pipeline would carry a half-million barrels of oil daily from the Bakken oil fields in northwest North Dakota to Patoka, Ill. But the tribe says the pipeline would destroy sacred burial sites and threaten its water supply.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs is working with the tribe to make sure the campers are safe during the winter weather.

Together the OIMC and Oklahoma Conference form the Oklahoma Area, led by Bishop Jimmy Nunn, with about 580 churches. Both are headquartered in Oklahoma City.

— from United Methodist News Service, Dec. 21

Help COSROW identify women to grow leadership

BY JENNIFER AHRENS-SIMS

Oklahoma's Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) is seeking to bring greater balance in male/female leadership in both programming and administration at the district and Conference levels.

This is a priority for the commission as a new ministry quadrennium (2017-2020) begins for The UMC.

That's why we are asking for your help to identify and name women interested in the work and service of district and Conference boards and committees.

Laura Glover's story portrays how leadership opportunities can shape lives. She is a 2016 COSROW scholarship recipient, attending seminary.

Each year the commission awards scholarships to women answering a call to clergy ministry. Those who apply range from recent college graduates to second-career women. There is great diversity in the lives transformed as women make commitments to follow God's leading.

Laura's ministry journey began 20 years ago. Her leadership roles have included education, mission, Bible study, prayer, social justice, and committee work. A Local Pastor, she currently serves Perkins and Ripley United Methodist Churches. She is a member of the Conference's Mission & Service Ministry Team and the Northern Prairie District

Committee on the Superintendency.

She noted how very active the women in her local congregations have been. "If you wanted something done, you went to the women of the church."

In her experience, female leadership in the programming and mission-oriented areas of church is more prevalent than that of men.

However, statistics on the Conference and district officers show disproportionately high male leadership.

COSROW has identified these administrative offices as where decisions and policies are most affected.

Glover stated, "The leadership of the Church needs to reflect the diversity of God's creation and should have the face of all we serve." This is a statement consistent with the type of advocacy with which COSROW is tasked.

COSROW celebrates Laura's experience and faithfulness. She represents many women willing to serve in both programmatic and administrative capacities. "Laura assumes the best in people, but she doesn't shy away from conflict," said her colleague Jessica Maynard of OKC-Village UMC.

If you know of women with gifts and interests for serving on district or Conference boards and other committees, send their names and contact information to COSROW Chairperson Jennifer Ahrens-Sims at jennifer@mychapelhill.org.



These Bethel elementary students collected and wrapped toys, helping high school senior Michaela Flatt and UMMen leader Jim Jenkins, back row, make Christmas merry for other kids.

UMMen and Bethel community join hands to serve

In central Oklahoma, some 30 families in the rural Bethel community — including 75 kids ranging from infants to high schoolers — received food, new clothing, and Christmas gifts in an act of love and support that is annually coordinated by the Bethel United Methodist Men.

At the church on a very cold morning Dec. 17, Future Farmers of America students helped sort the food and loaded families' vehicles when they arrived for pick-up.

Others in the community near Shawnee also joined the UMMen and Bethel United Methodist Church in this effort. Over 3,000

non-perishable food items were donated for neighbors who are hungry. Several people gave cash to help buy provisions.

To collect the toys and clothing for the children, high school senior Michaela Flatt reached out to various community groups. This was the eighth Christmas she has organized a toy drive. Among the groups that participated were Dreamcatchers Dance Studio, New Hope Baptist Church, and Bethel school's Lower Elementary Gifted/Talented students (GT). Kristy Swafford and Regina Flatt, Michaela's mom, sponsor the GT students.

— Jim Jenkins, Bethel UMMen

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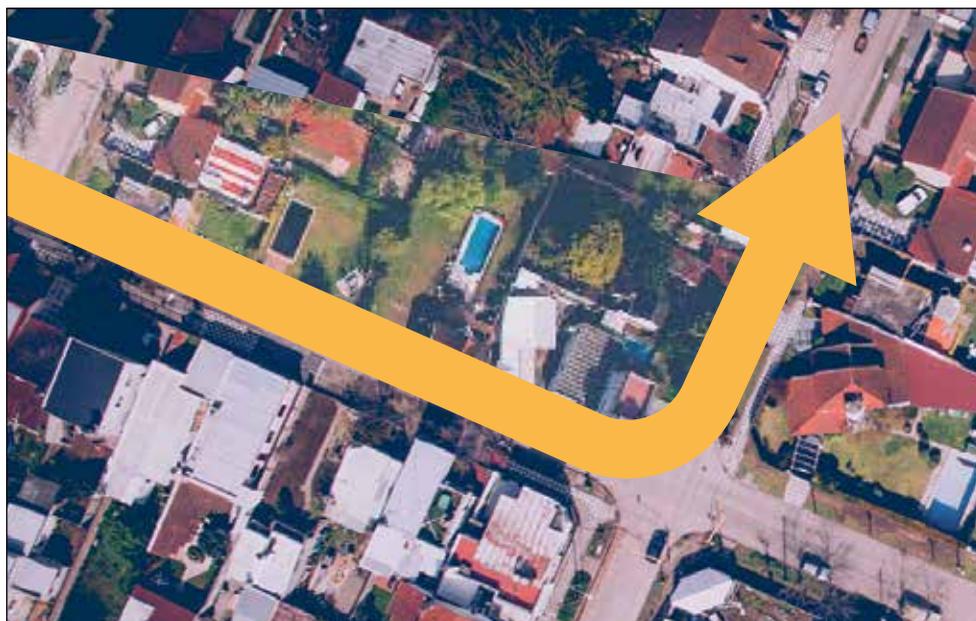
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THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Experts say we will soon “drive” self-driving cars that can take us wherever we want to go while allowing us to sit back and sleep, play chess, read, or do anything else that helps us relax.

While that may be the future, most people are not ready to turn over control and trust self-driving

cars. Can a self-driving car get you where you want to go? Will it stay on the road? How will it handle something unexpected?

When it comes to our future and the safety and care of loved ones, many of us would not relinquish control to a car that was on autopilot. What if it did not work as intended? Yet, when it comes to our finances, healthcare, and our estate plans, many of us have freely chosen to



P- Planning is an important step in your journey

R- Remember to provide for the people & causes you care about

N- Never has there been a better time than now

D- Don't leave your legacy to chance

1- Receive your free estate planning guide

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give up control to a system that is random and ill-equipped to make the kind of decisions we can best make ourselves. **Under state law, if you are incapacitated or pass away without a plan, someone else will make important decisions that could affect you and your loved ones.**

For example, if you die without a will or trust, a court will determine how your assets are distributed and that may happen in a way that does not reflect your wishes.

Don't leave your legacy to chance.

It's easier than you might think to write a will and provide for the people and causes that mean the most to you. We can help you gather the information necessary to create your plan using our estate planning guide.

Contact David Battles to request your free guide: dbattles@okumf.org or 800-259-6863.

Also, let us know if you plan to include United Methodist ministries in your estate plans so we can make sure your gift goes to help the causes that mean the most to you.



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Longest-serving OCU president dies

A former president and chancellor of Oklahoma City University, Jerald Carter Walker of Tulsa died Dec. 24, 2016. He was 78 years old.

Rev. Dr. Walker was the longest-serving president in the history of Oklahoma's only United Methodist university, devoting 18 years (1979-1997) to improving higher education; driving standards and accountability in Oklahoma political and social ethics; and access to education for Native Americans, other minority students, and students abroad.

He also served as president of the National Association of Schools and Colleges of The United Methodist Church.

A native of Bixby, he graduated from OCU, where he was president of the student association. He earned graduate degrees at the University of Chicago Divinity School and Claremont School of Theology.



Walker

An ordained United Methodist elder, his career prior to OCU included service as chaplain at Nebraska Wesleyan University and president of John J. Pershing College, Beatrice, Neb.

Walker contributed to building community and making people believe in education through other memberships, including the Board of Directors of the 4-H Foundation. He was named a Distinguished 4-H Club Alumnus in Oklahoma and Nebraska.

The National Conference of Christians and Jews honored him as a Distinguished Humanitarian. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame. He served as a member of the Oklahoma State Ethics Commission.

His capacities extended outside the U.S. as well.

During his tenure at OCU, Walker led in establishing 18 graduate programs in China, and he paved the way for the university to conduct master's programs in Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. He established management education programs

for 500 Soviet Union aviation executives.

When Walker became OCU's president, the institution was in dire financial straits. His leadership was key in what was heralded as “the miracle on 23rd Street.” OCU's endowment grew from \$2.8 million to over \$36 million.

He also authored numerous articles in the areas of political ethics, higher education, and Native American issues.

He was a member of the Cherokee Nation, and in 2000 he received the Cherokee National Medal of Honor. He received the Outstanding Achievement in the Arts Award from The American Indian Heritage Center in Tulsa.

Among survivors are his wife, Virginia Walker, and daughters Elisabeth Walker and Anne Walker Gibson.

Service was Jan. 14 at Tulsa-Boston Avenue UMC.

Memorial gifts to: Jerald and Virginia Walker Native American Scholarship Fund, c/o The Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation, 4201 N. Classen Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73118.

Passages

ODEN — Rev. Dr. Thomas C. Oden, 85, of Oklahoma City, died Dec. 8, 2016. He was an internationally known evangelical theologian.

He pastored churches in Ninnekah, White Bead, and Lexington; and taught at Yale, Southern Methodist University, Phillips, and Drew. His many books include “A Change of Heart” and the 29-volume series *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*.

Among survivors are a son, Edward, and daughter, Laura. He was predeceased by his wife, Edrita, and son Clark.

Service was Dec. 17 at OKC-Church of the Servant. Memorial gifts to: Institute for Classical Christianity, c/o Judy A. Akin E.A., 2816 NW 57th St., Suite 103, Oklahoma City, OK 73112.

Appointments

• Mark Polson, from Tulsa-Christ UMC (associate pastor) to Idabel UMC, effective Jan. 1.

• Wendi Neal, from OKC-Mayfair Heights to Norman-McFarlin (associate pastor), effective Jan. 1.

GRIFFIN — Nancy Sutherland Griffin, 77, of Muskogee, died Jan. 6, 2017. She was the wife of Rev. Raymond Eugene Griffin, retired.

Survivors include her husband of almost 60 years, sons George and Charles, and daughter Helen.

Service was Jan. 10, 2017, at Muskogee-St. Paul UMC.

TIMS — Josephine Tims, 99, of Overland Park, Kan., died Dec. 16, 2016.

She was the widow of Rev. Troy Donald Tims, who died in 2004. Among survivors are a son, Jim Pratt.

Louise Cole died Jan. 9. She was the mother of Rev. Connie Cole Jeske, an associate pastor at Tulsa-First.

Birth

Evelyn Victoria Tate was born Dec. 16, 2016. She is the daughter of Kinsie and Rev. Kris Tate, pastor at Shawnee-St. Paul UMC.