The wooden shanty sitting on the lawn of Wesley United Methodist Church in Shawnee was created to spark the curiosity of motorists driving along the busy street and others in the community.

That’s what the Rev. Ben Williams envisioned when he had the church’s affiliated Boy Scout troop build the structure just a few weeks ago.

The building is a replica of the shack — as in “The Shack” featured prominently in a book and movie of the same name.


Williams, senior pastor of Wesley UMC, said the shack replica was crafted to help promote his new sermon series that explores some of the faith themes highlighted in the book and film. He said he and members of his congregation saw the movie together shortly after it arrived in theaters, and he began his related sermon series on March 12 at the church, 302 E Independence.

The minister said he knows many people in communities around the country are discussing “The Shack” — whether it be positive reflections about the film or negative talk resulting from controversy surrounding it.

“With the movie coming out, I thought it was an opportunity to connect with our culture,” he said. “I just thought we ought to be part of the conversation.”

Discussing faith themes
Williams remembers that he was adamantly against reading the book “The Shack” when it was released in 2007, after seeing a book review about it in a national magazine.

“I thought it would make me mad,” he said. Williams said he reluctantly read the book after realizing that “everybody was talking about it,” including members of the church he led at the time.

The minister said he ended up seeing much good in the book, primarily that it portrays the love of God in a way that is potentially healing for individuals wounded by life circumstances and heartaches.

“It’s an incredible thought that the God who wields the entire universe has the ability to listen...
Dead leaves in springtime

There are varieties of trees that hold their leaves throughout the winter and early spring. The crusty, paper-thin, pale brown leaves maintain their grip in the same manner that old ways cling to us. But even those stubborn, dead leaves must give way to the new buds.

In late spring, the emergence of new life in those trees is a parable of resurrection. Jesus’ lakeshore encounter with Peter is one of the Gospels’ stories about what happened after the resurrection.

Peter had failed Jesus. He had stood among people beside a charcoal fire, after stories about what is one of the Gospels’ resurrection. Peter had failed Jesus. He had stood among people beside a charcoal fire, after Jesus’ arrest, and three times he had denied knowing Jesus (John 18).

The sting of those failures clung to him like dead leaves. He was filled with guilt and shame.

We read in John 21 that the resurrected Jesus helped the disciples catch a massive number of fish.

As the men neared shore with their catch, they saw Jesus cooking breakfast on a charcoal fire. I can imagine the unsettled feelings Peter must have had as they approached.

Would Jesus accept him? How would he react to Peter’s failures?

This is what happened: Three times, Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. And each time Peter replied, “Yes.” Asking the questions about Peter’s love, Jesus cleared the way for new growth to occur. Like springtime buds bursting forth, Jesus commissioned Peter to feed his sheep and lambs.

New beginnings occur when old roadblocks are cleared. Jesus tells Peter to follow him.

But Peter was not yet ready to begin a new journey following Jesus. It intrigues me that the first thing Peter did after hearing the command to follow Jesus was turn, look behind him, and ask, “What about him?” (John 21:21 CEV).

This is true for you and me as well. We are unable to follow Jesus when we set our sights on someone or something else. We cannot follow Jesus by looking backward.

Some brittle, dead leaves from last year that won’t let go illustrate Peter’s question that betrayed those feelings he still harbored.

When Jesus saw Peter’s distraction, he asked, “What difference does that make to you? Follow me” (John 21:22 CEV).

Following Jesus is a life directed by God; looking backward is a life dictated by circumstance.

Looking to Jesus supports a life lived by principles; looking behind is a life subdued by pressure.

Looking to Jesus means being led by the Holy Spirit; looking behind implies being lost in the wilderness.

The miracle of Easter is that Jesus Christ is risen! The power of the resurrection is affirmed when we release to God those things that are obstacles to grace.

Don’t dwell on the past. Don’t become imprisoned by circumstances. Don’t get lost in the wilderness. Christ is risen!

Just as the new growth on a tree can be easily seen, so also may your life reflect a deeper walk with Christ. May you grow in wisdom, shrink in opinion; increase in gratitude, diminish in pride; show more mercy and less harshness; reflect God’s love and overcome selfishness.

God transforms old hurts into spiritual assets.

Christ the Lord is risen! Alleluia!

The women’s basketball team and competitive cheerleading squad secured national titles for OCU this year.

Cue the music: OCU wins 2 national titles

We Are the Champions” by Queen blared through the cafeteria speakers March 27 as Oklahoma City University students, faculty, staff, and guests erupted in thunderous applause. Jim Abbot, the university’s athletic director, strode proudly to the mic.

“It is my great pleasure to introduce to you the OCU Cheer Squad, winner of the FIRST EVER NAIA national championship in competitive cheer and OCU’s 63rd national championship, AND the OCU Women’s Basketball Team, winner of their ninth NAIA Division 1 national championship and OCU’s number 64!”

• On March 11, the university hosted the inaugural NAIA Competitive Cheer Competition, with 24 cheer and dance teams from around the country. The OCU Cheer Squad made history by claiming the national title, scoring 4.15 points higher than the second-place finisher, the University of Saint Francis (Indiana) team. The OCU Pom Squad also did well, finishing fifth in the dance competition.

• On March 21, the No. 2-ranked OCU Women’s Basketball team ran the table at the NAIA national tournament in Billings, Montana, defeating top-ranked Lewis-Clark State College (Idaho) for the championship. In addition, OCU’s Daniela Wallen was recognized as the tournament’s Most Outstanding Player, and OCU coach Bo Overton was named Coach of the Year.

The Stars may claim additional national titles this school year. OCU’s women’s softball and men’s golf teams currently are ranked No. 1 nationally; men’s baseball, No. 2; and women’s golf, No. 3.

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Shack:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

to me and help me recover from my heartaches,” he said.

When the movie premiere was on the horizon, Williams said he came up with the idea for building the replica at his church. He remembered that a minister friend at Broken Arrow-Abiding Harvest UMC had done something similar when the book came out.

The Rev. Chris Buskirk, Abiding Harvest’s senior pastor, said his church built a replica in their sanctuary in conjunction with the release of the book and a related sermon series. Buskirk said his church distributed about 500 copies of the book at that time.

With the movie’s recent premiere, Buskirk said he and church members purchased about $7,700 in prepaid movie tickets to be distributed throughout the community. He said the church already has seen an influx of newcomers who saw the film and wanted to hear his current sermon series, titled “Unpacking the Shack.”

Not shying away

“We’re finding that it’s really connecting with people, and I think the movie is reaching more people,” Buskirk said.

“We’re giving them scripture to undergird things that they saw in the movie.”

Williams said much the same thing.

He said his sermon series is exploring themes in the movie such as evil and free will and Lenten season themes like guilt, self-examination, and forgiveness.

Both Williams and Buskirk said they are aware of the controversy that surrounded the book and now the movie. Most notably, Christian detractors of “The Shack” say it erroneously promotes universalism and gives an incorrect portrayal of the nature of the Holy Trinity.

Williams at Wesley United Methodist said he will talk about the controversial aspects of “The Shack,” and he understands critics’ concerns. He said one of his messages will explore what the film says about the Trinity.

Movie about God’s love

However, he said he continues to view the movie mostly about God’s love for people, which is a message that needs to be shared.

“The idea that God is this presence that is waiting to clobber people when they do something wrong is the mistaken impression that people sometimes have about God,” Williams said.

“Personally, I’m helped more by the people who I know really love me rather than people who all they do is criticize me. I think that is something that Young is aiming at in ‘The Shack.’”

At Abiding Harvest, Buskirk said he is purposely avoiding theological debates in his shack-related messages.

“I think people who are criticizing it are missing a healing work that God is doing in people’s hearts,” he said. “We see it as the beginning of a conversation. It may not be a perfect theological movie, but I don’t know if I’ve ever preached a perfect theological sermon. We’re all making imperfect efforts to point towards a perfect God.”

(Reprinted with permission.)

Saint Paul:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The seminary is in good standing with a second accreditation agency, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), and is approved by the University Senate of The United Methodist Church.

In a March letter, President Blair expressed disappointment with the sanction but also noted that Saint Paul “is embracing this opportunity to better realize our mission and emerge a stronger seminary.”

He said, “We invite you to be present with us in this process. You can support the seminary by recommending prospective students, donating financial gifts, and through prayer.”

Blair is the seminary’s fourth president since 2013; he was named to the post last year. A high rate of staff turnover was among concerns identified by the HLC board. Blair noted illness forced several presidents into early retirement.

Another concern is declining enrollment.

In 2013, Saint Paul’s brick-and-mortar campus in Kansas City, Mo., was closed and the school relocated to Church of the Resurrection for financial reasons. Enrollment was 169 at that time, according to UMNS.

Students totaled 154 during the 2015-16 academic year. Total enrollment is 140 this year.

A concern for declining enrollment is also faced by other seminaries, Blair told UMNS.

Saint Paul’s response to that challenge already includes:

• a new doctoral program in partnership with the Upper Room Academy for Spiritual Formation;

• “3+3” programs (accelerated degree programs) with OCU and with Kansas Wesleyan University; and

• training for deaconess and home missioner candidates in partnership with United Methodist Women.

Twenty students participated in the deaconess/home missioner training last summer, and 20 are expected in the three courses set for Summer 2017, seminary officials said.

Concern for financial stability also was highlighted by the accrediting agency.

Saint Paul’s endowment is about $30 million, according to Barney Barry, chief financial officer. He also said the usage costs are below-market for space at both OCU and Church of the Resurrection.

The seminary leadership team plans to provide regular updates on steps toward restoring full accreditation. You can access the document “Saint Paul Accreditation and Future-Building” at www.spst.edu/accreditation.

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Welcome home. Members of a new United Methodist group mean exactly that when they invite others to join them in Ardmore.

Home Church meets weekly in somebody’s living room. “I think God was positioning us in this place and this moment to do this,” said leader Brad Dery. He is associate pastor at Ardmore-First UMC, of which Home Church is a satellite. It also is a planting project of the Conference’s New Faith Communities (NFC) Ministry Team.

Launched Jan. 1, Home Church expanded organically within two months from one to three groups in Ardmore, Rev. Dery said. One meets on Sunday mornings; two, on weekday evenings.

Dynamic small groups

Each consists of up to a dozen adults, plus children, who meet in a home. They commit to attend a weekly Primary Gathering, with a stipulated format and a meal. From among them, Transformation Groups of two to three people meet weekly for accountability in their discipleship. And each person reads the same daily devotional selections. A monthly gathering of all the groups includes Holy Communion.

“When you talk to people on a weekly basis about the deep thoughts, desires, and fears of your soul, you develop trust pretty quickly,” said Dery.
The Home Church website states: “We are an authentic, rock solid community of people who follow Jesus.”

Dery’s vision for Home Church began with a desire to be part of a close Christian community “like we see in scripture (and) in early Methodism.” This Local Pastor said he studied John Wesley extensively even before he became United Methodist. John 3:18 is a favorite scripture.

He noted, “Wesley organized into classes, into groups, and look how it exploded.”

Home Church grows as more people join a group. A person age 13 or older is considered a participating member.

“All living room can only hold so many people. When you reach capacity, you take a few members and start a new one somewhere else,” Dery said.

“It is our hope that as we grow we will have these in every community … and tie them to licensed or ordained people in the area for the sacraments. So these could be implemented anywhere.” The Ardmore group already networked with some house churches in India, he said. The Home Church manual states: “The overall expectation of our membership is one of high participation and commitment … every Christian is a point of contact between heaven and earth — and a full-time missionary to the people around them.”

Discipleship “is not a spectator sport,” Dery declared. “If the Lord has placed somebody on our heart, we have an incredible responsibility to carry through.”

Transitions in pastorates

April 26-27
United Methodist Ministry Center
Oklahoma City

Arriving pastor
• Getting a running start
• Strategic preaching to get started
• Celebrating the past while building a future
The church
• Healing hurts and creating buy-in
• Honoring other staff
• Saying goodbye and hello
Exiting pastor
• Handing off the baton
• Setting your successor up for success
• Saying goodbye in a healthy way

Employment

Director of Youth Ministries:
Claremore-First. Full-time. Call 918-341-4580, ext. 314 or send resume to Brent Youngs, byoungs@claremoreumc.org

Day School Executive Director:
Tulsa-New Haven. Full-time. Contact cindy.havlik@newhavenumc.org or 918-743-6491.

Nursery Staff: Edmond-New Covenant. Part-time. Contact Jen Might, jmight@newcove.tv or 405-562-3200.

Director of Youth Ministries:
El Reno-Wesley UMC. Part-time. Send resume and cover letter to Taud Boorman, pastor@wesleyelreno.org, or call 405-262-3734.

Food Service and Housekeeping positions: Egan Camp & Retreat Center. For more information and to apply, call 918-456-6489 or e-mail campegan@okumc.org

Children’s Ministry Assistant Director: Edmond-First. Part-time. Contact Megan Borum at megan@fumceedmond.org

Pianist: Drumright UMC. Part-time. 918-352-2150 or drumrightumc@sbcglobal.net

Summer Day Camp Staff: Edmond-First. Part-time. Contact Megan Borum at megan@fumceedmond.org

Children’s Ministry Director:
Cushing-First. Part-time. Contact Kathy Lethner at katie2@aol.com

Director of Children and Family Ministry: OKC-Nichols Hills. Full-time. 405-842-1486 or revtrevor@gmail.com

Summer Student Ministry Intern: OKC-Chapel Hill. Part-time. Contact Jon Cunningham at jon@mychapelhill.org or 405-751-0755.
Tulsa retreat on race examines current attitudes

BY SHARI GOODWIN

“I so appreciate how passionate and loving the discussions have been.”
“IT’s important to ‘rub shoulders’ and become just people to each other.”
“We all must listen and learn — listen and learn and reflect. God has a part for each.”

Reactions proved the value of the recent retreat “Get on the Bus to Tulsa: Let’s Talk About Race.” The three-day Tulsa event in late March, filled with workshops, dynamic worship, and frank discussions, received great reviews.

All were moved by readings of eyewitness accounts of the 1921 Tulsa Race Riot and spirituals sung by Tulsa’s Unity Choir in opening worship. Through that lens, with homilies by Shelly Daigle, Twila Gibbens, and Burlinda Radney, the group began a thoughtful examination of racism, past and present, that plagues our nation.

Sponsors were the Conference’s Commissions on Religion & Race (CORR) and Strengthening the Black Church for the 21st Century (SBC-21).

Among the workshops at Tulsa-Centenary UMC, Judy Rowell shared the history of African-Americans in the Oklahoma Territories, before statehood, while Nathan Mattox in “Our Racialized Nation” showcased ways that current systems still favor white values and viewpoints. These systems often result in injustices in hiring, in the courts, classrooms, and even in church.

“Precious in God’s sight!” Nicholas Lee asked in that workshop exploring the pros and cons of America’s most segregated hour of the week: Christian worship on Sunday mornings.

“How can we effectively be the Body of Christ if we remain divided?” Rev. Lee asked.

Clergy couple Victor and Nancy McCullough were joined by Tulsa librarian Alicia Lattimore to examine “Colorism” — ingrained attitudes, even within a race, that the shade of one’s skin determines one’s worth. Colorism even affects how people see themselves. This must be addressed before racism can be resolved.

In the keynote address, Hannibal Johnson shared stories from the 1921 riot, focusing on the faith, resiliency, and resourcefulness of Tulsa’s African-American community. He is author of “Black Wall Street: from Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa’s Historic Greenwood District.”

“It’s not possible to blaze a trail to the future unless you trace the past,” he explained. “The riot is a story that’s part of a larger narrative — one of the human spirit and resilience.”

He said African-Americans were drawn to Oklahoma Territory, a “land of opportunity,” soon after the abolition of slavery. In Tulsa they prospered, and in 1905 the Greenwood District began. It became known as the Black Wall Street of America, home to many wealthy, entrepreneurial African-American families.

Unfortunately, the Ku Klux Klan, jealousy, and bigotry also were growing in Tulsa.

Johnson described the “spark” that ignited the 1921 riot: An elevator jolt knocked 15-year-old Dick Roland, an African-American, into 17-year-old Sarah Page, who was white. The biased local newspaper blew the story out of proportion. Roland was arrested, largely for his own protection.

Close to 1,000 white men congregated at the courthouse in Tulsa, allegedly to lynch Roland. About 200 African-American men gathered to defend him. A confrontation followed, a gun discharged, and butchery ensued.

An estimated 300 African-Americans were massacred, and 1,250 structures were destroyed. African-Americans were marched to internment camps while armed Klan members kept firefighters from saving homes and businesses. Many African-Americans lived in Red Cross-provided tents for months.

Mount Zion Baptist Church carried insurance but soon learned that “didn’t cover riots,” and the church received nothing. Members worked 30 years to pay off the mortgage and rebuild.

“Faith and love of God kept them going,” Johnson said.

Though many lost all they had, the African-American community rebounded and rebuilt. But news of the riot was silenced for decades because citizens said: Let sleeping dogs lie.

“That doesn’t work with history,” said Johnson. “The cover-up can often be worse than the initial trauma — like with Watergate.”

On March 25, after Johnson’s presentation and book signing, “Get on the Bus” participants boarded a bus to tour Reconciliation Park, built as a memorial to the riot victims, and to learn more about Langston University, which was started by and for African-Americans in the 1890s. Many then chose to strengthen friendships over a meal at Wanda J’s restaurant, which is African-American owned.

The next morning, Tulsa’s historic Vernon Chapel A.M.E. (African Methodist Episcopal) Church welcomed the group for Sunday worship.

Later, after heartfelt discussion and evaluation, participants headed home with renewed desire to struggle against racism and bias, and to share God’s love with brothers and sisters of all races and nationalities.

As retreat leader Twila Gibbens reminded the group, “Our souls are at stake.”
Pam and Chuck Weatherford ride a boat on the Sea of Galilee.

**Bishop’s assistant trains in Holy Land**

**BY CHRIS SCHUTZ**

When Pam Weatherford learned she was invited to the Holy Land by the General Council on Finance & Administration (GCFA), she was incredulous.

Her first thought: “I can’t believe they’re going to do it.”

Weatherford is administrative assistant to Bishop Jimmy Nunn of the Oklahoma Area. She regularly attends the meetings that bring together episcopal secretaries from throughout the Church. In early February, the group held its annual training in the cradle of Christianity.

It was their first meeting at a location outside the United States.

Weatherford was among 65 people, from across the world, to go on what she termed a “fantasy trip.”

They saw places in Israel and Palestine that they’d heard and read about all their lives.

**Bible study enhanced**

The trip enhanced the time Weatherford spends reading the scriptures. She said it’s helped her “visualize what I’m reading and hearing about.”

She added, “I’ve been in church all my life,” but visiting the Holy Land has made “stories about Easter and Christmas come to life.”

The visit “deepened the understanding I had of the area, the landscape, the people.” The challenges of living in the rocky, hilly areas she saw, imagining people in Jesus’ time “walking from place to place,” impressed her.

“It wasn’t like just walking up the road.”

A highlight for Weatherford and her husband, Chuck, was a meal in the home of a Palestinian Christian family. Weatherford called that visit “eye-opening.”

Their hosts served them chicken and rice, followed by tea and pastries. They discussed the relationship between Palestinians and Israelis and high hopes for their children: a girl, age 15, and two sons, ages 10 and 6.

The daughter wants to become a math professor. The 10-year-old son peppered the Americans with questions about their lives and whether they voted for Donald Trump.

Between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the group’s bus was required to stop at a checkpoint, where armed soldiers walked through the vehicle to inspect it. The members of the police force looked “very young,” Weatherford said, perhaps 18 or 20 years old.

She estimated each tour member walked 12,000 to 13,000 steps a day during the eight-day trip. “They crammed a lot of stuff into those days,” she said.

The Weatherfords returned home with many memories, including seeing camels being led about, massive palm tree groves, houses packed tightly along hillsides, and many street vendors.

“The street vendors are relentless,” she said.

**Musical memory**

Chuck, who is director of music and arts at OKC-Communion service at St. Anne’s Church in Jerusalem. The group sang “How Great Thou Art” in the church rotunda, renowned for its acoustics.

In addition to the time spent in training, the group took part in a mission opportunity at Bethlehem’s Hope School, which serves abused and neglected children. The Americans helped with gardening, picked up trash, and restocked the gift shop.

The GCFA administers the denomination’s Episcopal Fund, which pays for episcopal office expenses and bishop salaries, including professional training for episcopal office support staff. Each participant also paid a discounted rate to attend. GCFA worked with corporate sponsor Educational Opportunities.

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**Annual Conference highlights**

Find information and updates at: www.okumc.org/annual_conference

Advance news for delegates to the meeting May 29-June 1:

- Register online before May 17.
- A question-and-answer session, “Unpacking the Annual Conference Budget,” begins at 1:30 p.m. May 29 at OKC-St. Luke’s.
- The evening session May 30 will be spent in guided conversation on issues challenging The United Methodist Church.
- Rally your congregation to donate Health and Bedding Kits to the mission collection for UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief). Follow exactly UMCOR’s assembly steps to assure these emergency supplies get delivered to wherever they are needed around the globe. Deliver your kits to the truck parked during the conference.
- Collect money gifts now, through special offerings at your church, to send for the Annual Conference Offering, which will support the Circle of Care, serving Oklahoma children and youths in its 100th year.

**Court will hear petition this month on gay bishop**

**BY LINDA BLOOM**

United Methodist News Service

An oral hearing on a petition questioning whether a gay pastor can serve as a bishop in The United Methodist Church will open the spring meeting of Judicial Council, the denomination’s top court.

The hearing — set for April 25 in Newark, New Jersey — is the only portion of the April 25-28 meeting that is open to the public.

Any decision on that petition could affect Bishop Karen Oliveto, the denomination’s first openly gay bishop, who was elected in July 2016 by the U.S. church’s Western Jurisdiction.

She currently serves as bishop of the Mountain Sky Area, which encompasses Colorado, Montana, Utah, Wyoming, and a church in Idaho.

Bishop Oliveto, who was senior pastor of Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco, California, when she was elected, has been legally married to Robin Ridenour, a United Methodist deaconess, since October 2014.

The denomination’s Book of Discipline since 1972 has stated that all people are of sacred worth but that the practice of homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching.”

Since 2004, the book has listed “not being celibate in singleness or not faithful in a heterosexual marriage” and “being a self-avaowed practicing homosexual” as chargeable offenses for clergy under church law.

Dixie Brewster, represented by Keith Boyette, is the petitioner. The respondent is the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops, represented by Richard A. Marsh.

During the South Central Jurisdictional Conference, also in July 2016, Brewster made a motion that the SCJ request a declaratory decision from Judicial Council. Her question was whether “the nomination, election, consecration, and/or assignment as a bishop of The United Methodist Church of a person who claims to be a ‘self-avaowed practicing homosexual’ or is a spouse in a same-sex marriage” is lawful under the Book of Discipline.

The motion by Brewster, a lay delegate of the Great Plains Conference, passed by majority vote. (The Oklahoma and Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conferences are part of the SCJ.)

This is one of seven dockets items to be considered by Judicial Council in April. None of the decisions will be released until the meeting has concluded.
Gold medalist to help mark golden moment

On April 29, four-time Olympian Jackie Joyner-Kersee will headline the Circle of Care’s Friends of Children Banquet, as the United Methodist agency marks a year that’s pure gold.

The event, a highlight during Circle of Care’s 100th year of service, will be at the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

Joyner-Kersee dominated the women’s track and field circuit for 16 years. She holds six Olympic medals and the world record for heptathlon.

At the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, she won silver in the heptathlon.

In 1990, she won gold in the heptathlon and long jump. She followed that in 1992 in Spain by winning gold again in the heptathlon and bronze in the long jump. In 1996 in Atlanta, she won the bronze medal in long jump.

She also holds four gold medals from three World Championships.

Joyner-Kersee twice received the Jesse Owens Award. In 2004, she was inducted into the U.S. Track and Field Hall of Fame.

Sports Illustrated for Women magazine named her the Greatest Female Athlete of the 20th Century.

She also is known for her efforts outside the arena. She is the inaugural recipient of the Humanitarian Athlete of the Year. She is among the founders of the national Athletes for Hope charity; helped establish a youth center foundation in her hometown, East St. Louis, Ill.; and promotes My Plate for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

She also joined forces with the 77-year-old Farm Foundation to address the availability of healthy foods in challenged communities throughout the nation.

She is married to track-and-field coach Bobby Kersee.

More information and a registration link are at [www.okcu.edu/alumni/events/all-alumni-weekend](http://www.okcu.edu/alumni/events/all-alumni-weekend).

Focus on Native Americans

• On June 8-11, the Southeast Region District Center at Antlers will host the 2017 Annual Conference for the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. Bishop Jimmy Nunn also leads the OIMC.

Theme is “All Things New,” referencing II Corinthians 5:16-17. Offering will go to assist the water protectors at Standing Rock.

• Native American Ministries Sunday, with a special offering, is April 30. A pastor and leader’s resource kit to help your church observe this Special Sunday in the denomination is available at [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org).

Appointments

• Antonio Porter, from Tulsa-St. Matthew’s to Discontinued, effective March 1.
• Pam Anderson, from Lone Grove UMC to Not Appointed, effective March 15.
• Randy Scraper, from Lawton-First to retirement, effective April 1.
• Adam Leathers, from personal leave to Perry, effective April 15.
A charitable gift annuity and charitable remainder trust are two ways you can make a gift to support your church or a special ministry and receive cash back every year for as long as you live.

**What is a charitable gift annuity?**

A charitable gift annuity (CGA) is a simple arrangement in which we promise to make payments to you in exchange for your gift of cash, CDs, or an appreciated asset. No matter what happens with the economy, your payments are secure and fixed at a rate that will never change. You will receive a tax-saving charitable deduction, and a portion of your payments could be tax free.

**What is a charitable remainder trust?**

A charitable remainder trust (CRT) is similar to a CGA but offers you more options. You can receive payments for your lifetime or up to 20 years. The payment amount may vary with the trust's performance or be fixed similar to a CGA. It’s possible for you to be involved in selecting the trust investments to maximize trust returns.

**Lifetime payments and tax benefits**

In addition to lifetime payments, both plans provide the following tax benefits:

- An income tax deduction in the year you make your gift
- Potentially lower estate taxes (if your estate is taxable)
- Capital gains avoidance if you give appreciated assets

**With the CGA or CRT, you can have the fulfillment that comes with supporting a cause you care about while achieving your personal and financial goals. Please contact us to view a free illustration of one or both plans, including your potential payments and tax savings. Call or email David Battles at 800-259-6863 or dbattles@okumf.org.**

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**How Giving Back Can Help You**

What if you could lower your electric bills by turning on the lights in your home? While some things may seem at first glance to be counterintuitive, a charitable gift can benefit you in surprising and unexpected ways.

**The global church**

**Youth Teach Tech** — A church youth group in Savannah, Ga., recently taught elderly church members how to use digital technology. “This is a great way to build one-on-one relationships between the generations,” said a church member. The event also was described as “reverse mentoring.”

Prior to the workshop, those who sought help filled out forms detailing their questions and needs. In the fellowship hall, 16 youths manned booths for all types of tech: from smartphones to tablets and laptops.

**Office in Korea** — Christian leaders from around Asia joined March 23 to celebrate opening a General Board of Global Ministries regional office in Seoul, South Korea.

The new office is part of a strategy that also has involved moving GBGM headquarters from New York to Atlanta; opening a regional office in Buenos Aires, Argentina; and planning another regional office in Africa.

The Korean Methodist Church is providing the space free of charge to GBGM, which made a donation for the building’s construction.

**Baby Makes History** — An heirloom baptismal gown made its debut at Christ UMC, Plano, Texas, in February, when 6-month-old Payden Rose Manning was baptized. She became at least the 31st infant, through six family generations, to wear the garment that traces back 150 years to her ancestors in England.

Payden’s great-great-great-great-grandparents purchased the cotton gown in 1867, and it was used in christening ceremonies for their 16 children. Documents note that couple also gave a generous contribution to the building fund for the Methodist Central Hall in London.

**National Event for Men** — On July 7-8 in Indianapolis, 1,000 men are expected to come together for worship, 19 workshops, service projects, and fellowship at the National Gathering of United Methodist Men. Registration is discounted until April 30.

This is the 12th national men’s gathering. Speakers include Kevin Watson, an Oklahoma Conference elder who is assistant professor at Candler School of Theology. www.UMMGathering.org

**Hot Topic** — The nature of The United Methodist Church is a hot topic, and the denomination’s Committee on Faith and Order has developed a resource to facilitate conversation: “Wonder, Love, and Praise: Sharing a Vision of the Church.”


**El Reno church runs to fund mission work**

May 6 marks the fourth year that El Reno-Wesley UMC will hold the Bun Run, a fun run/walk that helps fund the church’s mission service trip to Rio Bravo, Mexico, to work with Manos Juntas and local mission projects.

Since Wesley Church revitalized the race, the sponsors and participants have increased annually.

“We are really excited to bring the Bun Run back to the Burger Day festivities and work hard to grow the event each year,” said Dorrie Parrott, race director.

The event kicks off at 6 p.m. May 5 at the church, 101 S Barker, with packet pick-up for runners and a fundraising pasta dinner for all.

On May 6, the One-Mile Fun Run starts at 8:30 a.m., and the certified 5K race at 9.

In addition to prizes for the top runners, those with the best-decorated shorts will get Fancy Pants cash prizes.

The Bun Run is held in conjunction with the community’s Fried Onion Burger Day Festival in downtown El Reno.